

Promises of reward (vii)

(1) *Opportunities to serve*

(2) *Successful witness*

(3) *Protection*

Rev 3:10 is not about 'the rapture'

• *No explicit reference to a rapture distinct from the second coming*

• *'Kept from the hour' is a strong promise of protection from fatal protection under Satan's attacks*

• *The 'protection' is viewed from the perspective of eternity*

• *Martyrdom is a possibility*

• *No reference to a rapture – we see what God says to us by seeing what God said to them*

The Lord Jesus Christ promises he will richly reward the Philadelphians if they will endure to the end of the troubles that are already upon them, and that are likely to get worse. He will give them (1) **opportunities** to serve God, (2) **success** in their witness to their enemies. And he will give them (3) **protection**. ¹⁰*'Since you have kept my command that you should endure I also will keep you from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.'* Christians who endure to the end of whatever trial God puts them through will find that God keeps them safe, in one way or another.

This does not mean that they will be taken away altogether from planet earth. Revelation 3:10 is sometimes taken as a 'proof text' for the idea that Christians are 'raptured' (snatched away) at some stage before the second coming, but in my judgement this is a mistake. There is actually no explicit evidence for a rapture distinct from the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is not a second coming and a third coming, or a two-stage second coming with years in between the two parts. None of this is taught clearly anywhere in Scripture.

It is not that the overcomer's reward is 'the rapture'. The idea that 'being kept from the hour' means being 'raptured' out of the world altogether is reading too much into the phrase. Admittedly, being 'kept from the hour of trial' is a very strong promise. It reminds us of John 12:27 where Jesus considered the possibility of being delivered from the time of the cross altogether – but decided it was not possible. He prayed that he would be 'saved . . . out of death'¹. This prayer was answered (as Hebrews 5:8 says). Jesus was **both** given strength to go to the cross **and** he was delivered out of death by resurrection. He was not raptured **before** the suffering of death. The closest parallel to the Greek phrase here is found in John 17:15, where Jesus says he is not praying that his disciples should be raptured out of the world (Greek *airo plus ek*) but he is praying that they should be protected from the attacks of the evil one (Greek *tereo plus ek*²). They will experience attacks of Satan but Jesus asks that they should be protected from being fatally destroyed by such attacks. The second phrase in John 17:15 is similar to our phrase in Revelation 3:10. The disciples would be **threatened** by Satan but **protected**³. In the same way the Philadelphians were promised that although they would be **threatened** with a period of tribulation, yet they would be **protected** in it in so great a manner that it would not at all hinder their reaching their final reward. The 'protection' is viewed from the perspective of eternity. They might even be martyred! But even in martyrdom they will be protected and will gain a martyr's reward (see also chs. 23 and 59). The one who endures to the end will be kept safe, in one way or another.

Certainly Revelation 3:10 cannot be used as proof of a rapture before the second coming. We must remember Scripture was first written to its original readers. We see what God says to **us** by seeing what God said to **them**. The promise here is first of all for the Philadelphian Christians, and the Philadelphians were not in point of fact dramatically taken to heaven! No verse of Scripture can be taken to refer to something entirely unrelated to the original readers.

¹ Hebrews 5:8

² as in Revelation 3:10

³ John 17:15

• *The thought of Revelation 3:10 is that faithfulness will be rewarded by special protection*

• *Not a reference to a 'great tribulation' in the distant future*

• *Always tribulation in one way or another*

Further promises if they remain faithful

(4) *Jesus will make them to be a pillar in His temple-church – a place of fellowship and security*

(5) *Honour and glory*

(6) *A home in the new Jerusalem*

• *Appeal to hear (vi)*

The point is: Christians who endure to the end of whatever trial God puts them through will find that God keeps them safe, in one way or another. The thought of Revelation 3:10 is that faithfulness will be rewarded by special protection; a time of trial which comes upon the whole 'world' (that is, the area around the Mediterranean Sea) will not touch them. Such times of terrible tribulation came in the days of Nero and probably there was something similar in the days of Domitian. The Philadelphians were already being persecuted. They are told: if they endure the **present** trial, the one that is soon coming upon all Christians everywhere will not touch them. They will not have to go through a terrible tribulation twice. This has nothing to do with any 'great tribulation' in the distant future (from John's viewpoint). There was tribulation for the Philadelphians right then and there. In the world we always have tribulation, in one way or another¹. At some times it is worse than others.

There are further promises given to the Philadelphians if they will remain faithful. In one way or another, Jesus will soon visit them. They must persevere until they receive their reward. ¹¹*'I come quickly: hold firmly what you have so that no one will take your crown.'* Another aspect of their reward is (4) that **Jesus will make them to be a pillar in his temple-church.** ¹²*'The person who overcomes – I will make such a person to be a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he go out from it.'* There were often upright 'pillars' in or near to ancient temples. Temples were viewed as the dwelling-place of God. To be a 'pillar in a temple' is to be in a place of fellowship and security in the presence of God. (There is no connection with Galatians 2:9 where the picture is different.)

(5) They will receive **honour and glory.** *'I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God. I will write on him my own new name.'* The overcomer is identified with God. He is given a 'name' that shows for ever that he was loyal to God and his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

(6) They will receive **a home**, in the new Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem is the heavenly people of God, destined to rule on earth for ever. The overcomer is given a special place within the people of God. Its name is engraved on him or her. 'Engraving' makes the point that once the home is given it cannot be lost. ¹³*'He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

¹ John 16:33



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