

That Blessed Hope

No Conjecture; Jesus' Promise!

written by

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That Blessed Hope Preface

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus said: “I will keep you from that hour of trial”.

That is a rather remarkable promise, given almost as a preface to the Book that actually describes “that hour of trial”. Yet, as unequivocal and undeniable as it is, it has been all but ignored by most Christians. And this at the same time that many of them, as the end of the 20th Century approaches, and more and more of the list of “signs of the times” gets checked off, place their hope in something called the “Rapture”. Does not the promise offer precisely what most Christians believe that the “Rapture” would effect? Is it the same thing, or is it not?

This book is a study of that promise. It is not about the “Rapture”, though I think it is fair to say that our understanding of the meaning and reality of the “Rapture” is greatly increased along the way. But the purpose and focus of this book is strictly a study of scripture, and the “Rapture” is a term and idea that never appears, explicitly, in any scripture. The promise, on the other hand, which is also of deliverance from “that hour of trial”, is as concrete and explicit as the red ink that brings us the words of Jesus. And so we start with that. By the time we’ve finished, we’ll have cited over 100 scriptures, about 325 verses in all, and studied most of them in some detail. We will have used 3 different translations (KJV, NIV, NKJ), and searched out additional understanding by consulting the original Greek and Hebrew on a number of occasions. This is, I say again, a scripturally driven, directed, and focused work. But, still, it is carefully written for the “average” reader — written in common English, and (hopefully) in a plain and companionable style. The intention is to make the meaning and purpose of Jesus’ promise clear to everyone. The hope is to make it fully understandable, and useful, to every Christian. And even to offer the non-Christian something to think about. And, perhaps, something which may lead them to redirect their own life.

I try not to express my own opinions (as much as my own excitement allows), and try to stay clear of doctrinal positions, and try to avoid “selling”, or persuading, the reader about any conclusions. Sometimes, such as when we find the scriptures that seem to tell us that Jesus is indeed (in the future that John conveys to us, in his vision) delivering on His promise, I’m not really good at containing myself. But it is my earnest desire that you, my reader, discern for yourself, and respond from within, to the message that Jesus has given. And not to my own, or someone else’s, opinion.

Russell Husted. October, 1997

That Blessed Hope

Chapter One To the Church in Philadelphia

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” (Rev 1:3,KJV)

Have you, like me, ever wondered why Jesus said there would be a special blessing conferred for reading the Book of The Revelation? I assumed also, of course, that He meant we had to understand (the “hear”) and live by (the “keep”) all the words, the whole prophecy. Well, to tell you the truth, after years of trying, I finally came to the conclusion that I would never get that particular blessing. Try as I might, I could never really say I even understood half of the mysteries of that most extraordinarily complex Book of the Bible. In fact, after reading a lot of books, by other authors, about the Book, I concluded there wasn’t anyone who could confidently claim the blessing. The Revelation, I’m sure you know, is not an easy thing to understand.

Well, we’re not going to actually study the Book of The Revelation, here. But I do think we are going to learn what it takes to claim the blessing. Or at least a most important part of its blessings. It involves, I am now confident, something that Paul spoke of numerous times, and referred to in his epistle to Titus, as *That Blessed Hope*.

If you’ve read The Book of the Revelation, which the Apostle John says is the personal Revelation of Jesus Christ, you know that the greatest part of it describes God’s coming wrath upon a sinful, unrepentent world. It tells (again) of seven years — originally foretold in Isaiah, and described even more completely by Daniel — that no one in his right mind should want to live through. Until the finish of that tribulation period, and the return of our Lord Jesus, and the advent of the New Jerusalem, it’s hard to see any blessing at all, in the book. I have known many wonderful, and joyful, and hopeful, and devoted Christians who still have to struggle in their hearts to find any real joy in the prospect of their own martyrdom should they yet be alive when the tribulation begins. They pray for the return of Jesus, but dread that they might actually be alive until He does. They know, because they’ve studied the Revelation, that there will be no escape from that seven years except death. So it was with me. And I continued to wonder why Jesus said we would be blessed for reading, and understanding, and living (keeping) what is written there. Because martyrdom seems the promise in the message. And surely Jesus knows we aren’t that brave. Even He, in His humanity, begged the Father that the cup He was destined

to drink be taken away if there were any other way. I always wondered, until — until I finally realised that Jesus does say, for us, there is a way for that very bitter cup to be taken from us!

Now, if you have read the Book of The Revelation yourself, have you ever thought of the first three chapters as a bit of a puzzle? Almost irrelevant? They consist of a series of seven “letters”, dictated to John by the Lord Jesus Christ, to seven different churches. Most of those who study the Revelation, scholars and theologians and students of “Bible Prophecy”, don’t even give them much attention. Probably because they don’t seem to have much to do with the Tribulation, or the Millennium, or the future as we now, 1900 years later, see it. But that’s exactly where, I think, we find our “blessing”. It comes in the letter to the church at Philadelphia.

The church at Philadelphia, as the letter reveals, is a church that Jesus loves. It’s the kind of church Jesus wants his church to be. It’s doing everything He wants his church to do. While the other six receive some serious criticism, almost to the point of being disowned, Philadelphia receives nothing but praise. And it receives the promise of a very special reward. This is what Jesus says:

“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” (Rev 3:10, NIV)

In some ways, the King James Version expresses it better:

“Because thou hast kept the work 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.” (KJV)

Do you get the message there? Do you understand what is being said? Jesus is saying, quite plainly, that since this church has steadfastly obeyed His commandments and kept the faith, He will rescue it from the coming “hour of trial”. And what is the coming “hour of trial”? It’s exactly that which most of the book of The Revelation is about. And it’s not merely an “hour”, but seven years. So, if you have read the book of The Revelation, whether you even understand it all that well or not, you have to appreciate just what it is that Jesus is promising. All of us who have even the slightest idea of what that “hour of trial” is, The Tribulation, know what a blessing it would be to not have to go through it. To have that cup taken from us. No matter how much love for the Lord you have, you don’t want your flesh to have to face the “hour of trial”!

Now, the verse has always been there but, as I’ve said, few Christians have even noticed it. That might be because they fail to appreciate that the seven letters are an integral part of the prophecy. Though the first three chapters, and their seven “letters”, rather sound like they are just speaking to seven real churches, in the “realtime” of the first century AD, they are not. The seven churches are seven “types” of churches, or kinds of churches. The seven types still exist within the world today. That one verse, Rev 3:10, proves that point. There would have been no point in Jesus offering to rescue a real church, existing in about 95 AD, from an event not due to take place for at least another 1900 years. We are most probably the ones who actually need to reach out to receive that promise, to be kept from the “hour of trial”. So we are the ones who have had it brought to our attention. Today. In this book, at least. We are the ones who need to study it, and understand it, and “keep it” in our spirits.

That's what this book is about. When I first read Rev. 3:10, I didn't really completely know what to make of it. So I decided to explore it further. I knew enough about the coming "hour of trial", that I recognised it as a rather extraordinary possibility. An awesome hope. Definitely a great enough hope to be the very "blessing" Jesus said would be found in reading the book.

As I've said, I've known a lot of Christians who have read The Revelation, and believe that the dreadful events it depicts might well come to pass within their own lifetimes. And they are not cheered by it. They see no hope of getting around it. They are resigned to living through the Tribulation. They are ready to be persecuted, and they are ready to be martyrs. But they also have such dread of it, they rather hope to die first.

I could understand their dread, because they didn't believe in something many Christians do believe in, and call the "Rapture". They (my more pessimistic friends) had very good arguments for not believing in the "Rapture", no matter how much they wished they could. The "Rapture", they argued absolutely correctly, is a word invented in our times, by men who have "deduced" the idea of it from several promising, but never explicit, scriptures. In fact, they say, and again absolutely correctly, until this very century, no one had ever heard of any "Rapture". So, with friends like those, I have always been left in doubt. I have listened to very good preaching on both sides. And from what I've heard, I cannot — in absolute certainty — vote for either. And I'm of the opinion that, if something isn't clear and explicit in the scriptures, it's risky to believe in it.

So I've continued, over the years, to try to understand why the Bible, the very Book of Life and Hope for all Christians, should in this last chapter about the greatest hope of all — the Return and Triumph of Jesus — should leave us in such a sorry, fearful state of mind. I'm sure that it's not the frame of mind Jesus wants his church to have, and it's not what He considers a blessing. When I finally saw the promise in verse Rev 3:10, I immediately saw the possibility of an answer to the contradiction, and I knew I had to understand it better.

This book shares what I found. We will go, as I did, through the New Testament and learn what other scriptures tell us about the promise in Rev 3:10. We will learn it isn't a promise that just appears "out of the blue". There is a rich scriptural path leading up to it, establishing the reasons, and the hows, and the whens, of it.

We know, of course, about the "Rapture". And though I've already spoken about it several times, I feel this book is not about the "Rapture". This book is totally scripture based, scripture directed, and scriptural revelation. It's totally about a promise, in scriptural black and white (or red and white), and not about deductions or speculations. It's about Rev 3:10.

Let me explain myself in this way. One can take a few clues and, with intelligence and diligence, and perhaps a measure of hope, come up with a doctrine, and a picture of an event, that can explain those clues. On the other hand, one can take an event in the scriptures, which has its own measure of hope, and with diligence search other scripture for clues that can explain the event. We will do the latter. The event is something that Jesus, himself, says will take place. He promises to someone, a church, that He will "keep you from that hour of trial". The clues are all

in the scriptures.

That's all this book is going to be, a book about the scriptures that establish and explain the promise in Rev 3:10. I will not argue with references and authorities, positions or persuasions. I do not attempt to teach you, only the Holy Spirit does that. I intend only to give you the results of a thorough search through scripture. I will highlight pertinent words and phrases, and I will explain some of the nuances of the original scriptural language when they get lost in one translation or another. But we will only rely on the Strong's and Thayer's dictionaries, which have the widest acceptance, and use comparisons between the KJV, NKJ, and NIV translations. I will strictly follow the organization of the Bible, itself, without jumping back and forth in order to build arguments, or to construct a persuasive case for some conclusion, or to establish any themes.

This is a book designed to reveal to you the truth, not to convince you of it.

Before we move on and start our scriptural search, we are going to read the rest of the passage, or "letter", about the Philadelphia church. We should know more about what kind of a church it is, and what it is that pleases our Lord so. It may shed light on what merits the promise of such a "blessed hope".

Rev 3:

7 *"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.*

8 *I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*

9 *I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.*

10 *Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.*

11 *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."* (NIV)

What we read, here, is Jesus praising the church for its works: He says "I know your deeds". The KJV, in fact, actually uses the word "works" rather than "deeds". We know that "works" include the things Jesus commanded us to do, the acts of "brotherly love". "Brotherly love", by the way, is what the name "Philadelphia" means! Such works might be feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, visiting the prisoners. But Jesus also makes it very clear, by his language, "See, I have put before you an open door..." that He has something else in mind, — namely, evangelism. That "open door" which He has put before the church, is to let the gospel out into the world, and for bringing new believers in. It is for fulfilling the Great Commission.

What is translated "little strength" in the NIV, is translated "a little strength" in the KJV. And if we check the Greek original, the "little" can also mean "a little time". I believe the best

understanding of what Jesus says there is , “You have strength for a time”, or “a little while”. That “time”, or “little while” in which the church has strength, is that time that remains before He returns. He always says, throughout the Bible, that it will be “soon”, “quickly”, or in “a little while”. Such a “little while” interpretation is in much better keeping with the rest of the passage, which includes “kept my word” and “endure patiently”, which the KJV renders “word of my patience”. Which word is, of course, “keep my commandments” and “keep the faith”.

So, we see that Jesus says, in essence: “Because you have kept my commandments, and have fulfilled my commission to you to go into the world with the gospel, and stayed true to my name and never been ashamed of it, right through to the end, I will keep you from that hour of trial that will test the rest of the world”.

One last note, though we will get into it more, later. The “hour of trial” is rendered “hour of temptation” in the KJV. The original Greek word, in this scripture, is the same as that used in the scriptures about the tempting of Jesus in the wilderness. Satan wanted Jesus to stumble, to break faith with the Father. The Tribulation will be, it implies, a time of that kind of testing for many. It should not be confused, as a few do, with a time of judgement. It will only be a time of “trial” for the living, not the dead. It will be exactly as the scripture says, “to test those who dwell on the earth”.

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Chapter Two The Book of Matthew

We started with a scripture from the last book of the Bible; from now on we will generally take them as they come, working from front to back. We'll traverse the whole New Testament, from Matthew through Revelation. That's the way I conducted my search, and that's the way I'll share the results. There were quite a few surprises along the way; verses that have been overlooked by every other book on this subject I've ever seen. But hold on 'til the end! When we return to the Book of The Revelation we will find another scriptural nugget, there, that literally took my breath away. It's another one which everyone seems to have overlooked. Yet to my understanding, it answers the question as to when and whether that deliverance from the Tribulation will be provided, as much any other verse in the entire Bible! Truthfully, it was the one that convinced me to start this, my own independent search for answers, instead of just continuing to read other peoples' books about it. It just seemed to say, "There! That's it! The matter is settled!" But I want to lead you to it, as the Bible itself does, that you might best be ready to interpret it yourself. So we start at the beginning.

Matthew 3:7 is the first time I see a verse that speaks to what is to come. To Rev 3:10. John the Baptist is in the river Jordan, fulfilling his call from the Lord, to "*prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him*" (Matt 3:3 quoting Isaiah 40:3)

Matt 3:

7 *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" (NIV)*

John says, "Who warned you to flee the coming wrath?"

This is the first mention, in the New Testament, that there is something, which John calls the "wrath", coming to the earth. And he says that it is something to be fled. Avoided. Since we can't escape our own spiritual destiny, which includes judgement... then what he is alluding to must be something "on earth", and "physical", or "in the natural". It must be something that we all might be subject to, and we all might seek to escape. Of course, we read numerous times in the book of The Revelation that men try to flee "the wrath", so we should today, with the benefit of that Book, pretty much know what it's about.

But here is John, before the book of The Revelation was written, referring to it — that "coming wrath". Now John, and the Pharisees and Sadducees, all had the Old Testament and

probably knew it well, so they did have ample opportunity to know a “Day of the Lord”, or a “Day of Wrath”, was coming, sometime. Many of the prophets, and Daniel’s dreams, and other scriptures, warn of it. But John seems to be saying that he believes something more; that some people on earth might be able to escape it by a means other than death. He even seems to suggest that his baptism, the water baptism, the baptism of repentance, could be the way. Or a part of it.

That’s something to think about. There is a wrath. There is a way to escape it. Besides death, that is. Now most likely none of the Pharisees or Sadducees were actually there looking for that particular blessing, expecting to partake of John’s baptism in order to gain some assurance they would avoid that eventual “Day of Wrath”.

But should we expect John, this wildman in the desert, would know about such a thing? He was a prophet, we know that. But prophets seem, as we read their accounts, to be privy to no more than the immediate message that God has called them to deliver. They don’t usually know the whole plan of God or, apparently, even the whole purpose and intent of their own message and actions. God generally seems to operate on a “need to know” basis with His angels and prophets. So I was surprised when Matt 3:7 intimated that John knew more about God’s plans for that awful “hour of trial”. His “assignment” was, after all, only to preach and perform water baptisms of repentance, preparing the way for “someone” (John had not personally met Jesus, yet) else. My surprise led me to pay a little more attention to just who, or what, John the Baptist was. This is what Jesus told us about John:

Matt 11:

13 “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.” (NIV)

and,

Matt 17:

10 The disciples asked him, “Why then do teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

11 Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things.

12 But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”

13 Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.(NIV)

And this is what the Gospel of Luke tells us that an angel told John’s father:

Luke 1:

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

13 But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.

14 *He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,*
 15 *For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.*
 16 *Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God.*
 17 *And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”(NIV)*

I've concluded that John certainly was someone who could have known the yet-unrevealed future plans of God!

The next scripture we want to look at comes in Matthew 24. There, the disciples approach Jesus and ask Him, directly, about when the “end times” will come. His answer was chilling even then, even without the horrendous detail He gives later in the Book of The Revelation.

Matt 24:

3 *As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”*

4 *Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you.*

5 *For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ’, and will deceive many.*

6 *You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.*

7 *Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.*

8 *All these are the beginning of birth pains.*

9 *Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.*

10 *At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,*

11 *And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. (NIV)*

This much, we might sorrowfully admit, sounds about like every day on planet earth. The “tribe of mankind” does not run its affairs all that well. So, except for the details of verse 9, they should not be too surprising. There is nothing there, yet, to provide a time marker, or signal a new age. The next verses are a little more qualifying.

Matt 24:

12 *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,*

13 *But he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

14 *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.(NIV)*

The “love”, at this point in the experience of the disciples, isn't all that widely shared, or

warm. And the gospel of salvation may be all that's meant in the "saved" of verse 13. Verse 14 prophesies things that are more unique, and more like benchmarks. Perhaps Paul, by the time he died, or the Apostle John on Patmos Island, thought the gospel had been preached in the whole world. But we now **know** it had not. Indeed, it still has not. Nor has it been as a "testimony to all nations (peoples)". So we must still await the fulfillment of the condition when "then the end will come". Jesus continues, however, and gives an even more specific sign.

Matt 24:

15 *"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel — let the reader understand —*

16 *Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."*(NIV)

The "abomination that causes desolation" is a very specific and unique event. It is something we can readily recognize, something we can really use as a benchmark. It is actually spoken of three times in the book of Daniel. The third and last time is found in Daniel 12. For a couple of chapters Daniel has been being told (probably by the angel Gabriel) an explanation of a troubling vision he'd had. The angel speaks about wars, great wars, being waged by a certain "he", a "he" who many call "The Antichrist". But the angel does not speak about the last great war, the one we call "Armageddon".

Dan 12:

1 *"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered.*

2 *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."*(NIV)

Michael is an archangel who, as the scripture says, protects the Jews. The declaration that he will "arise", suggests he will do something more than he's been doing, perhaps to deal with the occasion of some very serious warfare. That could match up with Jesus' warning of serious wars to come. We could easily believe that it refers the incredible wars that Israel has won in the last fifty years. But, to our knowledge, the "deliverance" of Jews — "Everyone whose name is ... in the book" (God's Book of Life, we might assume), including "multitudes who sleep in the dust (the dead) — has not happened yet. The King James Version says:

Dan 12:

2 *"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."* (KJV)

The translation "many of them" seems truer to the Hebrew of the original scripture, and raises a matter we will want to come back to later. Many, but not all, of the dead shall "awake". And notice that when they awake, not all of them will prove to be "saints" receiving salvation. Some will awake, at that time — when the dead arise — to receive some condemnation, and shame and everlasting contempt. But for now, let's leave that issue aside and continue to follow the angel's answer to Daniel:

Dan 12:

3 *“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*

4 *But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.”*

5 *Then I, Daniel, looked , and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank.*

6 *One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river “How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?”*

7 *The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, “It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.”(NIV)*

“Time, times and half a time” are the Hebrew way of saying 3 ½ years. One half of the seven years which the whole “Tribulation” is prophesied to last. The “holy people” is probably Israel, though it could be all who are of God. The answer continues:

Dan 12:

8 *I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, “My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?”*

9 *He replied, “Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.*

10 *Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.*

11 *From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.”(NIV)*

Here we have the “abomination that causes desolation”. It follows another event, “the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished.” To save you some research, this is referring to two other major events that are, a number of times, prophesied to take place in the last days, or “end times”. The Antichrist secures a major peace agreement for Israel, and guarantees the rebuilding of a Temple for God in Jerusalem. The Jews eagerly await that event, today. When it comes, and the Temple is restored, they will resume the daily sacrifices spelled out by Moses. Then, as this and other prophecies say, the sacrifices will be (forcibly?) stopped, and the “abomination” event will occur shortly thereafter. All this is around the midpoint of the seven year Tribulation.

The angel’s answer to Daniel concludes with a personal note:

Dan 12:

12 *“Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.*

13 *As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.”(NIV)*

It’s not exactly clear what “till the end” or “the end of the days” mean. As you see, this prophecy stuff leaves us a few ambiguities to ponder. You can guess, but you don’t know. (I

think it's a part of His plan to keep our attention.) And there seem to be a number of "ends", here, including the "End of the Age" (Church?), the "end of the Tribulation", and the "end of 1290 and 1335 day periods" (neither of which are 3 ½ years), etc..

Now I know this rather long detour into Bible Prophecy and the "end times" is taking us a bit far afield, but once it's done we can proceed much more directly, and knowledgeably, in reading those scriptures that lead to, and explain, the promise in Rev 3:10. Which promise, obviously, did not have relevance to Daniel, who would be long dead before the "hour of trial".

Daniel also mentions the "abomination" in chapter 11, which is an earlier part of that same explanation being given by the angel:

Dan 11:

30 *"Ships of the western coast lands will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant.*

31 *His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation."* (NIV)

The "he", again, is the Antichrist. What we have, here, appears to be a description of some wars preceding Armageddon, in which the Antichrist is defeated, and in a fit of ("childish"?) rage he takes out his frustration on Israel and the Jews. Not all the Jews are so "holy", however, because some side with the Antichrist. Anyway, then the "abomination" takes place. It consists of a "desecration" — something being done that violates the sacredness, or sacred areas, of the temple; ending the sacrifices; and "setting up" something. Many believe that last "something", that something that is "set up", is a statue of the Antichrist himself, or Satan, or some other rank idol. But even though it's not totally clear what the desecrating act, and "something set up", is, we understand it enough to use it as a real tangible benchmark event. We will know when it happens.

The other time, the first time, the abomination is mentioned in the book of Daniel, is in Daniel 9:27. Daniel and the Jews are captives in Babylon. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, had warned them that their defeat, and this captivity, was going to happen. God had also said that Jerusalem, and His temple, would be destroyed. But God also said that the city would be rebuilt after only seventy years. Daniel rediscovered that last part of the prophecy, which apparently had been forgotten by the Jews, and he sought to remind God, through prayer, and to persuade God to set the Jews free, that they might go back to Jerusalem and rebuild. The angel Gabriel has appeared to answer those prayers, of Daniels's, and explain a few things:

Dan 9:

25 *"Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens', and sixty-two 'sevens'. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.*

26 *After the sixty-two 'sevens', the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.*

27 *He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven'. In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.* (NIV)

These “sevens”, by the way, are seven year periods. The Anointed One is Jesus, of course. The “He” of verse 27 is The Antichrist, again. The time of verse 27 is the time of the last seven. We hear of the treaty again, the abomination again, and the fact that in the end The Antichrist gets his! The “pouring out” is the very same language used in The Revelation about God’s Wrath in the end.

Well, I trust that by now you have a reasonably good understanding of what the “abomination that causes desolation” is referring to, even though we don’t know precisely what it is. We should be ready to get back to the Book of Matthew, and Jesus. Jesus continued His answer to the disciples:

Matt 24:

21 *“For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now— and never to be equaled again.*

22 *If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”(NIV)*

This is the Great Tribulation. Things are so awful, both in the things that men are doing, and in supernatural events emanating from heaven (as described in The Revelation), that “no one would survive”, Jesus says. “But for the sake of the elect”, who are Jews, or Christians, or both, it comes to an end! We cannot say for sure who the “elect” are. Needless to say, scholars and denominations argue endlessly over that matter. Maybe you can decide that for yourself, when we are finished with this study.

Jesus continues:

Matt 24:

23 *“At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it.*

24 *For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible.”(NIV)*

Now here is an interesting statement, that Jesus makes. Again, I want to repeat my belief that God never speaks loosely, or unintentionally. There are no “throw-aways” in God’s conversation. There are no slips-ups. He says, here, that false Christs and prophets will be appearing, in the general time period. It need not be precisely within that last seven, or 3 ½, years. In fact, there are many antichrists in the world, all time. (Read 1 John for more about that.) But they, apparently, will be incredibly more persuasive toward the end, even able to perform their own miracles and wonders. They could even “deceive the elect— if that were possible”! Now that’s a strange phrase, isn’t it? “If that were possible!” As you think about it, it gets downright exciting! What could it possibly mean, that “if”, in “if it were possible”? One answer, in fact a very reasonable answer, might be that which we read in Rev 3:10. That is, it won’t be possible because “the elect” aren’t here anymore! They have been relieved of duty,

taken out for R&R. Taken out for Rest & Resurrection!

Let's continue, however. The excitement only builds, I think, as Jesus tells us:

Matt 24:

25 *“See, I have told you ahead of time.*

26 *So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert’, do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms’, do not believe it.*

27 *For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

28 *Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.*

29 *Immediately after the distress (“tribulation” in the KJV) of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give it's light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”(NIV)*

Verse 28 might well be describing the valleys and plains full of the dead resulting from the Battle at Armageddon, as The Revelation, and earlier prophesies, describe. Verse 29 describes some of the “supernatural” cosmic display of God's Wrath. And Jesus continues:

Matt 24:

30 *“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”(NIV)*

Oh my! Here comes Jesus! He's coming in “power and great glory”! Almost everyone believes this is about the “Second Coming”, the return of the King of Kings to set up His most righteous Kingdom! So why do “all” — I repeat, “all” — the nations (peoples) mourn? Would we Christians be mourning? I think not! So is it possible that the Christians, or most of them, are not here? Again, is that what Rev 3:10 is saying? But the scripture continues:

Matt 24:

31 *“And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”(NIV)*

Now look: it says “and”! Jesus will appear, and — something else, something separate from that, happens! You really need to pay attention to all the details in this verse — remembering God is not careless, but very precise. There is a trumpet call, and He sends the angels, His warriors, now, to gather “his elect”, Jews and /or Christians, “from the four winds, from one end of the heavens — that is “heavens”, not earth — to the other.” If this does describe Jesus' Second Coming — His return to reign — then are His “elect” already “up there”, in the “heavens”, and not on earth among those who “mourn”?

Well, if this is getting your adrenalin up, hang on, there's still so much more to see! Even here in Matthew, there is much much more of interest. We have the “lesson” of the fig tree, and then Jesus continues to tell us:

Matt 24:

36 *“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*

37 *As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*

38 *As in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark;*

39 *And they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the coming of the Son of Man.”(NIV)*

Now, again, the real story is in the details. As Jesus talks again, here in verse 36, we are not referring to the Second Coming. We are back to the beginning, to the start of the Tribulation. He says that “no one knows” about when it will happen. Now that can only be plainly true, and obvious, — that no one knows — when the Tribulation, the “hour of trial”, shall begin. Once it begins, everyone knows, and anyone with a Bible can do a pretty good reckoning, about when the end, the last day, will come. And only at the beginning will it be exactly “as it was in the days of Noah”. It is Jesus, himself, who makes that comparison. Noah, and his family, God’s “elect” of that time, entered the ark, and left the danger, just before “the flood came and took them”, the wicked, “all away”. Rev 3:10 could have been written as a message to Noah: “Since you have kept my command to build patiently, I will Keep you from the flood that is going to come upon the whole world.” But not to those who have remained through the “flood” of wrath in the seven years of tribulation.

And consider the Second Coming. How could it be that (1) all the nations will “mourn”, (2) it will be a complete surprise, (3) everyone is just going on with “normal” (notice, all carnal) life, eating and drinking and marrying, if His true and faithful were still in the earth? What Christian would not be VERY aware, and waiting, and relieved, and ready — and indeed, very unlike the people who perished in the time of Noah? The implications of these verses are pretty strong: we are hearing about two very separate events, one at the beginning, and one at the end of that “hour of trial”, the Tribulation. And the verses that seem most obviously referring to the end, and the Second Coming, make little sense unless the “elect” were already “gone up yonder”, to be “gathered ... from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other”? I think that’s something to ponder, at least!

Now, in Matthew 25, Jesus tells a parable:

Matt 25:

1 *“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”(NIV)*

Of course, we all know the church of Jesus is often called, and likened to, a bride. Jesus is the bridegroom. Here, we have ten virgins who could be likened unto ten churches. They all know the bridegroom. And they all have chosen to respond, to accept the offer to become brides, and they all (ten!) await His uncertain time of coming to fetch them (to take them away into joy, not into an “hour of trial”).

Matt 25:

2 *“Five of them were foolish and five were wise.” (NIV)*

Some churches were foolish, and some were wise.

Matt 25:

3 *“The foolish one took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.*

4 *The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.”(NIV)*

They all prepared by owning, and taking with them, oil lamps, like the gospel, the light/lamp of truth. (Sorry, there’s no way to discuss a parable without some of this kind of “This actually means…” stuff.) But some did not take any oil (like the fuel/energy or anointing/power if God) to keep their lamps burning. If you need any more convincing about the meaning of lamps, read the rest of The Revelation chapters 1 through 3!

Matt 25:

5 *“The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.”(NIV)*

That speaks for itself.

Matt 25:

6 *“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’”(NIV)*

Now notice, carefully, a couple of points, here, that will become even more important later. It’s the midnight hour, the last hour of the day (age?). A cry, not attributed to the bridegroom (Himself), calls them “out” to meet Him. Matthew 24:31 speaks of angels issuing a trumpet call as the summons to meet. So the brides, here, go out to meet Him — out there, somewhere.

Matt 25:

8 *“The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’*

9 *‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’*

10 *But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.”(NIV)*

This was an “event”. Now it’s over. And five missed it. They are still virgins, or churches. They still want to be with the bridegroom. But their lamps were emptied of oil, allowed to fade out in the dark night. They asked the wiser five, who had come to the meeting place well-prepared, to share some oil. But they refused! Now, this point puzzled me, years ago, before I understood the full meaning of it. I was surprised that the five who were well-prepared would not share their oil. That seemed selfish to me, “unchristian”. Then I learned that oil is for anointing, and is a representation of the anointing, the power of God, for us to do what He has called us to do. We cannot share it, we cannot pass it around to others. Just as we cannot provide salvation to our friends and family. Each of us must get it ourselves, from the only source. We can’t fetch a double portion, and then dole out the Lord’s grace. So,

Matt 25:

11 *“Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’*

12 *But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’”(NIV)*

This touches the quick of many a Christian. If you want to understand it better, read

James. James does about the best job, I think, of explaining how faith without works, belief without action, a lamp without oil, is dead. But again, our interest in this parable is concerned with the picture of the bride/church being ready and waiting, as she must be, if she is to be able to receive the call to the bridegroom.

One last point; we are looking for clues to understanding the apparent promise of Rev 3:10, which this parable might supply. But there is another really important thing to notice, here, and to remember, for later. The other brides, the other churches, still remained, still survived. They were not banished or left outside, where there was “darkness and gnashing of teeth”, as happens in the next parable Jesus tells, the parable of the talents. The foolish brides missed the call to the bridegroom, and were left “outside” (as in the “hour of trial”), but did not perish. In the next parable, the parable of the talents, the real loser, the one who did not invest his oil/talent at all, but only buried it and then expressed his bad opinion about the master, was expelled into the darkness, the sorry place of lost souls. He, essentially, perished. The five virgins are, apparently, still “virgins”. They may yet see the bridegroom when the door is opened again. There was no “last day or hour” indicated, no final judgement. They only missed the midnight rendezvous, for their foolishness, with the bridegroom. They did go, even though “too late”, and did get their oil. They still have a future, though their best opportunity is now lost.

When Jesus continues His answer, in Matthew 25:31, He again takes up the subject of His second coming. He talks about when He will come to establish His millennial reign, and perform His duties of judgment.

Matt 25:

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.”(NIV)

Something, several somethings actually, should be noticed about this. In this verse the Son of Man is coming in his glory, with his angels. There are no saints, no army, no battles, no bloody robes, no sword, etc.. What we begin to see, is that the so-called Second Coming is not a single, singular, or one-moment event, either. It is more like a series of events, or process. And this event in Matt 25:31, especially, is not the Battle of Armageddon. Nor is it a meeting in the sky, which we will find described latter. Nor is it like Matthew 24:30, where “the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all nations,...mourn”. This event is not, as Matthew 24:31 describes, announced with a trumpet call, and the gathering up of His elect! Jesus comes here, more quietly, “in all His glory, essentially as if expected. He comes with angels, and sits upon His throne. Now, we read:

Matt 25:

32 “All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”(NIV)

Nations are gathered. All the “nations” — the Gentiles, not the Jews. Nor are we told that saints or the dead are assembled, but only nations of “people” are gathered before Him. The Tribulation, and Armageddon are behind us, here. These are survivors of that terrible “seven”. Then He judges. And this judgement does not speak of crowns, or rewards, but of life and death,

of salvation and “the eternal fire” (Matt 25:41). Churches, saints, and brides, are not mentioned as Jesus portrays this judgement scenario. He simply says “all the nations”, of yet-living Gentiles, are gathered. The judgement seems to only focus on whether they are blessed by the Father. That blessing, apparently depends upon whether they had obeyed Jesus’ command, “Love you brother”:

Matt 25:

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take you inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

37 Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

40 The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”(NIV)

Those who did not do those righteous things, are summarily condemned:

Matt 25:

41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”(NIV)

We have one more verse in Matthew to consider. It doesn’t speak directly to our topic, but it’s worth thinking about. It’s the last sentence in Matthew. Jesus is about to ascend into heaven, and He’s giving the disciples, now apostles, the instruction known as the Great Commission. He says:

Matt 28:

19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”(NIV)

Look at the last sentence. Jesus says He will be with us “to the very end of the age.” Now, will that last “seven” be a part of the “age”? I don’t believe so. Let me explain why.

This “age”, the “Church Age”, is the time for spreading the gospel. It is the time for gathering and building His “church”, His “body”, His “bride”. It is especially characterized by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was expressly “given” to us by Jesus, to be our “Counselor” and “Comforter” in a rough, wicked environment. Without that Spirit being active in the earth, in fact, we don’t even have the means to come to know Jesus, or be “reborn” (the spirit gives birth to spirit... ‘You must be born again.’ John 3:6,7 NIV). Few would argue that there

could be a Christian Church without the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God.

But either at the beginning of the seven years, or at least by the mid point of the seven years when the Antichrist sets up himself and the “abomination that causes desolation” in the temple, the Holy Spirit must leave the earth:

II Thes 2:

6 “And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time.

7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow...”(NIV)

If the Holy Spirit, “the one who holds it (The Antichrist) back...is taken away”, can the Church remain? A church without the means, and the protection, and the power of the Holy Spirit is impotent, powerless, and ripe for slaughter. If it’s not the end of the “Church Age”, it’s at least the end of the age of the church’s power and efficacy.

Jesus’ promise, “I am with you, always, to the end of the age”, doesn’t change that. If Jesus and the church are here together, on the earth, when the Holy Spirit is gone, then they are both without power. You have to remember that even Jesus derived the power for His ministry’s miracles and wonders from the power (anointing) of the Holy Spirit. While Jesus grew up, for thirty years, amongst the sick, and lame, and lepers, and demon-possessed, He delivered and healed no one. Even after His baptism by John, and His sojourn in the desert, Jesus still only preached, without miracles. Remember the moment at the wedding party in Cana? His mother said “Do a miracle”.

He answered:

John 2:

4 “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”(NIV)

It is most intriguing to me, in fact, that His mother ignored His answer, and in (rather “typical”!) mother fashion, went right on as if the miracle was going to happen. The case has been well-made that His mother, essentially, went over Jesus’ head, that she took her faith straight to the Father, to appeal for Jesus’ miracle-working to begin “now”. Whatever, only minutes later, Jesus did work His first miracle. Even though He had begun a ministry, by preaching and teaching, and gathering His disciples, and at least overseeing baptisms, His real “anointed” miracle-working ministry had not yet begun. Even after John the Baptist watched the Holy Spirit announce “This is My Son”, it had not yet begun. Even if Nathaniel had recognized Him as the Son of God (John 1:43), it had not yet begun. Until God, the Father, released the miracle-working power of the Spirit, Jesus was limited to being a good “Rabbi”

So if the Holy Spirit is absent from the earth, about all Jesus could do, if He were here, is watch us try to survive the wrath. He would be in the same situation He was in before Cana. He could watch us as we dodge 200 pound hailstones and mountain-sized meteorites, as we hide

from a “scorching” sun and horse-sized stinging scorpions, but He could not deliver us. You might ask whether He could protect us individually, like give us protecting angels, or a shield of some sort?

Well, we know that the believers who are (remaining, or newly-converted) here during that “hour of trial” will suffer greatly, and be severely persecuted. We also find, as we read The Revelation, that no one is ever immune or protected from anything, except 144,000 newly-designated (sealed) Jews, whom we read about here:

Rev 14:

1 Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.

2 And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.

3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

4 These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb.

5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.(NIV)

They are all Jews, no Christians or Gentiles among them, and twice the scripture does explicitly protect them, but no others:

Rev 7:

3 “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of God.”

4 Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.(NIV)

And,

Rev 9:

3 And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.

4 They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.(NIV)

We certainly have to ponder, then, the meaning and purpose of “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” It suggests, at the very least, that either the age ends and He abandons us during the next, terrible, final seven years, or that we will not need Him **here** with us after the age ends. That’s why we are studying Rev 3:10!

That Blessed Hope

Chapter Three Mark, Luke, and John

In chapter 13 of Mark, we find another account of the “Olivet Discourse”, that time when Jesus was on the Mount of Olives teaching the disciples about “the end of the age”. It differs little from the account in Matthew 24 and 25, which we’ve already examined pretty closely. The same significant “markers” are all there:

Mark 13:

14 “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong — let the reader understand — then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”(NIV)

and,

Mark 13:

19 “because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now — and never to be equaled again.

20 If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom He has chosen, He has shortened them.”(NIV)

and,

Mark 13:

24 “But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;’”(NIV)

and finally,

Mark 13:

26 “At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

27 And He will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.” (NIV)

There is one significant difference here, however, we need to think about. It comes with verse 27. Compare it to its equivalent in Matthew:

Matt 24:

31 “And He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his

elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”(NIV)

You see, Mark quotes Jesus as saying His elect will be gathered from the earth and the heavens. When we studied Matthew, we were rather excited about the fact that he strongly implied that “His elect” were already in the heavens, by the time of the Second Coming. Now, does Mark’s gospel diminish or contradict our original point? No, not at all. You need only to remind yourself that there are more than one “elect”, or types of “chosen” in the whole of God’s creation. We needn’t try to name or define them, but we can readily think of some of the more significant group boundaries. There are Old Testament and New Testament elect; there are Jewish and Gentile; there are “Church-age” pre-Tribulation and those who become believers within the time of the Tribulation, that “hour of trial”. Those should include the 144,000, and the Jews who were “hidden” in verses Rev 12:12-16, and any number of new, or renewed, believers. There may, as well, be some of His elect who never heard the name of our God, but found Him in the testimony of his creation, and the conscience of their hearts.

So, Matthew only mentions the elect who are already in the heavens — whom we might conclude are them that received the benefit of the promise in Rev 3:10. Mark mentions them, and others who apparently did not receive that benefit. Mark’s gospel, I believe, simply refers to the broader, the more complete, picture of the time when Jesus returns in triumph and ready to begin his millennial reign.

In a moment we’ll look further into the Olivet Discourse, as it appears in the gospel of Luke, but first I have something else I want to show you in Luke.

As Jesus is talking with His disciples He encourages them, telling them that their eternal futures are promising:

Luke 12:

32 *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” (NIV)*

But then He cautions them, adding something of a “but...”, an important condition:

Luke 12:

35 *“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,*
36 *like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.*

37 *It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.” (NIV)*

That language is pretty familiar, wouldn’t you say? This admonition, to His disciples to “keep their lamps burning”, could hardly be any clearer in its meaning. And look at verse 35. Couldn’t you just drop that whole thing right into the middle of the parable of Ten Virgins, and not even notice it was out of place? Even more, if Jesus had quoted either of these, this instruction in Luke, or the parable of the virgins in Matthew, to the Church at Philadelphia, would you have thought it out of place? The message is absolutely the same. Jesus promises to be a very grateful master if His servants are still alert and at their posts when He returns. And He

promises a very special, and priceless, reward. In fact, the reward in Luke 12:37 is practically the same, I would say, as the reward promised in Rev. 3:10. Jesus, as far as I can see, is promising a little “R & R” at the end of a good “tour of service”. The servants, in Luke, will get to set their duties aside, and even lay back and relax and be waited on hand and foot, themselves. By the very grateful master himself! And the church at Philadelphia? It, too, is being told that a full “stint” of faithful service, will earn it a rest from the “battle field”, for perhaps seven years of R & R!

In the next couple of verses Jesus repeats the familiar warning, again, that His return will be very unpredictable, definitely a complete surprise no matter how much we might try to guess it, and that we had better be always at work and at our posts, if we expect to receive our reward — that blessed hope. I think the NKJ really says it best: Then Jesus the model of the story in a more classic parable form. First there is the warning regarding vigilance and being at their works:

Luke 12:

38 *“And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants....*

40 *Therefore you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (NKJ)*

What happens next is very interesting. And probably tells us something very significant regarding the promise of Rev 3:10. Peter was always aware of these sort of things; he was a little more class and status conscious than most of Jesus’ followers, so he asked the Master a very explicit question.

Luke 12:

41 *Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?”(NIV)*

Like, “Does everyone qualify for this very great blessing, or is it just us, your inner circle?” That’s a pretty up-front question. The context of the whole chapter reveals that everyone there is a follower of Jesus; they had all followed Him out of the city and into the countryside, eager to learn, attending His every word. So Peter wants to know. Will anyone who follows be in line, or only those who “really serve”, who really do the heavy work. Like himself. Jesus answers him by retelling the “parable” in an even more classic form, and draws the distinctions I think Peter wanted to hear.

Luke 12:

42 *The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?*

43 *It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.*

44 *I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.*

45 *But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk.*

46 *The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the*

unbelievers.” (NIV)

Let’s really study this, for a minute. To start, it’s pretty obvious that this parable is about the “end of the age”. The language even slips into the terminology of “the unbelievers”, it does not say something like “the unemployed”, or those “outside the master’s house”. The servant in charge of “the other (obviously lesser) servants” seems both a good stand-in for a “true disciple” like Peter, and for the Church, even the “good servant model” of the Philadelphian church. It’s pretty easy to see all the other, by now familiar, parallels; the call for right behavior and conscientious hard work, and the promise of heaven and heavenly rewards for the righteously industrious. But there’s something else here I think is even more important to discern.

When I first considered the story, I recognized its “appropriateness”, and application as another example of our concerns. But I wasn’t really moved to include it. It was a little bit redundant, I didn’t see it shedding any “new light” on the promise of Rev 3:10, so I felt I might just leave it out, for the sake of “brevity”. But that was only a part of the reason for passing it by. There was also something about it that really troubled me whenever I read it. But I wasn’t quite sure what it was. So I passed it by. But I kept being called back to it. And the more I read it, the more uneasy I was. I finally realized that I kept thinking about the punishment of the bad servant, about his “being cut to pieces”. Sure, it’s obviously comparable to being alive in the Tribulation, so why should it trouble me so? And why should my thoughts keep coming back to it? Then I began to realize that it was that it didn’t “fit” with my understanding of Jesus. This harsh master, “chopping up, into pieces” a poor feckless, even rascally, servant, hardly sounds like the Jesus I know. This was a bit like the feeling I’d had about the virgins who were unwilling to share their oil. So I at last decided to go back to the Greek to see if there was any other way to read verse 46. I’m always reluctant to do that, preferring to rely on authorities greater than myself. Nevertheless, I tackled the project.

I did find that you can, indeed, read verse 46 quite differently. The “bad guy gets chopped up” is not the only way the Greek can be translated. In fact, I feel it is much better interpreted as, “The master will scourge him and, indeed, leave him to his destiny with the godless.” Another equally appropriate, and accurate, reading could be, “The master will cut him out from the other servants and leave him to his lot with the faithless.” Either of these, I think, is much more consistent with the life and spirit of Jesus, and His ministry. And both are much more consistent with the parable of the virgins, which I see as an exact parallel. In that parable, as I pointed out, the foolishness of the virgins without oil did not condemn them, or leave them to eternal damnation, but only missing out on the first and best rewards. They still had much to hope for, much to still work for. In this reinterpretation, the bad servant is not “damned” or totally destroyed, but he loses a lot!

Now some, I know, think he deserved the crueler fate. Let me answer that. I think it’s important to our whole Christian attitude, and walk. And our understanding of Rev 3:10. The servant, you have to realize, was “in the house”! In the house of the master! Not only that, he had been promoted substantially, and entrusted with a great deal of responsibility. Unless the master, himself, was absolutely careless or foolish, he must have seen good qualities, and received

a goodly bit of faithful and reliable service from the servant, to have entrusted him with so much. Apparently, the problem is that the master was gone for quite a long while — too long for the servant-in-charge to resist the call of worldly pleasures and distractions — and he “backslid”. He “fell”. He went the way of five or six of the seven churches. He went the way of very many of us. But, in my knowledge of Jesus, the redemptive power of His love and His blood is great enough to overcome, if we are willing to come back and seek our redemption. So what about this poor “backslid”, formerly-faithful servant? Just as the reinterpretation says, he missed the great reward of that “R & R, but all was not lost. But now, to his still-great misfortune, he was left to work out his fate, his future, along with the (so far) faithless and unbelievers. And that, I believe, is the greatest contribution this parable has to make to our understanding of Rev 3:10. Even within the house there may be some who do not qualify. Outside the house, forget it. There’s not even a promise given. But if you are in the house (or in Peter’s situation, the circle of serious disciples), just be sure you don’t fade in the later days!

By the way, The Tribulation is not the “Judgement”, as I read The Revelation”, but only a preceding, serious “hour of trial”, or “testing”, in which many will come to, or renew their faith in God, and still receive their ultimate salvation. Rev 3:10, therefore, is not about salvation, but a different reward for the Philadelphians, who have been the best of His servants.

OK, now to the Mount of Olives. Luke reports on the Mount of Olives discourse in chapter 21. Most of it, again, is quite familiar. But there are some differences that merit our attention. As before, we hear Jesus prefacing his remarks with warnings about the prelude, or the “beginning of the end”, which are popularly called (today) the “signs of the times”:

Luke 21:

9 *“When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”*

10 *Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.*

11 *There will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.*

12 *But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.*

13 *This will result in your being witnesses to them.” (NIV)*

Verses 12 and 13, which follow on the heels of the “fearful events and great signs from heaven”, tell us that the (notable and pronounced) persecution of Christians will be “before all this”. As so many times in prophetic scripture, we are left with a bit of indeterminacy and mystery that we can debate over forever — at least until we get to heaven. But we can, in deference to the grammar of the translation, say that the persecution that serves God’s purposes — having us be witnesses, even to kings — follows wars and revolutions but precedes the great cosmic, and supernaturally originated signs and wonders that dominate the scene of the Tribulation.

Luke's report stays more focused on Jerusalem:

Luke 21:

20 *“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near.” (NIV)*

We should not assume that this refers to the last, great battle at Armageddon. Jerusalem is attacked, and overpowered, yet saved, just before, or shortly after, the last seven begins. And then the city is completely overcome in the midpoint of the seven, when the “abomination” takes place. So the desolation is only “near”.

Luke 21:

23 *“How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people.*

24 *They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” (NIV)*

What we have here, in Luke's narration, is a general progression of history which, as we've seen before, isn't specific or unique enough to demark ages, or the seven, or a coming of the Lord. But in the next verses, the heavenly and cosmic signs are described, and we are told that after them will be seen “the Son of Man, coming, in power and with great glory”.

Luke 21:

25 *“There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.*

26 *Mn will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.*

27 *At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” (NIV)*

Now comes the most telling verse of the entire passage:

Luke 21:

28 *“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”(NIV)*

We must read this carefully. First, it says “When these things **begin**”, not **during** or **after**, we should “stand up”, “lift up our heads”. Now, if we are being bloodily persecuted by the regime of the Antichrist, and the earth is being pummeled by unimaginable horrors that include 200 pound hailstones and firestorms and stinging scorpions as large as horses, and so on, the advice to “stand up” is not very well taken. And I'm not being facetious. Christians will be in hiding. In fact, just before Jesus returns “in power and great glory” (this is an important description, as you'll see later), everyone, who is sane, will be hiding. The scriptures, themselves, in The Revelation, say so.

“But”, one might object, “it's only figurative!” I see no reason to conclude that. It is quite reasonable to read it as a literally explicit instruction.

“But”, one might object, “it is worth it, to ‘stand up’ and receive one's salvation!” This verse is not about “salvation”. The Greek word, in the original scripture, is not a word used for

“salvation”, but for “deliverance”, or “redemption”, or “liberation”. So, if we put all these clues together, we can see this verse saying, to good Christians, “When these signs of the times begin, signifying that the ‘hour of trial’ is nigh, stand up tall and receive your deliverance”. That sounds very much like the promise of Rev 3:10.

The verses that soon follow, in fact, are even more clear, and they conclude with an extraordinary instruction:

Luke 21:

34 *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.*

35 *For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.*

36 *Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” (NIV)*

Let’s go through that again. Do not be like the bad servant (v. 34), or that day will be like a “trap” (“trapping” one where?)! And, “it **will** come upon **all** those **who live on** the face of the earth” (v. 35)! Be ready! And “**pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen...”! Now that is remarkable! Jesus, himself, has just said — without any ambiguity — that there is a hope (a prayer) that one can escape all that is about to happen (not yet happened). And there is no doubt, here, that this is a hope for a “deliverance”, and is not about “salvation”. And what else could this be, then, if not that “Blessed Hope” that Paul speaks about later (Titus 2:13)? What else but the hope of receiving the promise of Rev 3:10? Well, I promised not to try to “persuade” you, so I’ll try to contain my own obvious convictions on this one, and recommend you still hold back from any conclusions until we finish. We have yet much ground to cover, and that will include scriptures that speak to whom this hope is given, and to whom it might not be given, and why, among other things. We do have a lot of scriptures to go through yet. This book is not resting upon just the few that you’ve heard so often before.**

The gospel of John doesn’t include the teaching on the Mount of Olives. In fact, there are only two scriptures, in John, that have much relevance to our topic. The first is in chapter 6.

John 6:

39 *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.*

40 *For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I shall raise him up at the last day.” (NIV)*

This is not about the promise of Rev 3:10, about before “the hour of trial”, but about the ultimate gift of eternal salvation, bestowed “at the last day”. And it is not really clear, here, what “the last day” is precisely. I only include this passage because the language of it might lead some to think we have ignored or skipped past something that does have a bearing on our conclusions. The same is true about verse 44:

John 6:

44 *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (NIV)*

The next scripture, however, does give us a bit more to think about.

John 9:

4 *“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.*

5 *While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (NIV)*

This may be the least obvious scripture we will look at. It doesn't stand out, without deeper interpretation, as really any great help to our understanding of the promise in Rev 3:10. The scripture, as a whole, just tells us of our need to do our work in the Lord's service. But it is the “night” and “day” imagery that especially catches my attention.

We need to start by thinking about what the “church” is, and why it is. Then the significance of Jesus' warning, “Night is coming, when no one can work”, becomes much more obvious.

While Jesus was here, physically present, with his disciples and present on the face of the earth, we can readily understand the “As long as it is day ... we must do the work of ...”. It can be understood to say that He and his disciples should be doing the work. We also recognize that “day” is a time when there is light, and “night” is when the light is gone. Jesus plainly says, “I am the light”. So we, and the disciples as well, understand that Jesus is telling us that when He is gone, it will be that “night” time, “when no one can work”.

Well, truthfully, when Jesus did leave the earth, there was a short time you might call a “twilight”, when little work was being done, but the full “night” obviously did not come. The Holy Spirit came into the world, and the Church, and the Church Age, began. And the “light” of Jesus has continued to light our way, and permit us to keep on working. And in fact Paul, the consummate evangelist and church-planter, tells us the church is the new “body of Christ”. And we know, as believers, that He lives yet in the earth because He lives in each of us, and our corporate church. So He is still “in the world” and it is still the day; the night has not yet come, “when no one can work”. How did that come about?

Jesus began arranging it, and setting up the means for continuing His ministry after his crucifixion, at least as early as in Matthew 24:14, when He declared the “Great Commission”:

Matt 24:

14 *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (NIV)*

In His last moment on the earth, with the last words He spoke before his ascension, He established and appointed the Church:

Acts 1:

8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (NIV)*

The “twilight”, we could say, fell in that time “when”, the time from His ascension until the Day of Pentecost. Nothing much, for that while, was being done. And, if anything, it does show us exactly what Jesus meant. Jesus' followers were now a group of people huddled together, a community and fellowship, but unable to “work”. If you've ever seen field hands

huddled at the edge of the farm, waiting for the sun to rise enough to let them start their work, you have seen Jesus imagery, and His point. As it were, Jesus' followers were appointed, but not yet empowered. They had been hired, and knew their appointed labors, but had no "light" by which to work! They were a group of believers, of people who fully well knew the gospel, but they were not yet His Church. It was not "night", but close enough to night that "no one could work". Such may well describe the seven of the Tribulation.

Then came the moment of Pentecost:

Acts 2:

1 *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*

2 *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.*

3 *And there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.*

4 *And they were filled with the Holy Ghost... (KJV)*

At that moment, a room full of people became a church, His Church, with light again in the world, and the ability to "work". The Light of Christ had returned. And the "day" of the Church was at hand and they all "could work". Until...?

If Jesus does not return, and does not begin his millennial reign until after that "hour of trial", the Tribulation, is finished; and if the Holy Spirit must be "taken out of the way" so that "the Lawless one" can "be revealed", and that "hour of trial" can begin"; then the beginning of the "hour of trial" will mark the true end of the day, and the beginning of the "night ... when no one can work." If that is the case, then what is left for the Church to do? Whatever remnants, whatever collection of church members, might remain on earth during the "hour of trial" will be at least as powerless as the "twilight" crew we see in Acts.

Look again at the language of Rev 3:10:

"Since you have kept my command ... I will also keep you from the hour of trial..."(NIV)

"Because you have kept my command ... I also will keep you from ..."(NKJ)

"Because thou hast kept the word ... I also will keep thee from ..."(KJV)

It is both clear that the work of the Philadelphian church is completed, and that the promise is one of complete protection, if anything less than complete removal from the face of the earth, which is about to be enveloped in that hour of trial. The "hour of trial", after all, is an "hour of testing", and the church at Philadelphia has already passed the test. And during the "Hour of night", we might say, the church at Philadelphia would be powerless, without the Holy Spirit, without even "a little strength". We will be getting more into this, later.

As we read further in the Book of Acts we will find a few more scriptures that help our interpretation of Rev 3:10. One is back in chapter 1.

Acts 1:

9 *After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

10 *They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.*

11 *“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven”. (NIV)*

Here’s the King James rendition of the key verse:

Acts 1:

11 *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (KJV)*

The matter of our interest is the precise language that the “two men” (angels, of course) used: “this same Jesus ... will come back in the same way (“in like manner”) as you have seen him go.” The King James “in like manner” is, as I read the original, the best rendering, which expresses the notion of “fashion, style, deportment, and character”. The original scripture really emphasizes the atmosphere and nature of the event, not the obvious action or mechanics, i.e., His “levitation”, in the ascension. That atmosphere is one of quiet, and a majestic serenity. Jesus is all but alone, not accompanied by a great host and blaring trumpets; not heralded by lightening, or cymbals, or shouts of triumph and celebration; even though it is an event of great victory — death has lost its sting, Jesus has humiliated Satan, and God has demonstrated that He can indeed deliver resurrection and everlasting life!

Now, we’ve already noted, in the previous chapter, that the scriptural records appear to show that the “Second Coming” of Jesus will be more a “process”, or series of steps or stages or events, rather than a single unitary event. You might look at our election of our nation’s President, for a similar concept. We talk of the election of the President in “one event” language, while the actual election is a process with numerous steps, or events. There is a “primary”, a nomination, a campaign, the voting, the electoral college election, the inaugural, etc.. One separate event in the process of Jesus’ return, consists of His return with an army, dressed in something of a battle array, and ready to conclude the wars at Armageddon, and to destroy the Antichrist’s armies. We get some of that picture described to us in Chapter 19 of the Book of the Revelation. It describes the King of Kings as He heads out of heaven, bound for the earth:

Rev 19:

11 *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With Justice he judges and makes war.*

12 *His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but himself.*

13 *He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.*

14 *The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.*

15 *Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God*

Almighty. (NIV)

Now there is absolutely nothing in this picture that compares to the picture of the ascension! There is no similarity in His “manner”, “style”, or “deportment”. If the angels spoke truthfully, then there is another time that Jesus shall come back, and it will be a very different sort of event.

What about His return, after all this war, to establish His throne, and carry out His duties of judgement? Well, let’s look to Matthew 25 for a description of that event. Again, you will see, there is absolutely no comparison with the ascension scene.

Matt 25:

31 *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.*

32 *All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” (NIV)*

We see here, it seems, at least two separate events, quite distinct, quite different in almost every descriptive quality. And both are very different from anything we saw in the “manner” of His ascension. Jesus on a horse is not like Jesus on a throne. Jesus armed with sword, and robed in bloody garments, leading the armies of heaven, is not like Jesus in the regal array of a throne, in the company of the angels (and no armies). And Jesus at the moment of the ascension, stood entirely alone; even the “two men” appeared beside the Apostles, not Jesus. If the “manner” at the ascension bears any resemblance to what we’ve read so far, it would be more like that in the parable of the virgins: “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’”. Or even the master who returns home to find, and reward, faithful servants at their posts. The master was alone, and quite at peace, as far as we can tell.

That Blessed Hope

Chapter Four The Epistles

The epistles are a real treasure trove of scriptural light, as we all know. Much of that light shines brightly on the promise of Rev 3:10. We'll start with something that we might not immediately think of as having a bearing on our subject. Well, maybe it does. In 1 Corinthians, Paul asks us:

1 Cor 3:

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. (NIV)

We've certainly heard about that before. It's one of the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. But if we are, in fact, His temple, what will happen to that temple, a million times over, in the torrent of destruction that will rain upon the earth, and all those that live upon the face of the earth, in the "hour of trial"? Will God himself be, then, an agent of destruction of that temple? Can He so contravene His own word? Would it not be, as Jesus said in Matt 12:25 and Luke 11:17, "A house divided against itself..."? Or is the question answered by the fact that (1), His Spirit is withdrawn, and no longer in the world, and (2), all those who truly "abide in Christ" and "in whom Christ abides" are gone, absent from that "hour of trial"? These are an extremely serious, and significant, set of questions, I think, that must be answered in any debate about the promise of Rev 3:10, the "Rapture", and the probable "real life fate" of anyone who remains to live in the actual time of the Tribulation either as, or just becoming, a believer. There are several answers one might come up with, but all have very serious consequences as to what being a "Christian" actually entails, and what Christ's Church is. We won't try to answer them here.

Our next verse, 1 Corinthians 15:51, is one of two that are at the heart of the doctrine of the "Rapture". In fact it, and a passage in 1 Thessalonians 4, are pretty much the whole case for the "Rapture". Should we not expect that they will be quite important, and equally illuminating, for our study of the promise in Rev 3:10? I should think so, — certainly if they are about one and the same event. So let's look at the scripture in 1 Corinthians.

1 Cor 15:

51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed —

52 *in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.*

53 *For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*

54 *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (NIV)*

Without doubt, that's a very powerful statement. It paints a rather clear and exact picture, of an event that is yet to take place, someplace in our future. The heart of it, of course, that gives the basis to the belief in the "Rapture", is the declaration that not all of us shall die, but instead shall be directly translated from our being yet alive, living in our accustomed mortal bodies, into something new, into our glorified, eternal, and "imperishable" bodies. There are several details of this event that we should note. They include: that it will be accomplished in an instant, the mere "twinkling of an eye"; that there will be no steps, or stages, or long drawn out processes involved; and that it is not just we who are alive will be "raised" into our eternity at this moment but, if it were possible in such a brief instant, the already-deceased believers (the "dead in Christ", as they are called elsewhere) shall be raised and resurrected even before us. That's a lot to comprehend. And it's definitely a broader picture of the event (if it is the same event as that of the "promise") than anything we could derive from our verse in Rev 3. For one thing, Rev 3:10 makes no mention of the dead. Neither does it say anything about any believers outside the one church at Philadelphia. Nor does it actually describe anything of resurrection or translation or of being made into anything else at all. Jesus simply says, "I will keep you from that hour of trial." We might assume it involves such a "translation", but we are not told of it. So this, if this 1 Corinthians scripture is a "snapshot" of the promise given in Rev 3:10 actually in the process of being honored, it certainly is quite an illumination. And, if these two scriptures are both about the same event, then what can we conclude about each — from the other?

Rev 3:10 tells us that the event will occur before the "hour of trial". That's good, because the 1 Corinthians passage tells us nothing about the time, or timing, except that it will be "at the last trumpet". Rev 3:10 tells us it will be as a reward to a good and faithful church but also, though only by omission, it implies it will not be a reward enjoyed by feckless or unfaithful and un-persevering servants and churches. There is nothing about "qualifications" at all, in the 1 Corinthians passage. But it does, as we've noted, tell us a bit about the nature and mechanics of it all.

The essential and crucial "fact" left out of the 1 Corinthians event, the fact that would really help us determine if the two scriptures are about the same event, is the timing, or the "relative date", i.e., when in relation to the "hour of trial" this event will take place. The only clue is that "at the last trumpet". And it presents us with a problem. Now, the most obvious thing — which is actually overlooked by most authors and commentators — is that this "trumpet" is not a "shout". The ten virgins are called up by a "shout". And the other foundational scripture of the "Rapture" also refers to a "shout". Actually, it refers to both a shout and a trumpet call. It says,

“a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” (1 Thes 4:16, KJV), or “with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God.” (NIV). The shout and the voice fit well with the ten virgins parable. And perhaps the additional detail of a “trumpet call” is not necessarily any significant problem. The parable may simply have omitted such a detail (the presence of a trumpet), which actually was common to such marriage scenes, in those days. And 1 Corinthians may have just omitted the “shout”. But a problem remains. The problem is that 1 Corinthians says it is the “last trumpet”. In other words, it says there will be no more trumpet calls! Not at Armageddon, not at the setting of the throne for the judgements. No more, period. You might not think it matters all that much, but I think we must assume that God is never careless in His words, and I know He is incapable of a lie. So we need to account for the matter of the “last trumpet”, for if it is indeed the “last trumpet”, then this is taking place AFTER the Tribulation, and all the final “return” scenes. You see, in Matthew we read:

Matt 24:

31 “And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.” (NIV)

This event in Matthew, the gathering of his elect — already in heaven, remember — is signaled by a trumpet call. And this event, we have already concluded, is after the Tribulation, or at the very end of it. And the promise occurs at, or before, the beginning. “Rapturists”, themselves, still hotly debate about when the “Rapture” takes place. Which is one reason I do not want to equate the “promise”, or “Blessed Hope”, with the “Rapture”. So let us see what we can do with this “last trumpet” thing. Let’s look at the key words in each scripture to see what they are in the Greek, what possible interpretations might be made of each, and whether they are all the same.

First, Matthew 24:31. The key words are: loud, trumpet, call. “*Megas*” is the Greek word translated “loud”. The dictionaries translate it as “big, exceedingly great, mighty”, and of a “broad expanse”, as in far-reaching or everywhere. I think “loud” or “great” is fine. “*Phone*” is the Greek word translated “call”. It does include “tone, sound, noise” in its definitions, as well as “saying, language, voice”. So it allows for some latitude, depending on the source. “*Salpigx*” (or *salpinx*) is the Greek. It is a “trumpet”. So there is no argument with the interpretation of the Matthew scripture.

Second, 1 Corinthians 15:52. The key words are: last, trumpet, trumpet will sound. “*Eschatos*” gave us “last”. Its meanings are “last of a sequence”, and “final in time”. “*Salpigx*” is the original word for “trumpet”, again. And “*salpizo*” is the Greek word translated “trumpet will sound”. Its dictionary meanings are “sound a blast”, or “sound a trumpet”. I think the verse is accurately translated. We have the “last trumpet”. Period.

Third, 1 Thessalonians 4:16. The key words are: shout, voice, trumpet. “*Keleusma*” is translated “shout”. Its best meaning is “cry of incitement” or “stimulating cry”, as in that which a herdsman might use to raise up his resting herds. “*Phone*” is the original which, we’ve already seen, is translated as “voice”, though it also refers to a foreign language. Who knows what the

word of the angel might be? “*Salpigx*” is the origin of “trumpet” again. So, again, the translation is accurate, and rather inflexible.

So we have very consistent language in all three scriptures. Matthew, I would say, definitely refers to an event that comes at, or near, the end of the Tribulation. Indeed, that fact serves to validate our surmise that the promise given in Rev 3:10 is precise, real, and had been (future to us, past in the Revelation Vision) already fulfilled. I Cor 15:52, I am sure, describes a real event, but that event seems to be taking place toward the very end of the Tribulation, or after it, as indicated by at least one detail. 1 Thes 4:16, which we will look at more thoroughly, shortly, is consistent with I Cor 15:52, but actually lacks any particular detail that would place it exactly into any timing or sequence, other than its association with the Corinthians scripture. At any rate, as picturesque and complete as this Corinthians scripture is, it is not definitely linked to Rev 3:10.

1 Corinthians 16:22 is another of those scriptures that caught my attention, as I did this study, but at first seemed to have little relevance. Except that there was something out of character, or out of place about it, that begged a deeper look into the translation. Here’s the verse:

1 Cor 16:

22 *If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.*

(KJV)

The King James left the original language alone, merely transliterating it rather than translating it, here. “Anathema” and “Maranatha” are both the Greek originals. Many of us are familiar with “anathema”, recognizing it as a word that signifies something very disliked, or cursed, or banned. In many churches, such as the Catholic, it is akin to “excommunication”; that is, to being separated from the Body of Christ. The NIV translates the verse this way: “*If anyone does not love the Lord — a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!*”

You see, there it is again. That’s a statement that, to me, seems very uncharacteristic or inconsistent, — in this case, to the character and mission of the Apostle Paul. Think about it. Many — in fact, most — of the people that Paul met, did not love the Lord. Not yet. That was his job, to help bring them to Christ, not to curse them and “write them off”! In fact Paul, among the Twelve, was the most adamant in his preaching against our judging of others; about us doing that which is for the Lord alone to do; about our presuming that there is any limit to God’s Grace and Mercy and Patience. Now, you may question my re-interpretation here, but I think it is entirely within the range of connotations of the original Greek, to understand Paul to be saying: “If anyone does not love the Lord (or be accustomed to serving the Lord), then let him be left to face the worst...”, or, “...he shall be left in the direst straits, like an animal ready for slaughter. Our Lord comes soon!”. Paul certainly knew that the “hour of trial” was coming. If he also knew anything about the promise, if he knew that Jesus intended to deliver His faithful from that trial, and if that was in his mind when he wrote that statement, then his words were not an emotional outburst, or condemnation, but were a reasonable statement, an important reminder and warning. So the pertinent question is, “Did Paul, and the church of his time, know or believe that they had a

reasonable hope for being rescued from the “hour of trial”, whenever it came?” Well, we’ve already had some evidence that they did. When we began this search for more scriptural antecedents, and for more evidence and illumination about the promise given in Rev 3:10, we started with John the Baptist. John, that first harbinger of the new age and new covenant, raised the possibility that we might “escape the coming wrath”.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 provides another evidence that they did. The tone of that scripture implies that it was quite matter-of-fact in their minds. Paul, in a most casual way, makes this comment about what believers do:

1 Thes 1:

10 and wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (NIV)

I think the language there is so clear, and we’ve already so thoroughly determined what the critical terms (like “coming wrath”) are all about, that that statement stands pretty well on its own, its meaning plain and implications obvious, and it needs no further comment.

The next scripture we will take up is one which we’ve already looked at, to some extent. It is the second foundational scripture that supports the doctrine and belief in the “Rapture”.

1 Thes 4:

13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

15 According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

18 Therefore encourage each other with these words. (NIV)

This definitely seems to be about the same subject and occasion that the scripture in 1 Cor 15:52 was about. But whether it is about the same occasion that Rev 3:10 is about is not at all clear. There is no time, or timing, of this event given. There is no “last”, or “first”, or “before”, or “day”, or “hour”, mentioned. It is only clear that it is about the ultimate promise of the resurrection and translation of all believers, no matter when they lived or died. The primary purpose of the explanation, apparently, was to clarify some facts that were being disputed and argued about, and a worry to some. They did not know that Jesus’ “soon return” was thousands of years away, yet, and apparently they were worried about friends and relatives who had already died, and were in that rather uncertain “limbo” called “sleep”. Paul was reassuring them that to die before Jesus returned was not a loss in itself; that you and your loved friends and family members would not have to wait any longer to enjoy the company of Jesus than those lucky enough to see Him coming.

Does that have anything to do with the promise in Rev 3:10, i.e., that if we are still “alive in Christ” and doing our best faithful service, when the Tribulation begins, we won’t have to go through it? I see no clue. It can be argued that it does, I am sure, especially by a firm believe in a “pre-Trib Rapture”. But I see no “black and white” evidence. I do see a couple of less obvious, but intriguing, clues that it might not be.

First, of course, is the idea that this is about “all” the “dead in Christ”, and all the rest — “we who are still alive and left”. So, I think that it says that there cannot be any more to come. If this is “pre-Tribulation” timing, then that says there will be no more “in Christ”, and no more “coming to Christ”. Whether or not anyone can still “come to Christ”, with the Holy Spirit gone from the world, is a still-debated question. But whether or not there will be any who were “in Christ” but missed the deliverance of Rev 3:10 is another question. By the time we are done, you should be able to answer that for yourself. But I am sure there will differences of opinion, so that will also still be debated. But, if you conclude that those who are in five or six of the seven churches will not be delivered from “that hour of trial”, then they will be going into the Tribulation period, — and we then have a knotty problem. This 1 Thessalonians 4 passage does not account for their ultimate resurrection.

Another implication, or clue. Verse 17 says “we who are still alive and are left...” Does that still “alive and ... left” refer to some who are “left” in the Tribulation scene? Verse 15 says, “we who are still alive ... left till the coming of the Lord”. To which “coming” is that referring. A “pre-Trib” coming as required in Rev 3:10? Or the “mid-Trib” coming that many believe is the true schedule for the “Rapture”? Or the “nearly-post-Trib” coming for the final battle, or the “post-Trib” coming to “sit on his throne” (Matt 25:31)? The passage, as a whole, only clearly speaks about the final, or completed, resurrection of “all” — with no more to come, as I said — and our henceforth being “with the Lord forever”. Truthfully, in my own opinion, I do not think this event, of 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, is the same as that promised in Revelation 3. One might consider my opinion supported by the fact that, just a little prior to this 1 Thes 4 passage, Paul had written:

1 Thes 3:

13 To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. (KJV)

Paul seems clearly advising them toward achieving the whole reward of salvation, not just a reward of missing the “hour of trial”. And the “coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” cannot be that coming “pre” the “hour of trial”, because (1) all the saints are already with Him, (2) it is a noisome crowd with Him, much unlike the “manner” of His ascension, or the quieter midnight meeting with the bridegroom we see in the parable of ten virgins. The context established by this verse, 1 Thes 3:14, does not support the idea that 1 Thes 4:13-18 is about either the promise in Rev 3:10, or the “Rapture”. If it does describe the “Rapture”, then what is the difference between the “Rapture” and the whole cloth of the resurrection and salvation? And where does it fit, then, the saints coming out of the Tribulation (i.e. Rev 8:14) into the same?

Our next scripture begins with a familiar sketch of the times that broach the Tribulation:

1 Thes 5:

*1 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you,
2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.
3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them
suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.
4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a
thief. (NIV)*

It's interesting to realize some subtlety of language, here. We are not told that the Lord will come, like a master coming home unexpectedly, — instead, we are told that the “day of the Lord”, that is, the “hour” itself will come as a “thief in the night”. So this scripture is not, in and of itself, about the “promise” or the “Rapture”. And since it tells us that the “hour of trial” itself will come upon the world like a thief in the night, that the “day of the Lord” we call The Tribulation, will be a complete surprise to those who must suffer through it (there will be no escape!), I think it is also telling us that any “deliverance” of some, before it begins, will also be unnoticed! Therefore that deliverance must either take place only moments before the “jaws of the trap”, so to speak, are sprung — or it will be so discretely performed as to be unnoticed. This is not in accord with the rather common portrayals of the “Rapture” we see in film and novel, nowadays.

Verse 4 also supplies some interesting food for thought. Paul says, “you, brothers (believers), are not in darkness (you are in “the light”, in Christ) so ... this day should (meaning, “Should not”, but implying it “could”!) surprise you...” That’s how I read it, anyway, that some who are “brothers” might be surprised.

The passage continues, adding some further instruction in language that reminds me of the “night” and “day” scriptures in John (v. 9:4) we studied earlier.

1 Thes 5:

*5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or
to the darkness.
6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self
controlled.
7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.
8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love
as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. (NIV)*

This reminder from Paul, and what seems an obvious warning, would be rather pointless if it were not possible that any of his fellow believers could miss the boat, so to speak, and needlessly end up in the “night”. If, as many seem to teach, the “Rapture” is a pre-Trib rescue of all Christians, or if the promise in Rev 3:10 is for all Christians, there is really no particular need to “be alert”, and avoiding being caught in the distractions, or seductions, or places, of the night.

The next verse in the same passage gives us even more to think about, in this regard:

1 Thes 5:

9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our

Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)

God did not “appoint us”, or intend or purpose or make us, “to suffer wrath”. It’s not in the plan, any more than all our sins and sufferings, but we have the ability to experience them all through every fault of our own! “But to receive salvation...” That “receive salvation” is translated from two Greek words: the first is “*peripoiesis*”, which means “preserve” or “keep one’s own property”; the second is “*soteria*”, which is “salvation” in its broadest sense, that also includes “rescue, safety, deliverance” and “deliverance from molestation of enemies”. I think this verse continues, or certainly can be read as such, to refer to avoiding the Tribulation, more than holding on to the bare essential of salvation, eternal life with God.

The next verse kind of wraps it up:

1 Thes 5:

10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. (NIV)

The “asleep” is the same word in each of the several verses. It carries quite a range of meanings, which include literal “sleep”, and “dead”, and “to be indifferent to one’s salvation”. So this is not likely referring to the “dead in Christ”, as some of the earlier verses were. This is talking more, I think, about being indifferent to, or careless about, or risking the loss of, deliverance from the coming wrath. We have, after all, in verses 6 and 7, some who are “asleep”, and we are being warned not to be like them. Why? That we risk the eternal salvation of our souls? I don’t think so. Why? Because, immediately in verse 10 we are told that “He died for us, whether we are ... asleep”, or not. He died for those who ARE asleep, that they, too, “may live together with him.” But I think this whole passage warns that, while you may still expect to live together with Him, you may well miss the deliverance from the coming “hour of trial”, if you are not especially alert and self-controlled! If you fall into a life of dissipation and self-indulgence, like the bad servant did.

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul is writing to a church suffering from some very serious trials and persecutions, and a real confusion about the coming “day of the Lord”. Like so many of the human family, at so many points in our troubled history, they felt their suffering and troubles could hardly get any worse, and they were beginning to believe that “day” (the same thing as the “hour of trial”) was either at hand already, or extremely close. The more general “signs”, which Jesus described: “wars and rumors of wars”, “earthquakes and famines and pestilences”, and so on, are rarely absent. And sometimes have been “very” present. And we usually think our own troubles and persecutions are as bad as they can get. Imagine, for instance, being in the middle of Europe before and during WW II. Seeing as how the real “hour of trial” will be even worse, and worldwide, the subject of this book must be of some interest to us all! At any rate, for the Thessalonians, things were pretty nasty, and looked every bit like the described “signs of the times of the end” to them. And many were throwing up their hands, so to speak, and simply sitting and waiting their rescue by Jesus. Paul, as we’ll see, did not think the “hour” was all that near, for he also knew some very specific historic events must also come to pass and, even in Rome, he did not see that history yet being written. So he wrote this epistle to calm their frightened hearts;

remind them that “vengeance is the Lord’s; and explain again, the real and true signs of the end. He had to get them back into the “Philadelphia” mold, as it were! He starts out his letter declaring:

2 Thes 1:

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. (NIV)

That seems pretty straightforward. But what’s it got to do with us? Or Rev 3:10? Why do I include it for our discussion? Well, the NIV, in its choice of words, misses something that the KJV shows us:

2 Thes 1:

6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; (KJV)

The KJV, you see, uses the word “tribulation”. That choice of language certainly has a greater likelihood of catching our attention. It suggests that Paul may be saying, just maybe, that “those who are persecuting you today, will get a payback when...”, and that “when” sounds like that “hour”. What about it? When we look at the original Greek, we see that the word translated “tribulation” in the KJV, instead of “trouble” as in the NIV, is indeed the very same word we also read as “distress” in the NIV (but again “tribulation” in the KJV) in another important scripture we looked at earlier, Matthew 24:29.

Matt 24:

29 “Immediately after the (tribulation, KJV) distress of those days, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’” (NIV)

I think we have pretty well established that the “distress” (or “tribulation”) in Matthew 24 is the “hour of trial” (or Tribulation). And it seems quite possible, therefore, Paul is saying, here, that those who are troubling the church will get, or risk getting, a payback in the form of being left at the mercy (well, there’s very little “mercy” to be found in it) of the Tribulation. Remember the bad servant who is put outside to suffer his fate with (even) the unbelievers? As best we know, a lot of the troubles of the church in Thessalonica were being caused by so-called members. So it looks like Paul, at least, is suggesting that the Tribulation will serve as something of a payback to the enemies (inside and out?) of the church of the faithful. By the same logic, we should assume, I think, that the faithful of the church will not suffer the same fate, they should not have to suffer the tribulation. Paul very nearly says as much in the next verse:

2 Thes 1:

7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well... (NIV)

But here, again, I think the NIV let’s us down a little, in this translation. The KJV gives a much more accurate (following the Greek original) translation, that almost speaks for itself:

2 Thes 1:

7 And to you who are troubled, rest with us ... (KJV)

This sounds very much like the promise of Rev 3:10 — “to you who are getting beat up, right now, a little R & R with us, while they start dodging hailstones...” (my paraphrase). But the

scripture continues, and there is a possibility of confusion that we need to sort out:

2 Thes 1:

7 ... This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (NIV)

What I've done, notice, is split the verse. I split verse 7. The verses are not determined in the original, but were devised by a printer in about 1550. Sometimes they obscure a meaning. Here, I think they ran two subjects, and events, together. The passage, starting with "7b", actually describes the ultimate punishment of the Thessalonians' enemies, at the post-Tribulation coming of Jesus, and the Judgement. Because that is what is being described, we are given a description of a visible, glorious, with a host in attendance, return of Jesus — that is very much not in "a manner like" His ascension, and the quiet, unobtrusive return before the Tribulation hour, for the performance of His promise in Rev 3:10. Verse 6 says, "They are gonna go through some nasty times."; verse 7a says, "you will get some rest with us."; verse 7a - 10 says, "And this will happen when Jesus comes back in Glory with his host of powerful angels — they will be judged and punished with everlasting destruction." The believers, who have believed the testimony, and obeyed the gospel, were told not to worry about any of that. We get no clearer "picture" of that deliverance moment, but we do get a matter-of-fact reassurance that the faithful who do obey and serve and persevere alongside Paul and his compatriots will get to rest together while the others are payed some "tribulations" for their wickedness. We also see, again, how the "Return" of Jesus is more than one event, each of which will be rather different, and unique.

Our next scripture:

2 Thes 2:

1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers,

2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.

3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. (NIV)

There's a lot in this passage. Much of which we are now quite familiar with. We have both the "coming", and the "our being gathered to him". We have the caution that there will be many false prophets and people trying to distract us into thinking Jesus is already back. He is already in Detroit, I heard recently, hidden out by the government to protect Him! If you go for that one — forget this book, for now, and get back to the Basic, the Bible! But (back to serious

talk again), Paul says absolutely clearly, first “the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness”, the AntiChrist, is recognized — I repeat that one: he is “revealed”, he is recognized and known. No mystery there. And the really operative word, for us, is that this “day”, or “hour”, will not come UNTIL he is revealed.

By the way, here is an interesting — and pretty important — aside. The KJV uses the phrase “a falling away”, instead of the term “rebellion”. The Greek original, “*apostasia*”, is commonly translated as “apostasy” or “defection”, or “forsaking”. I think the word, and meaning, is rather obvious, and sensible in the verse and context. But many who argue for the “Rapture” take this “falling away” rendition of the KJV to mean “falling away into the clouds”, like “falling off the earth”, and cite it as proof that the “Rapture” will, and must, as verse 3 says, take place before “that day” will come. That may be a convenient interpretation, but I find neither comfort nor persuasion in it. Instead, it seems absolutely sensible and consistent to translate it as “apostasy”, meaning a false doctrine, or a church that simply forsakes and denies the true God, and gospel. It is also absolutely consistent with many other portions of scripture in both Old and New Testaments; and consistent as well with the ideas of “Babylon” and the apostate “world church” which we are told will arise in Tribulation times, in The Revelation.

The next verses we look at reconfirm our surmise that this topic was not new or newly known:

2 *Thes* 2:

5 *Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?*

6 *And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. (NIV)*

It's a familiar subject — “don't you remember?”. And Paul continues on to make it perfectly clear that it is, indeed, the Holy Spirit, the heart of the Church, and the power of the Church, that is the “he” that is holding back the “lawless one”, and the “apostasy”, and the advent of the “hour of trial”. And if that is the key, then Jesus should have no difficulty in knowing when, and arranging for, the deliverance He promised in Rev 3:10.

2 *Thes* 2:

7 *For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.*

8 *And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. (NIV)*

And when he, the Holy Spirit, is “taken out of the way”, as we have already questioned early on, what will become of the Church? What will remain of the Church? What will be the heart and the power and the souls and the — spirit — of that Church that remains, if any?

The next scripture has been puzzling to many of us.

2 *Thes* 2:

9 *The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,*

10 *and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish*

because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

11 *For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie*

12 *and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (NIV)*

We get an interesting picture of what life will be like inside that “Hour”. The lawless one, the AntiChrist, will appear to many, if not all, as a “Christ”. He will be a “false Christ” following very closely the model (role model, in today’s parlance) who calls upon the miracle working powers of his own father, Satan, just as Jesus always looked to his Father for His direction and examples (“*the Son can do nothing by himself, he can only do what he sees his Father doing...*” John 5:19, NIV). And these miracles and wondrous deeds will absolutely deceive “those who are perishing”. And that is not everyone! It speaks of only those who are perishing, and we know already, from several references in the Book of the Revelation, that there are many who will suffer, even lose their lives, in the Tribulation but not perish — in fact they will arrive in heaven as a special category of saints who were martyrs in the awful “hour” (Rev 6:11, 7:14, 14:13.....).

The part of that passage that has perplexed many of us is found in verse 11: God sends “a powerful delusion” into the minds and spirits of those who hitherto “refused to believe the truth”. I’m sure there are many possible interpretations of that — let me give you mine. The people who are “in” the Tribulation, will include a wide variety types and groups. Some will be those who heard the gospel, and perhaps saw the evidences of God, even including miracles by His servants, but yet “refused to believe”, or simply chose the wages of sin. Others may be people who believed, but “fell away” for one reason or another — perhaps they were never well-enough disciplined, or they were hurt by other Christians so badly they stopped trusting in God and forsake the Lord, or quit obeying the Lord, or committed some terrible sin and ran from Him, or were led astray by New Age or cultic deceptions. Who knows how many avenues, how many paths, can lead one far enough astray to fail to qualify for the promise of Rev 3:10. Maybe many were pretty good Christians, but no “Philadelphians”. That will be the real watershed question for many who read this book. We only know for a fact, I believe, that there will be many Christians who live — and die — in the Tribulation, but there will be no Holy Spirit present in the midst of that time, so where those Christians come from is something none of us wants to put off thinking about!

Something else is worth thinking about, in regards this delusion that essentially “guarantees” those who have hitherto chosen not to believe will continue on to their way (pre-Trib path?) to destruction. The Spirit is gone, the delusion is sent, and the false Christ is in his full power and glory. It doesn’t seem to me there will be many last minute, out-and-out “conversions”. No last minute realizations, and last minute, “Wow, I coulda had Jesus!”, to mimic a famous old Tomato and Veggie juice advertisement. I think that calls into question the theory, that some hold to, that there will be a lot of “evangelism” going on during the Tribulation. There may be a lot of soul-searching, and a lot of need for shepherding and discipling of some very scattered, and shocked, sheep. But whether the 144,000 will be out rounding up those who

were still uninformed of the gospel, or whether they will be having anything at all to do with the “Christian” population is not, to me, clear.

The last scripture of this chapter is the scripture that gave rise to the name of this book. It is found in Paul’s letter to Titus, and is probably referring to the promise given in Rev 3:10.

Titus 2:

13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; (KJV)

I gave the KJV first this time, because it provides a very important “and” in its translation — an “and” that is in the Greek original, but is left out of the NIV translation. With the “and”, we are justified in assuming Paul had two things in mind: that “blessed hope” (our promise of deliverance from the “hour of trial”), **and** the coming in great glory that signals the end of the Tribulation, and the beginning of His reign on earth. Both would bring Paul immeasurable joy. The first, getting to take his weary and persecuted bones away from this tiresome earth for a well-deserved rest with his Lord, and the second, seeing with his own eyes, the inevitable final day when his Lord finishes the fight, and concludes the battle. First, the blessed hope, and then, the absolutely undeniable reward.

That Blessed Hope

Chapter Five Revelation

So back to the Book of Revelation we come. We started here, but we didn't stay long. Now, the rest of our study will be focused here. Before we are done we will look a lot more closely at the context of Rev 3:10, and consider who the audience really was/is that the letters were written to, and to whom was the promise really given.

That's something you need to keep foremost in your mind, by the way. The seven letters were not telegrams, or private messages, each to be read separately, and privately, by the seven churches addressed. In fact, by no accident, every one of the letters were destined to be read, and studied, by millions, if not billions, of believers through the next twenty centuries. It is also no accident, I'm sure, that they were included as part and parcel of the Book of Revelation. That book, certainly, is chock full of absolutely new revelations, and prophecy and insight about the future, and our future in Christ. But it is also very much a thorough review, and explicit reminder, of some prophecies of old that many, if not all, believers and Jews should already have known about — in some detail. So a promise, or the omission of such a promise, of avoiding that coming "hour of trial", was dramatically pointed. Neither they, nor we, should have any doubt about the two alternatives that it sets up. I'd say you could compare it, somewhat, to this little homespun parable: Your (strict) father is standing before you and your sister, holding a long and sturdy paddle in his hand, and saying, as he prepares to go to work, "Children, I expect you to do your chores thoroughly. If not, I shall see you are punished as you deserve. But if they are well done, we will go out for an ice cream when I return."

And before we are finished with this chapter, we will read a scripture that, in my opinion, speaks to the promise about as clearly as my seeing your father's automobile parked in front of the ice cream store, shortly after his business has closed for the evening.

But right now, let's go back to the letter to Philadelphia.

Rev 3:

8 *"I know thy works: behold, I have set before the an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."*
(KJV)

Jesus starts out by saying, "Look, I know how much you are doing, how hard you are working at fulfilling my commission to you. And I have opened the door for you, made the way

possible, and until I myself close that doorway into the world, it will remain open. And you shall have the strength, with My Holy Spirit, to carry on. They have tested you, I know, but you have not turned your back on me, you have not taken the easy way out of these persecutions by renouncing my name, but you have stayed the course and preached my gospel.” (My paraphrase)

As I pointed out in the first chapter, most translations of the Greek have left out some vital nuances of the meanings, here, for our particular needs. One is that the “little” in a “little strength” might be better understood to say, “you have strength for a little while”. The “little while”, which notion we have heard in other places, is in respect to the time when Jesus will return, and the Great Commission is no longer the charge, for the Holy Spirit itself will be withdrawn, and the church will forthwith have no strength, at all, and the door will be closed shut by the AntiChrist himself, against the true church. Two thousand years may seem long to us, with our mere hope of threescore and ten, but to our eternity, and eternal King, it is only “a little while”. And the “strength” which His church has is hardly “little”, for it is the same as He had himself (i.e. John 14:12)

But verse 10 is (it should be apparent by now) the verse from which all this discussion proceeds:

Rev 3:

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

The interest of this, our last chapter, is not trying to determine IF there is a promise, or to figure out what it is, and what the “hour” is, we have covered that all quite enough now. We want, in this chapter, to see what we can learn about the conditions that are in the “because”, and who the “you” is. And see what “proof” there might be that this is no empty promise of the past, but a meaningful promise for the future.

It will be of some good advantage, I think, to expand on the definitions/meanings of several words in the Greek original of this verse. “Thou hast kept” comes from “tereo”, which also translates “attended to carefully”, and “fulfilled my command”. “Word” comes from “logos”, which also translates as “mandates”, and “what I have declared”. And “patience” comes from “hupomone”. It also translates as “steadfastly” and “steadfastly waiting”. But I found the definitive explanation given in the Thayer dictionary as most remarkable, especially remembering that it was hardly written with this verse in mind. It reads:

“The characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.” (New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Hendrickson Pub., 1981)

So this is the kind of person we know the promise was given, and this is the kind of life and service we know so pleased the Lord that He offered it — seemingly as a reward, “because”. Do we know whether it was offered to anyone else, to any other sort, or was it really strictly conditioned by that “because”? The first place to look, it would seem, is in the other letters. They were all “dictated” one after the other, in the space of that same afternoon, and gave Jesus

every opportunity to make himself clear and explicit. So what about the other letters? To make it easy, I've summarized what I found in the seven letters.

<u>CHURCH</u>	<u>PROMISED?</u>	<u>OTHER COMMENTS</u>
Ephesus	NO	This church, in fact, was actually threatened with disestablishment! It is told to repent, and get back to its "first works", which was fervent evangelism, or lose its "candlestick", i.e. spiritual light.
Smyrna	NO	Jesus acknowledged their suffering, and warned more was to come. But He only reminded of that reward we all have, if we persevere, the crown of life.
Pergamos	NO	He warned them about idolatry and infiltrating sin, and developing a doctrine like the Nicolaitins (gnosticism and adultery), which He "hates" to the point of threatening to destroy them himself.
Thyatira	NO	Jesus warned them about idolatry and sexual sins and threatened Those sinners with "great tribulation"! For the rest, who remained True, He also promised a place in the millennial Kingdom.
Sardis	Maybe	He warned this church to "be watchful and strengthen the things which remain" lest "I come upon thee as a thief in the night and thou shalt no know." That is familiar language, but its meaning not clear.
Philadelphia	YES	He also adds, "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."
Laodicea	NO	This church is most remembered as the "lukewarm church", "neither cold nor hot". He says, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." He advises, "Buy of me gold"; meaning, "Get doing some works!"

It's clear that only one church "type" was given the promise. A couple of church "types" were fairly threatened with the very opposite. And it's very interesting that in almost every letter Jesus speaks "past" the corporate "face", past the formal body of the church, to address individuals inside of it. He chastises and threatens some, but He promises rewards to others, and gives them encouragement. But the promise, that blessed hope of leaving before that "hour of trial" comes upon the world, is spoken only the once.

As I said before, in the first chapter of this book, some people want to insist that these letters were to actual churches, historic entities that are long gone, and so the letters are not relevant to us today. Well, if that were the case, what scriptures would be relevant any more? It is far more accepted, throughout the entire Christian community, that these churches served as "types" and examples, and we can find examples of each around us right now. And Jesus would hardly have any different opinions, or words to say to them, today. And it makes little sense that Jesus would give such a promise, in fact an empty promise in 95 AD, in a Bible intended for all

our times, especially written in a book of prophecy more pertinent today than 1900 years ago, were it not meant for our ears today.

As Jesus gave John the Revelation, He was giving us a vision of our eventual future, of the end of our age. He was actually fleshing out details of prophecies that were already recorded in the Old Testament many hundreds of years before. Why? Why would He bother to do that? Very little of prophecy, and very little of what God's prophets ever said, was, or is, heeded or even understood before it's time has come. We seem to derive most of our benefit from prophecy after the fact, usually as reassuring confirmation that God really did plan it, and that God really is in control. Some prophecy, however, like that which alerted Daniel to the fact that the Jews were due to be released from captivity in Babylon, does give direction to history, and our personal actions. Some prophecy does, I guess, just as God intends, serve as a "special delivery letter" to a people targeted in the future. "That Blessed Hope", of Rev 3:10, is of little use or value to anyone before the time of the Tribulation is nigh. It might inspire some believers to better works and better faithfulness, all along the way, but if it is overlooked, or the signs of the times are distant, is it much more inspiring than the rest of Jesus' gospel? Or should we consider it a "special delivery letter", more likely sent to us than anyone before?

What is the clearest picture we have, so far, of what that moment of Jesus' fulfillment of that promise look like? I think the most probable picture we have discerned from the many scriptures we've read, to this point, is that Jesus, himself, will approach the earth with some sort of a beckoning, or announcement, call. Those believers who are eligible and ready, who qualify for this "rescue", will hear the call and be enabled to respond. It seems most likely that Jesus, himself, will not actually set foot upon the earth but stop somewhere short, "up in the clouds". The "rescued" believers will meet Him there, presumably being translated and glorified in the process, though not necessarily.

We could, taking the promise literally and precisely, assume that this will take place before even a minute of the Tribulation takes place, but we shouldn't just assume that. The trials, as you read the Revelation, get off to a rather slow start, and take a while to become so "trying" and intense. There are many Christians who have doubts that the first year or two will truly amount to all that much a "trial". There's quite a debate, still going on after maybe 90 years, amongst those who believe in the "Rapture", whether the Rapture would take place absolutely before the Tribulation begins, or mid-way before the second half, sometimes called the Great Tribulation, or near the end. The mid-point is generally reasoned as coming about three and a half years into the seven, when the "abomination that causes desolation" occurs. After that, the wrath certainly is intensified. The "near the end" point is usually seen as after much wrath has been poured out and consummated, but before the battle at Armageddon. Some believers think the Rapture will occur then so that all those who are going to be saved are finally gone up to join the Lord in His army, and in His triumphant return. Each position has its proponents, and each has what they feel are good scriptural grounds. We should not, therefore, just simply dismiss any of them without good justification. What I would like to do, for drawing own conclusion, is see what the Book of the Revelation may have to say about it. I think it says a lot.

The Apostle John is in the Spirit, in Heaven, and before the Throne. He sees a scroll brought forth. That scroll is sealed with seven seals. Each seal, as we will learn, initiates or releases an event in the Tribulation, as it is broken, or opened. These events bring about, and constitute the wrath of God. This is the end of the age. This is the day of the Lord. This is the beginning of the end of the power of Satan, established on earth since the deception of Eve. This must not be handled by any lesser authority than the Son of God. In a sense, it is all “His show”.

Rev 5:

1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.

2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”

3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.

4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. (NIV)

You must not miss, or fail to appreciate, the remarkable situation described in verse 3. At that very moment, planned since the foundation of the earth, foretold by the prophets across the centuries, all the heavens and the angels and the cherubim and the elders and the spirits of the mighty men of God that have gathered around the throne, and He who sits upon the throne himself, is waiting. The moment of eternity is arrived. The Tribulation, the day of the Lord, the day of His Wrath, is waiting. Waiting. Waiting. The Apostle begins to weep. Angels look from side to side. Angels scurry throughout the heavens, and scour the earth, even plumb the depths beneath the earth. Must not even God the Father be looking about, asking where is He? Where is the One worthy to open the scroll and read that which is written inside? The truth is realized; it is spoken through the ethereal realm, and even poor old John, still in his earthly vessel, hears what they are saying. There was no one there to do the deed. “No one was found”; no one “*in heaven*”; “*or on earth*”; “*or under the earth*”, who could open the scroll. Jesus, we already know from reading ahead, is absent. He’s late! While the father, and all the heavens and the earth, and perhaps those under the earth, wait — Jesus is not there! There are only *four places* that He, who is the only one worthy to open the scroll, can be! That is what I understand that this scripture says.

Jesus could not have ceased to be. So He had to be somewhere. And the scripture carefully lists the three places that He was known not to be. So there was a fourth. And to what purpose would this scripture — which is the word of the Lord himself, given to us His church — be being so careful to let us know exactly Who we are looking for, and exactly the three places He was not, — if not to tell us where He was? There is one other place, mentioned several times in the scriptures that talk about these things: that place is *in the clouds above the earth!* So must it be that Jesus was, at that moment, that extraordinary moment, in the clouds above the earth? Almost as if to give another clue, or to emphasize that this small moment is something we should take notice of, we see that His absence was short-lived:

Rev 5:

5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

7 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.(NIV)

The picture is dramatic, and needlessly emphatic, if not telling us something we should know. At the moment before "that hour of trial" begins, Jesus, the Lamb, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, the only one who was worth to open the scroll, was not present to start the "hour". Not only that, for a short time, He was not "in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth." Then He was back, in heaven. Then "He came and took the scroll."

Rev 5:

8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."(NIV)

And when that time of reverence and worship was finished, He began the "hour of trial". He broke the first seal, and the false Christ, the poor imitation of Jesus, "is revealed" and rides forth on his own white horse to take over the earth as a conqueror.

Rev 6:

1 I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!"

2 I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.(NIV)

If Jesus was indeed, rescuing the "Philadelphian" church from the earth, in that time He was not in the heavens, nor on the earth, nor under the earth, then the timing of the rescue is clear: before the Spirit is withdrawn and the lawless one revealed. Definitely before the hour begins. I might also point out, there is no other scripture in Revelation, or in all the Bible, that has Jesus absent from heaven, nor present on the earth, nor near it in the clouds, from the time of His ascension until the time of His return for the final Battle at Armageddon. Only that one, Rev 5:3, says that He was absent from heaven. And not on the earth, as He was during his life and ministry. And not under the earth, as He was during His burial and confrontation with Satan in the underworld. Those are the three places we have always known Him to be: first Heaven, then the earth, then under the earth, then the earth, then heaven again. But the one other place, that

place which I have said is where He must have been (or will be, actually) — in the clouds — is the only other place the scriptures have ever said He could be and, for at least one event, would be! This is strong evidence, at least!

But there are some other very important questions that still need to be answered. There are answers that you and I still need to know. We need to know them, I would think, at least for the sake of other loved ones in our lives whom we would not have miss out on that promise, that Blessed Hope.

There are many “saints” who, according to other scriptures in the Book of the Revelation, live through some, if not all, the days of that terrible seven years. John’s depiction and description of what he saw, as the “story” of the Tribulation was shown, and only sometimes explained to him, is often confusing. If we assume that he saw the real thing — the real and actual future, with all its (our) modern technology and implements of warfare, and the myriad of new peoples and nations, and the litany of cosmic and supernatural incidents and events which are foretold — then we surely can understand why it is confusing. It was almost always far beyond anything John could have apprehended or imagined. Talk about a stranger in a strange land, John was certainly one. He didn’t even have words for much of what he saw, and he obviously struggled to describe such incredible things. He was seeing satellites and rockets and jet fighters and helicopter gunships and nuclear explosions and trains, why, even the modern landscapes of his own homeland! All that — this modern world, at war no less — and cosmic events none of us could have described, yet John was still trying to describe them to his own contemporaries.

It also appears that, to most of us who have studied the Revelation very thoroughly, the events accounted there are not always in an “historical” or chronological order. Or, at least John did not recollect, and transcribe, the many things he saw that day, in such an order. So, no small wonder, then, that our usually linear and chronologically-unidirectional thinking is rather confused as we try to analyze or reconstruct the “history” of the Tribulation and Second Coming.

I won’t try to do that; I won’t try to explain, or interpret, the Book of the Revelation, here. I leave it to you to earn your own “blessing”. But there are still a few other scriptures in the Book of the Revelation that I think apply to our study.

In Chapter Four, I noted that a number of Revelation verses reveal that there are “saints” who will be “inside”, and “coming out of”, the Tribulation. For example:

Rev 7:

9 After this I looked and here before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

10 And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb”

13 Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?”

14 I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the

Lamb.”(NIV)

And another is:

Rev 14:

11 “And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.”

12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”(NIV)

I see no ambiguity or vagueness in these two scriptures; they certainly do tell us that there will be still be Christian “saints”, on the face of the earth, during that “hour of trial”. There will be multitudes, Rev 7:9 attests; multitudes from every population of the earth, in numbers too great to count. And they will be Christians — people believing in, and coming to God through Jesus Christ. I think that clearly means they will not be only Jews, or believers in Jehovah, or post-church-age converts, as some — especially “Rapturists” — have argued. Why would they argue that? Well, if you propose that the entire Christian Church has been removed (“Raptured”) before the beginning of the Tribulation, and that the Holy Spirit who leads us to Christ, and baptizes us into Christ, has also been removed, there should be no Christians here. Christians in the midst of the Tribulation is a contradiction to the most popular (we are all rescued, who believe) idea of the Rapture. That’s one reason some believe in a “Mid-Trib” or “post-Trib” Rapture. But that raises some significant questions about the two foundational scriptures in 1 Corinthians and 2 Thessalonians. Is it a contradiction with Rev 3:10? I don’t think so. I think there are answers in the scriptures, especially the seven letters. The answers are implicit — at least implicit — in the summary table of the letters.

The promise, the reward of being delivered from “that hour of trial”, is unequivocally given to just one church. Six did not hear a word about it. While Jesus even went past the facade, or level, of the corporate body of the other churches, and praised and encouraged, or chastised and threatened, individuals or groups within, He still never came close to offering a similar promise. Two of the churches were given words that actually threatened them with spiritual disestablishment!

I’ve already belabored the point, on more than one occasion, that these churches are “types”, archetypes of the sorts of churches we have today. If only one “type” was given the promise, it seems an unavoidable conclusion that there are some churches, groups of people who call themselves Christians, and probably believe themselves Christians, are not going to be delivered. Some who we believe are Christians will not be rewarded with that precious “Blessed Hope”!

If the letters to the churches are to be read not only as “examples”, but as prophecy, then there will be whole churches left behind. There will likely be people in every church who miss the

call. Not to salvation, but to deliverance from that “hour”. The question is “Who?” I actually think that Jesus intends you answer that question, yourself. You decide whether you go, or stay.

There are some who think this is “unfair” or “cruel”. Well, I can’t second guess the Lord, but I can see very plainly that we have much to say about our own eligibility. Just as we have much to say about our ultimate election unto salvation.

But what about those who may be left behind? What happens to them? Well, to start with, they are not lost. Jesus says very plainly that whoever chooses Him has eternal life:

John 6:

39 *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day*

40 *For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”(NIV)*

But He also says here, that it will come at the last day, not seven years before. That is the “bottom line” with God. Seven years, even of tribulation, are pretty “small potatoes” in eternity, and in the infinite joys of heavenly life, I think. In fact, trials and tribulations are a part of everyone’s life. Why, by comparison, for some unfortunates who experience a particular disease or injury, or who have had to live through a bit of history like the holocaust or the trials of Lebanon or Bosnia, the Tribulation may not even seem all that exceptional. Nonetheless, we know it will be “something else”, especially for a Christian — if for no other reason than it is designed, by God, to be an “hour of testing”. The language used, by the way, in the scriptures about Jesus’ time in the wilderness and the “hour of trial”, is the same!

There are many indications, besides that similarity of language, that the Tribulation is a time of testing. It is a time intended to force all men and women and children to finally choose. It is a time to make clear the alternatives, and leave no doubt to “reason” that God is real, so that no one may face the judgement day and say, “I just didn’t know!” or “I wasn’t sure!”. And “fence-sitters” in Christian churches should, I expect, be no exception. If that be the case, then the promise of Rev 3:10 is not just a special reward, but a natural and reasonable “alternate pathway” for those who have already shown, by their fully dedicated lives, that they need no further testing. They are not living with any doubts; nor with double-mindedness; nor with acknowledgment, but not submission and service to the Lord.

If the “hour of trial” is intended to be a time when men and women are finally forced to decide, and choose, between God and the world, we should expect the Lord to make the Tribulation years a period of incredible demonstration of His power, and the alternative of salvation. It should be a time of unequalled opportunity for “coming to God” and acceptance of salvation, if God is still “not willing that any shall perish.”(2 Pet 3:9, NKJ). And what better candidates, and what better guides, than Christians left behind? In fact, how else might the gospel of Christ be preached if, after the Spirit is removed to let the “lawless one” have free reign, if all believers are gone? I intend these questions only as questions, by the way, I have no certain answers. There are many well-trained and erudite theologians who debate these things. They ask, “If the Holy Spirit is gone, then who can lead us into knowledge, and ‘baptize us’ into the

Christ?” They ask, “If the Church of Christ is gone, and the Church Age is ended, how will any come to even ‘knowledge of Jesus Christ’?” They ask, “Will the gospel preached in that ‘hour of trial’ not be the ‘gospel of Christ’, but the ‘gospel of John’ that was preached before Jesus gave us his own to preach?” John’s gospel, remember, was “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”(Matt 3:2, NIV)

The Revelation tells us that there will be 144,000 “servants of our God” still in the earth when the Tribulation is already begun. In fact, it is only after the first six seals have been opened, and many terrible things already taken place, that we hear about them. And are shown, also, that they are not “left behind”, or “new” Christians. Let me summarize the evidence.

The four horsemen have already gone forth, when John sees, under the alter of Heaven, “the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.” (Rev 6:9, NIV) It is not clear whether these are souls of victims of Tribulation persecutions, or of all preceding history. They could be souls from throughout history who are still awaiting the final resurrection; that would suggest that 1 Cor 15:51-54 and 1 Thes 4:13-18 are describing the last day resurrection, rather than a “Rapture”. But, no matter what the answer about that, it is still clear that there are more martyrs yet to come, out of the Tribulation, for the first are told, “to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.” (Rev 6:11, NIV) It is after the sixth seal, and the whole earth witnesses terrible things (some think it is an all-out nuclear war), that everyone, “the kings... the princes, the generals, and every slave and every free man...”(Rev 6:15, NIV), finally realize that this is the “day of God’s wrath” and seek cover. Then we read about the 144,000. John reports it this way:

Rev 7:

2 Then I saw another angel coming.... He called out...:

3 “Do not harm the land or the sea until we put seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”

4 Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. (NIV)

Unless we assume, as some choose to do, that the Bible is being imprecise, or calling all believers “Israel”, these are Jews, not Christian evangelists.

There are also the two “witnesses” who stand invincible in the middle of Jerusalem and “prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days”. Some Bible scholars think that they might be the ones who lead the millions who “come to Christ” during the Tribulation. It could be, but one really has to ask how effective two “prophets”, in one place, will be in reaching and evangelizing an entire world, most of which is literally falling apart and hiding out, — especially would-be Christians who face terrible persecution if they so much as show their face? One has to ask, and one has to answer for himself. There can be, I’m sure, many explanations and rationalizations about the origins of the many Christians who live through some of the Tribulation. The question of more importance, however, to my mind, is what is the promise of Rev 3:10? Is it your and my “Blessed Hope”?

Index of Significant Scriptural Citations
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