

# **The Interpretation of *You Have Kept My Word*: Revelation 3:10**

(Part 2 of 2)

By John Niemelä

## **Introduction**

Every conceivable eschatological theory has claimed Revelation 3:10 as a proof text. Theologians become passionate about their positions on this verse but this is time for a calm appraisal. An event after the author presented a paper on the passage at a pastors' conference, started a process that led to this article. The conference paper dealt with:

1. the grammar of Revelation 3:10, and
2. the resultant theology.

A few non-attendees requested copies. One man's email response asserted, "I agree with your translation, because of my theology." He accepted my conclusions, but for the wrong reason. When grammar precludes a translation, it does so, whether or not a corrected translation fits a given theological system. That email affected the way this author split this paper into two parts.

Specifically, part 1 of this paper scrutinizes Revelation 3:10's grammar and syntax.<sup>1</sup> This concluding part will examine the passage's theology in light of:

1. Grammatical considerations (discussed in part 1), and
2. Revelation 3:10b's relationship with 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11.

An interesting turn of events occurred between the original writing of the two parts of this paper. The first part avoided taking a stand on whether Revelation 3:10 is a rapture passage. During the author's research for the second part, he changed his view on that issue. As a consequence of avoiding pronouncements on the Rapture in part 1, the second installment attaches seamlessly to the first.

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<sup>1</sup> The paper, John Niemelä, "The Syntax of *You Have Kept My Word*: Revelation 3:10," version 1.0, May 19, 2007; is available from Message of Life Ministries: <http://www.mol316.com>. Originally published as: John Niemelä "For You Have Kept My Word: The Grammar of Revelation 3:10," *CTS Journal* 6 (January–March 2000): 14–38. All Scripture quotations are from the NKJV, *New King James Version* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1982), unless noted otherwise.

## Syntactical Review

The first installment of this paper discussed four syntactical issues affecting translation:

1. Joti as a capitalized “Because” is a rare suspensive use,<sup>2</sup>
2. *and I* rarely links independent to dependent clauses,<sup>3</sup>
3. *and (also)* links 3:9–10’s three first person verbs,<sup>4</sup>
4. *keep* means “obey” (3:8, 10a), but “deliver” (3:10b).<sup>5</sup>

Based on these four issues, the passage ought to read:

*Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you because (or for) you have kept My command to persevere. And I will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth* (author’s translation).

The grammar leads to this rendering, whether or not Revelation 3:10b is a Rapture passage. It is not contingent on 3:10a.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Niemelä, “Syntax of Rev. 3:10,” 1–7 and 11–16. A capitalized “Because” would function in a way that is rare in the NT (starting a sentence that suspends the independent clause). Non-suspensive words, “because,” “for,” and “For” are common uses of *hoti*.

Rare: **Because B is true, A is true** (the clause containing *Because* precedes the independent clause).

Common: **A is true, because B is true.** (the clause containing *because* follows the independent clause).

The verse’s usual translation (capitalizing “Because”) assigns a rare meaning to Joti. By itself, this does not prove the usual rendering wrong, but suggests the need to determine whether it is the best treatment.

<sup>3</sup> Niemelä, “Syntax of Rev. 3:10,” 7–8 and 17–22. *kagw* (“and I”) is a compound word (*kai* “and” + *egw* “I”). *Kai* is a coordinating conjunction, so it would usually connect two comparable clauses: independent-independent or dependent-dependent. Verse 3:10’s traditional translation forces *kai* to connect dependent-independent[?!]. Such a rendering requires a rare usage for both *Joti* and *kagw*.

<sup>4</sup> Niemelä, “Syntax of Rev. 3:10,” 8. Note that the independent clauses link three first-person verbs: *Indeed I give those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. . . . And I will keep you from the hour. . . .* (author’s translation). This is a natural use of *kagw* in 3:10b.

<sup>5</sup> Niemelä, “Syntax of Rev. 3:10,” 8. Three times in a space of three verses, Christ uses *threw* (“keep”). Verse 8 says, *you have kept My word*; verse 10a says, *you have kept My word to persevere* (author’s translation). These usages mean “obey.” However, in verse 10b, it means “deliver.” Under any eschatological system, 3:10b has a different use of “keep” than verses 8 or 10a. Is it not odd that the traditional translation strongly links the divergent uses of “keep” (10a and 10b)? Is it not more natural to connect “keep” in verses 8 and 10a? The proposed translation does this, by making 3:10b into a complete sentence.

<sup>6</sup> Those impressed by the Calvinistic doctrine of final perseverance might object: “All true believers (1) persevere (2) and will be raptured. (3) By persevering, the Philadelphians proved to be true believers. Thus, they will be raptured.” The doctrine of final perseverance receives no support from this passage, as this paper argues.

## A Specific Promise versus a General One

Verse 3:10b's verb tenses point toward a future deliverance:

*I also **will keep** you from the hour of trial which **shall come** upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*

How far in the future is it? The first-century Philadelphians must receive the promised deliverance, since Christ specifically made a promise to them. The promise would be hollow, if they do not receive it. How does it apply to that first century church?

In this regard, David Aune believes that the promise applied exclusively to the first century Philadelphians. He asserts:

(T)he promise made here pertains to the Philadelphian Christians *only* and cannot be generalized to include Christians in other churches of Asia, much less all Christians in all places and times.<sup>7</sup>

In former times, the present author would have argued against both of Aune's assertions, by contending that Revelation 3:10b *directly* teaches the Pre-tribulation Rapture.<sup>8</sup> However, what Aune says deserves a bit more attention. His statement has not just one contention, but two:

1. the promise only pertains to Philadelphia, and
2. one cannot extend it geographically or chronologically.

Though his two assertions may seem synonymous, this article rejects contention 1 outright, but disregards contention 2 as irrelevant to the present case. Aune assumes that seeing a promise that applies to all locales and times requires generalizing a narrowly-specific promise.

Does seeing Revelation 3:10b as a promise to the Universal Church *require* generalizing a specific promise? No, the following illustrates the difference between *generalizing a specific promise* and *specifically applying a general promise*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 52A (Dallas, TX: Word, 1997), 240.

<sup>8</sup> The present author applies the following argument to **other** features of Revelation 2–3, but it is not *necessary* for 3:10b. The messages to each of the seven churches begins with, *To the church* (singular) of “\_\_\_\_\_” (name of city) and ends with *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches* (plural).

<sup>9</sup> Aune's argument applies against most views in which Revelation 3:10 relates to the Rapture, but not against all such arguments. An illustration: most people who drive between Southern California, and Chicago, IL, go through Arizona. Why? The following routes, I–8, I–10, I–15, or I–40, are the most direct from Southern California. However, someone might go to Sacramento and take I-80 to Chicago (bypassing Arizona). Similarly, Aune's second objection does not apply against this article's position. Gratitude is due to him for raising that objection: It has greatly affected the present writer's thinking and this article.

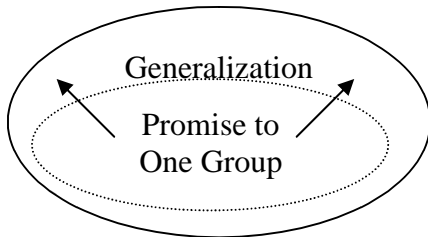
The following statement, “Scripture promised first century believers that they will not enter the Tribulation” has three possible relationships to the present. One might view it as either:

1. a specific promise that says nothing about today,
2. a specific promise that can be generalized to today,
3. a specific application of a general promise (that naturally extends to today).

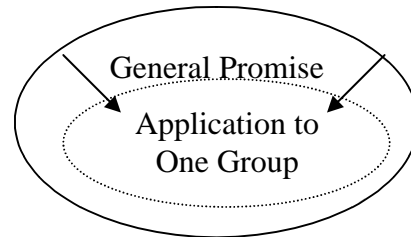
**View 1: No Generalization Possible**



**View 2: Generalization of a Specific Promise**



**View 3: Special Application of a General Promise**



In regard to Revelation 3:10, Aune ignores View 3. Yet, nothing about 3:10b (a complete sentence) requires it to be a promise restricted to Philadelphia alone: *I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*

This paper’s first installment contends that Revelation 3:10b is not part of the same sentence as 3:10a.<sup>10</sup> The traditional (but wrong) punctuation has made this verse appear as a special promise, even though it should be seen as a specific application of a general promise. When one recognizes 3:10b as a separate sentence, it is much easier to recognize it as a specific application of a general promise. A determination requires considering the nature of the promised deliverance.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Niemelä, “Syntax of Rev. 3:10,” 1–22, for a detailed analysis. A summary appears (above) Cf. p. 1.

## Is It a Rapture Passage?

Tim Nichols (who was then one of my students) kept asking, “What proves that this is a Rapture passage?” My research time coincided with his out-of-state internship. The planned article would need to pass the “Tim test.” The key came while rereading Schuyler Brown’s article in *Journal of Biblical Literature*.<sup>11</sup> Upon Tim’s return, I said, “I no longer believe that Revelation 3:10b is a Rapture passage, but it still has relevance to the Rapture.” That is, the subject of the verse is not the Rapture, but a larger topic (one that includes the Rapture). The following presents the research that led to the conclusion of this article.

Prior to the author abandoning the traditional punctuation of Revelation 3:10 (in 1994), he had read Brown’s article. He raises an equal-opportunity puzzle, one that affects Pre-, Mid-, Three-quarter-, and Post-tribulation positions alike (under the traditional punctuation). As an equal-opportunity puzzle, it had seemed a mere oddity. This time was different, because the corrected punctuation solves the puzzle. What did Brown say?

If the promise is understood this way,<sup>12</sup> then we must grant Bousset his objection that the Philadelphians are promised nothing that pertains specially to them.

His logic is cogent. Indeed, Revelation 3:10b does not promise the Philadelphians anything that is unique to them. Passages written before Revelation (such as 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 and 5:9–10) already promise that Church Age believers are not destined for wrath, i.e., Daniel’s wrathful seventieth week.<sup>13</sup> For all intents and purposes, 1 Thessalonians makes the case, while Revelation 3:10b seconds that case.<sup>14</sup>

Is Revelation 3:10b a Rapture passage? Technically, it is not but it relates to the Rapture. It does not specify the means of deliverance from the hour. It only gives a negative promise. Negative statements can be general in nature. Saying, “It is not Tuesday” leaves six other possibilities. Similarly, in Ruth 3:12–13, Boaz promised Ruth redemption, not who would redeem her. If the nearer kinsman did not, Boaz would. Two means of deliverance existed. Likewise, one could be spared from entering the *hour of trial* either by the Pre-tribulation Rapture or by dying before the Tribulation begins. Either satisfies the promise.

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<sup>11</sup> Schuyler Brown, “The Hour of Trial,” *JBL* 85 (Summer 1966): 311. Cf. Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 5th ed. (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 228f.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, “Hour of Trial,” 310, presents a post-tribulation perspective, i.e., deliverance through the hour. In light of this, he agreed with Bousset (p. 311) that such an approach creates a problem. The traditional punctuation creates the same problem for defenses of the Pre-tribulation Rapture from Revelation 3:10. Why? The traditional punctuation treats Revelation 3:10 as a *special promise* (under any eschatological view) while simultaneously treating the Rapture as a *general promise*. That, as Brown observes, is a difficulty. When repunctuated, the problem disappears, because the reason for treating it as a promise only applying to first century Philadelphians disappears.

<sup>13</sup> The final issue of the *CTS Journal* for 2000 has two pertinent articles: Zane C. Hodges, “1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and the Rapture,” *CTS Journal* 6 (October–December 2000): 22–35; and Thomas R. Edgar, “Lethargic or Dead in 1 Thessalonians 5:10?” *CTS Journal* 6 (October–December 2000): 36–51.

<sup>14</sup> It is true that this constitutes Revelation 3:10b as a secondary passage on the Rapture, not a primary one. This allows it to make a specific and strategic contribution to the defense of the Pre-tribulation Rapture.

Almost everyone (other than Preterists) recognizes that the Tribulation is yet future.<sup>15</sup> Thus far, who has been spared from entering the hour of trial? Through the centuries, a wide variety of people of all geographic locales have been spared.

1. all growing believers who died before the hour,
2. all stagnant believers who died before the hour,
3. all unbelievers who died before the hour.

The reason for focusing on dead people is that they have already been spared from the yet future hour of trial. One cannot say that everyone living today has been spared, because John Doe (an unbeliever) may still be alive during the yet future Tribulation. On the other hand, those who have died have been spared from that hour (whether believer or unbeliever).

After reading Brown's article, it was clear that commentaries and theologians have made Revelation 3:10 too complicated. Christ reiterates a general promise for the Universal Church to the Philadelphians: they would not enter the *hour of trial*. He does not specify the means of deliverance. They could escape the Tribulation either through death or the Rapture. The same is true for believers today. As an incidental feature, death has prevented unbelievers (through the centuries) from entering the Tribulation. This is a simple approach to the passage that does not take anything away from the first century Philadelphians. Christ fulfilled the promise by not letting them enter the Tribulation. Physical death continues to prevent believers from entering the hour until the Rapture. The Rapture delivers the final generation of the Universal Church.<sup>16</sup>

### **Is Revelation 3:10b Pre-tribulational?**

Post-tribulational interpreters often attempt to treat the phrase in 3:10b keep from (threw ek) as though it meant "preserve through." For example, Robert Gundry renders it as "protection issuing in emission."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> It is not the purpose of this article to digress into an argument against the eschatological views of Preterism, Historicism, or Idealism.

<sup>16</sup> The article will discuss 1 Thessalonians 4:13–15. All Church Age believers will be raptured, whether they are alive or have died. However, the Rapture does not deliver the dead in Christ *from the hour of trial*, as it does for those *who are alive and remain*. Physical death is what delivered them *from the hour of trial*. The Rapture delivers them into accompanying Christ as He conquers at Armageddon and prepares for establishing His kingdom.

<sup>17</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation: A Biblical Examination of Posttribulationism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 59.

Gundry contends that:

. . . , if *ek* ever occurs without the thought of emergence, it does so very exceptionally. This fact incapacitates Revelation 3:10 as a proof-text for pretribulationism.<sup>18</sup>

He asserts that *ek* means emergence. Thus the Philadelphians must be within the *hour of trial* before Christ can take them out of it. It is necessary to consider Revelation 3:10b in relation to the first century church at Philadelphia. According to Gundry, Christ promises to preserve them through the Tribulation until the point when He will remove them. Jesus must do for these first century Philadelphian believers what He has promised to them. Logically, Gundry's view of *ek* would yield the following:

1. Philadelphian believers died (first or second century),
2. at some yet-future point, the Tribulation begins,
3. Christ resurrects the Philadelphians,
4. Christ puts the Philadelphians into the Tribulation,
5. Christ raptures the Philadelphians out of the *hour*.

Will Gundry insist that Christ will resurrect the first century Philadelphians, put them into the Tribulation, and then rapture them? If not, he denies the idea of “emergence (from within)” with regard to the original readers. Now, certainly, Christ will do for the first century Philadelphians themselves what Revelation 3:10b promises, will He not?

On the other hand, the present author's case for a Pre-tribulation Rapture is quite compatible with Revelation 3:10b. In retrospect, Philadelphia serves as an illustration of a general doctrinal truth. As modern believers look upon Philadelphia, the illustration (of a Pre-tribulation deliverance), it is encouraging to know that our Lord graciously spared them from the Tribulation. He will be as successful in keeping every generation of the Church out of the hour.

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<sup>18</sup> Gundry, *Tribulation*, 56. Some excellent responses to Gundry are: Jeffrey L. Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10,” *BSac* 137 (July–September 1980): 252–67; David G. Winfrey, “The Great Tribulation: Kept ‘Out of’ or ‘Through’ ?” *GTJ* 3 (Spring 1982): 3–18; and Thomas R. Edgar “Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10,” *GTJ* 3 (Spring 1982): 19–49.

## Relationship to 1 Thessalonians 5

Two recent articles argue correctly that 1 Thessalonians 5:10 promises the Rapture even to unwatchful believers.<sup>19</sup> Revelation 3:10b does not conflict with this understanding, because it is not contingent on verse 10a. These are the three propositions of 3:9–10:

1. *Indeed **I give** those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—*
2. *indeed **I will make** them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you for you have kept My command to persevere.*
3. ***And I will keep** you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*

The Pre-tribulation Rapture is the third proposition. How do 1 Thessalonians and Revelation 3:10b relate? 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9–10 indicate that Church Age believers, whether lethargic or alert, are not destined for wrath (Daniel’s seventieth week), but for deliverance. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17 shows that the *dead in Christ* and those who are *alive and remain* will be raptured. Part 1 (of the chart on the next page) puts these features of 1 Thessalonians together. Part 2 deals with Revelation 3:10b, deliverance from the hour, and 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9, salvation from wrath. Part 3 considers 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Revelation 3:10 and 1 Thessalonians 4-5 harmonize.<sup>20</sup>

	Alive	Dead
<b>1</b>	Alert	Dead who were alert
	Lethargic	Dead who were lethargic
	⇕	⇕
<b>2</b>	Rev. 3:10b 1 Thes 1, 5	The Rapture delivers these <i>from the hour</i> . Death delivers these <i>from the hour</i> .
		⇕
<b>3</b>	1 Thes 4:17	The Rapture delivers these to meet Christ. The Rapture delivers these to meet Christ.
		⇕

This is a simple view of Revelation 3:10b that matches the equally simple view of the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians appearing elsewhere in this issue of the *CTS Journal*.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Hodges, “1 Thessalonians Rapture,” 22–35; and Edgar, “Lethargic or Dead?” 36–51.

<sup>20</sup> This section draws upon Hodges, “1 Thessalonians Rapture,” 22–35; and Edgar, “Lethargic or Dead?” 36–51. Consult those articles for exegetical support regarding the interpretation of 1 Thessalonians.

## Quadruple Divide Peak

Meltwater from Triple Divide Peak in Montana goes in three directions:

1. to the Pacific Ocean,
2. to Hudson Bay, or
3. to the Gulf of Mexico.

Revelation 3:10 is a biblical counterpart to that mountain. However, meltwater would go in four directions; hence, a Quadruple Divide Peak. It involves both eschatology and soteriology. An expositor can err on two issues, on one of them, or on neither. Even seasoned exegetes face pitfalls where two major doctrines intersect, especially, if both are controversial.

The following chart depicts this intersecting set of divides on Quadruple Divide Peak:

	<i>True Eschatology</i>	<i>False Eschatology</i>
<i>True Soteriology</i>	<i>True-True</i> <sup>21</sup>	<i>True-False</i> <sup>22</sup>
<i>False Soteriology</i>	<i>False-True</i> <sup>23</sup>	<i>False-False</i> <sup>24</sup>

Four combinations are possible:

1. true soteriology and true eschatology,
2. true soteriology and false eschatology,
3. false soteriology and true eschatology,
4. false soteriology and false eschatology.

The present author's past approaches to Revelation 3:10 has put him on different faces of Quadruple Divide Peak. He always accepted the Pre-tribulation Rapture. However, he formerly related this verse to that eschatology in diverse ways. Keeping them *from the hour* would refer to:

1. the Rapture and nothing other than the Rapture,
2. only something other than the Rapture, or
3. death (most generations), but Rapture (one future generation).

Other passages have always led the present author to conclude that the Pre-tribulation Rapture view is right. However, one can have a correct theological position, but err on the exegesis of a passage related to that doctrine. The goal is not merely to have correct theology, but to understand each passage of the Bible. From that standpoint, views 1 and 2 are not satisfactory, even though they are compatible with a Pre-tribulation Rapture. During the summer of 2000, this

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<sup>21</sup> **Divide 1:** *True-True*: Truly-Free Soteriology + Pre-tribulation Rapture.

<sup>22</sup> **Divide 2:** *True-False*: Truly-Free Soteriology + Partial Rapture.

<sup>23</sup> **Divide 3:** *False-True*: Lordship Soteriology + Pre-tribulation Rapture.

<sup>24</sup> **Divide 4:** *False-False*: Lordship Soteriology + Post-tribulation Rapture.

author perceived the relationship between soteriology and eschatology in Revelation 3:10. The objective is to discover truth. Periodically, this requires admitting, “I have erred.” The text must be able to critique and change our views. The intersection of eschatology and soteriology makes it easy to err in Revelation 3:10. Knowing this from personal experience, the following sections focus on issues, not personalities. Consider the four faces of Quadruple Divide Peak.

### **Northwest Divide: True-True**

This first quadrant represents a correct understanding of Revelation 3:10 in its soteriology and eschatology. Verse 10b is a complete sentence. Verse 10a connects to verse 9, not to 10b. Thus, deliverance from the hour is not contingent on how well one keeps Christ’s command to persevere. After all, no one (neither spiritual believers, nor carnal believers, nor unbelievers) has yet entered the Tribulation.

Technically, the passage does not promise how Christ would deliver the first century Philadelphians, but that He would deliver them. Either death or the Rapture would sufficiently protect them from entering the Tribulation. Keeping the first century Philadelphians from the hour is a specific application of a categorical doctrine found elsewhere (e.g. 1 Thessalonians).

### **Northeast Divide: True-False**

The statement, “It is not Tuesday,” is not as specific as “It is Wednesday.” Likewise, it is not surprising that many false answers are possible. Therefore, the following only lists a few.

One possibility, viewing this passage as directly addressing the Rapture, misses the eschatological point. It recognizes that the first century Philadelphians will be raptured (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17). However, it treats the Rapture of *the dead in Christ* as if it were what keeps them *from the hour*. It does not. Death is what keeps them from living into the hour. The Rapture delivers the dead in Christ to meet with Christ in the air. Taking the Rapture as the means for fulfilling Revelation 3:10b to the first century Philadelphians involves errant eschatology. When the present author re-punctuated Revelation 3:10, but he still classified the verse as a “Rapture passage.” That lessened the tension, but such an approach still has difficulty, because it is a true-false view.

Likewise, inferring the Partial Rapture view errs. This view embraces the traditional, but incorrect, punctuation.<sup>25</sup> Those holding the Partial Rapture view tend to be quite clear on the freeness of the gospel of grace, but Revelation 3:10 does not assign the Rapture to rewards for faithfulness. Everyone in the first century, even unbelievers and the carnal Corinthian believers, escaped the Tribulation. Physical death spared them all. It would be a hollow promise for Christ to say that the deliverance of the first century Philadelphians depended on their faithfulness, when He actually spared everyone then alive.

Furthermore, the promise to the overcomer in Philadelphia is in Revelation 3:12, not in 3:10. Thus, Christ does not set 3:10b forth as a reward to the overcomer. If deliverance from the hour were a reward for faithfulness, it would have been in verse 12.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Niemelä, “Syntax of Rev. 3:10,” 1–22, for a detailed analysis. A summary appears (above). Cf. p.1.

Of course, anyone who argues for a gospel of grace who also embraced a Mid-, Three-quarter-, or Post-tribulation Rapture, would be on the northeast slope.

### **Southwest Divide: False-True**

Someone compromises the freeness of grace, but still see death (or the Rapture) fulfilling Revelation 3:10b. Such a view fits this category. This involves soteriological error. As a positive, it cannot logically use Revelation 3:10 to argue that deliverance from the hour is contingent on final perseverance. For an advocate of final perseverance to recognize that this passage does not contribute to that doctrine would be a positive step.

### **Southeast Divide: False-False**

Those who use Revelation 3:10b to relate a doctrine of final perseverance to the Rapture err on both eschatology and soteriology. The passage does not teach that all true believers persevere to the end. This is evident from Revelation 3:11: *Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.* Christ treats the crown as something that belongs to them, which can be lost. It was a real concern for Philadelphia. That assigns the crown to the category of rewards, not to the results of justification.

As a contemporary illustration, in the days following the 2000 presidential election two men regarded themselves as the winner of the election. In God's view, only one of them was legitimately the President-elect. However, others had the power to take victory away from him.<sup>26</sup> The true winner (or the usurper) may be the one eventually inaugurated. The true winner may (or may not) hold onto what he has. Victory was his, but will he enjoy it on Inauguration Day?

Similarly, the Philadelphians were ones having real victories. If they were to die or be raptured at the moment Christ uttered Revelation 3:11, they would receive certain rewards called crowns. At the moment Christ spoke, those crowns belonged to them. However, between that date and the end of their lives on earth, someone could take their crowns away.

Observe that Revelation 3:11 talks about something that certain people actually have, not something that they do not yet have. It is doublespeak to try to see unbelievers (who do not have eternal life) losing what they do not have. That would be like a person who has always been poor talking about how he lost a million dollars. One can only lose what he has; he cannot lose what he does not have.

Therefore, the passage does not prove a doctrine of final perseverance. The only people who could have real victories are believers. However, it is potential that those first century Philadelphian believers might not continue keeping Christ's command to persevere (3:10a). It is not proper to impose a doctrine of final perseverance onto this passage. Revelation 3:10 says nothing that can legitimately be viewed as proof of that doctrine.

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<sup>26</sup> As of November 9, 2000 (the date when this note was originally conceived), the author made no attempt to identify the real winner. God knows who he is. For this illustration, what matters is: The potential exists for someone to usurp the true winner's right to rule (his "crown," so to speak). Whether one believes that Bush (or Gore) was the real winner is between the reader and the Lord. The logic of the point stands regardless.

With regard to eschatological errors, many are possible. This article has discussed errors that Pre-tribulationists make and those by other schools. Unfortunately, many find themselves with both soteriological and eschatological errors here.

## CONCLUSION

Christ literally fulfilled the passage to the Philadelphians. Their deliverance was total and complete: None of them lived into the hour of trial. Revelation 3:10b is not a promise that is specific to Philadelphia alone. Rather, its basis is the absolute promise that the Church is not destined for wrath. Thus, Christ made a specific application to Philadelphia of a general promise. Such an interpretation flows simply from the passage. It does not conflict with 1 Thessalonians and it preserves the freeness of the gospel of grace.

The controversy surrounding Revelation 3:10 has been both unceasing and of such intensity that the grammar of the passage requires scrutiny apart from any theological considerations. The conclusion that Revelation 3:10a is properly subordinated to 3:9 and not 3:10b points to Revelation 3:10b as a categorical statement of doctrine, a specific application of a general truth.

For almost 2000 years, physical death has been the means for preventing Church Age believers from living into the hour of trial. Christ kept His promise to the first century Philadelphians. In so doing, He has given a prototype of the way that He delivers the entire Church. The deliverance is Pre-tribulationist. Prior to the Rapture, physical death has been the means by which Christ has prevented believers from entering the Tribulation. However, the final generation of the Church will receive its deliverance via the Rapture.

Thus understood, Revelation 3:10b is compatible with a simple exegesis of pertinent passages in 1 Thessalonians<sup>27</sup>. The basic understanding of this passage avoids the difficulties caused by interpretations that go down the wrong side of either the eschatological divide or the soteriological divide. It upholds the freeness of the *Blessed Hope* as a truth that guarantees that no Church Age believers will present in the seven-year Tribulation.

**M<sup>o</sup>L**

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hodges, "1 Thessalonians Rapture," 22–35; and Edgar, "Lethargic or Dead?" 36–51.