

What is the Hour of Testing?
Examining Revelation 3:10
A Series on the Practice of Sin: Part 5

The book of Revelation is the conclusion to mankind's perpetual practice of sin - the expression of one's desire and lust in disobedience to God's word. In His message to the church of Philadelphia, Jesus speaks of the "hour of testing."

Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the **hour of testing**, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. (Rev 3:10)

Revelation is a difficult and complex book to read and understand, and there is considerable confusion in comprehending the apostle John's observations. One area of uncertainty is precisely here, at the "hour of testing," which will "come upon the whole world." Many commentators see "the hour of testing" as a reference to the tribulation or great tribulation of the apocalypse; this interpretation is the basis for the view that Jesus Christ will remove Believers from experiencing the tribulation. Does objective hermeneutics support this view? The evidence does not appear to support this:

1. There are 3 instances when human beings are mentioned in heaven and specifically in the Temple of God. These human beings appear to be those martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ just before the fifth seal (Rev 6:9-11; Rev 7:13-15; 14:1-3). Jesus Christ makes the explicit mention of the "great tribulation" to indicate the intense level of persecution Believers they will experience for their faith and die for.

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "**These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation**, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. (Rev 7:13-15)

"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. For then there will be a **great tribulation**, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. (Matt 24:15-21)

To learn more about this, see the article: "Which heaven do Christians go to?" at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/7Humans/DeathWhichHeaven.aspx.

2. In every instance Jesus Christ uses "tribulation," He uses the term expressly in the context of Believers being persecuted for their faith; it is something all Believers will experience after He is gone from earth (Matt 24:9-14; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:10-19). When "the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, is standing in the holy place," the "great tribulation," is days of vengeance against God's people "such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation" (Matt 24:15-28; Mark 13:14-23; Luke 21:20-24). The implication here is that tribulation does not occur in the absence of Believers and it ends with the death of the last Believer.

Thus, in light of the biblical text itself, the view of pre-tribulation rapture of all Believers is contrary to Jesus' own words.

To learn more about this, see the articles: "What and When is the Tribulation?" at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/12End/DefTribulation.aspx, and "What is the Great Tribulation?" at Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/12End/DefGreatTribulation.aspx.

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Since the “hour of testing” cannot be the tribulation or great tribulation, what could it be that includes the “whole world”? To aid in an objective hermeneutic approach to Revelation, it is important to recognize that the apostle John is writing a narrative of apocalyptic material, and he is recording it as a sequence of events, which is indicated with his frequent use of the preposition “after” (12x).

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” (Rev 4:1)

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. (Rev 22:8a)

The safe hermeneutic approach is to see if the book of Revelation refers to a period of “the hour of testing,” and indeed there is a reference to “the hour of His judgment” in Revelation.

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because **the hour of His judgment** has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.” And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.” (Rev 14:6-8)

At this moment, all that remains is the dispensation of the bowls of God’s wrath (Rev 15:1). The last trumpet has sounded (Rev 11:15), and Jesus Christ and His angels are returning to “reap the earth” (Rev 14:14-16; Matt 24:29-31).

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle and reap, **for the hour to reap** has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.” Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped. (Rev 14:14-16)

But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And **He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matt 24:29-31)

Here, when Jesus Christ is reaping, He is removing Believers from earth before the bowls of God’s wrath are dispensed; for Believers, it is the start of the process of resurrection (1 Cor 15:42-54). Following Jesus Christ, another angel emerges from the temple of God to reap the earth (Rev 14:17-20), and he leads a group to gather the wicked whose sins are now ripe for judgment.

The mention of the third woe (Rev 11:14) attempts to describe the enormity of the reaping by the angels. The reaping includes the dispensation of bowls (Rev 16:1-21) and ends at the conclusion of Armageddon when Jesus figuratively trends the wine press of God’s great wrath (Rev 19:15) and produces the vast amount of blood (Rev 14:20).

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The sequence of Jesus Christ reaping first followed by the angel reaping corresponds to Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of God, such as the Parable of the Tares and Dragnet, which present the separation of Believers from non-Believers as occurring simultaneously.

This is the only time in the book of Revelation that corresponds to Jesus Christ's "hour of testing" (Rev 3:10), and it takes place "upon the whole world". And "the hour of testing" corresponds to "the hour of His judgment" and "the hour to reap."

To learn more about this, see the article: "The Reaping, A Series on Divine Judgment: Part 13" at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/2JesusChrist/WorksJudgmentReaping.aspx.

To check if this interpretation is correct, one can examine whether other judgments of God affected the whole world.

In consideration of both seal and trumpet judgments, none affect the earth on a global scale in the manner like the bowl judgments, and there are no other instances where Jesus Christ keeps any Believer "from the hour of testing."

What is the meaning of "testing" in the "hour of testing" "to test those who dwell on the earth"? When the angel speaks "the hour of judgment" (Rev 14:6-8), it is in the context of a figure of speech "Babylon the great."

Babylon has a special significance to God. After Noah's Ark and the Flood, human beings attempted to build a tower and make a name for themselves. But it wasn't simply building a tower, it was building a tower "into heaven" and seeking some recognition akin to God.

Babylon was seen as a "great harlot" (Rev 17:1-2). From a theological perspective, a "harlot" was a term God used to refer to His people that were unfaithful to the Mosaic Covenant by worshiping other gods (Ex 34:14-16; Lev 20:4-6; Deut 31:15-17). Here Babylon is portrayed as something more than an individual non-Believer. It is "the great harlot" who leads others, including kings, to be immoral. It is a lifestyle that attracts all cultures and people and is intoxicating and pleasurable (Rev 14:8).

After God's judgment is pronounced (Rev 14:9-11) and dispensed, the attitude of the people of Babylon is revealed:

"And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' "And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more — cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!' And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?' (Rev 18:9-18)

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Rather than recognize the sovereignty of God, people are recorded as observing the woes of Babylon (Rev 18:9-20) and selfishly lamenting of their financial losses. This stands in stark contrast to the eagle's three woes (Rev 8:13) which were expressed in sympathy for those remaining on earth reminiscent of Daniel's lament for Nebuchadnezzar who did not recognize that God "is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes" (Dan 4:19-37). But Babylon, in contrast to Nebuchadnezzar who came to recognize God, is a culture that will never recognize the one true God, and her evil influence is cause for its termination.

To learn more about this, see the article "The Doom of Babylon, A Series on the Function of Revelation's Interludes: Part 4" at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/12End/InterludeDoomOfBabylon.aspx.

The meaning of "the hour of testing" "to test those who dwell on the earth" becomes clear. While Babylon the great represents the completeness of lust, deceiving ourselves and others for the pursuit of personal desires of our heart, will the expression of God's wrath, in the hour of testing through the dispensation of His bowls of wrath, cause a person to recognize His existence and engender obedience to His word? Or will it stiffen an obstinate denial and motivate one to continue in disobedience? And in fitting conclusion, this is God's final test.