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THE GREAT TRIBULATION: KEPT "OUT OF" OR "THROUGH"?

DAVID G. WINFREY

The debate over whether or not the church will enter the great tribulation is focused on a single critical phrase in the Greek text. The question is: does τηρέω ἐκ ("keep from," KJV) in Rev 3:10 necessarily imply that the church will be kept out of the great tribulation, or does it allow for the church to go through the great tribulation? As the end time fast approaches, it is imperative for the church to settle this issue. Is the Lord's coming for his church imminent, or will the church soon enter into a period of unprecedented Satanic persecution. In answer to this question, four points are considered: (1) Robert Gundry's use of John 17:15 as an interpretive guide for Rev 3:10; (2) three antithetical expressions which support the pretribulational view; (3) four complications to Gundry's posttribulational view; and, (4) an analogy illustrating the difference between the phrases "keep out of" and "deliver out of."

* * *

INTRODUCTION

IN the course of the history of the Church, controversies often crystalized around particular phrases and words. When the deity of Christ was challenged in the fourth century, the issue was brought into sharp focus in two Greek words: ὁμοούσιος and ὁμοιούσιος. At the Council of Nicea, Christ was declared to be ὁμοούσιος (of the same substance) with the Father rather than ὁμοιούσιος (of a similar substance) with the Father, as the Arians taught. As can be seen, the only difference between these two words is the letter *iota*. To some it may seem ludicrous to argue over such a "trivial" point. However, although a mere letter distinguished these two Greek words, the matter was by no means insignificant. Whether Christ was co-eternal, co-equal, and co-substantial with the Father or a mere creature, even though of the highest order, was the issue at stake.

Today one of the important issues facing the church is in the area of eschatology. In the nineteenth century, the early premillennial

teaching of the church was rediscovered. Under the leadership of J. N. Darby, the brethren movement (Plymouth Brethren) of the 1830s developed a new and startling variation of premillennialism. Whereas those who are now called "historical premillennialists" taught that Christ's second coming would occur at the end of the great tribulation, these "dispensationalists" taught that God had two separate programs: one for Israel and another for the predominantly gentile church. They taught that Christ's second coming to establish his earthly reign would be preceded by an earlier coming for his church. By being raptured away before the great tribulation, the church would escape the terrible plagues and persecutions depicted in the Apocalypse of Saint John. These two distinct forms of premillennialism are labeled "pretribulationism" and "posttribulationism." Pretribulationists teach that the church will be kept *out of* the great tribulation. Posttribulationists, on the other hand, teach that the church must enter this horrible period of persecution and suffer at the hands of the Antichrist. Only after the church has passed *through* this period will she be caught up to meet the Lord and accompany him in triumph at his second advent.

Posttribulationists have of late put forward telling arguments against several features of the pretribulationist scheme. Many of these points were popularized in 1898 by W. E. Blackstone's *Jesus is Coming*.¹ Although several of the texts used to support the pretribulationist view have been abandoned by pretribulationists, Rev 3:10 has remained the primary defense of the position. Until recently, it has withstood every argument the posttribulationists have marshaled against it. However, with the publication of Robert Gundry's *The Church and the Tribulation* in 1973, it has once again come under siege.²

Gundry's provocative book has caused many pretribulationists to reexamine their position on this issue. Will Christ come for his church *before* the great tribulation (pretribulationism), or will he come *after* the church has entered this time of unparalleled suffering (posttribulationism)? Perhaps the impact of Gundry's book can be measured best by the response it has received from the champions of the pretribulationist view. Gundry's treatment of the issue has been reviewed by Charles C. Ryrie in *Bibliotheca Sacra*.³ In a series of articles in the same journal, John F. Walvoord, president of Dallas

¹W. E. Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1898).

²Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973).

³Charles C. Ryrie, "The Church and the Tribulation: A Review," *BSac* 131 (1974) 173-79.

Theological Seminary, has examined Gundry's dispensational post-tribulationism at length.⁴ However, whereas Gundry deals with Rev 3:10 extensively in developing his arguments for a posttribulation rapture,⁵ Walvoord's rebuttal is rather brief, little more than a page in length.⁶

The most recent article in *Bibliotheca Sacra* examining Gundry's treatment of Rev 3:10 is written by Jeffrey L. Townsend.⁷ In it he traces the usage of the preposition ἐκ from the classical period to that of the NT and demonstrates that in addition to the primary meaning of "out from within," ἐκ was also capable of bearing another meaning, i.e., "a position outside its object with no thought of prior existence within the object or of emergence from the object."⁸

If there is a "proof text" for the pretribulation position, it is Rev 3:10. Perhaps this is why Gundry deals with it at such length. Unfortunately, many pretribulationists now consider Rev 3:10 indecisive. It has become a sort of "no-man's-land" in the ongoing debate between both camps. This, in the author's opinion, is a serious mistake. Gundry's rebuttal of the pretribulation position on Revelation must be met head-on. It will not be repelled unless each argument is met by convincing counterarguments.

TEXTS

Rev 3:10 (RSV)

Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will *keep* you *from* [τηρήσω ἐκ] the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth.

John 17:15 (RSV)

I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst *keep* them *from* [τηρήσης . . . ἐκ] the evil one.

A FAIR ASSUMPTION

Robert Gundry's treatment of the phrase "keep out of" found in these passages is based on the fair assumption that if the phrase has

⁴John F. Walvoord, "Posttribulationism Today," *BSac* 132 (1975) 16-24. The series runs through *BSac* 134 (1977) 299-313. These articles have been published in book form. See John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

⁵Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 54-61.

⁶Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*, 137-38.

⁷Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," *BSac* 137 (1980) 252-66.

⁸*Ibid.*, 254.

the implication of "previous existence within" in one passage, it most likely also has the same implication in the other.⁹ The question to be considered is whether "keep out of" (τηρέω ἐκ) implies "previous existence within" in John 17:15. If it does, then it is reasonable to assume that the same implication would be found in Rev 3:10, for these are the only two occurrences of τηρέω ἐκ in the NT. And if τηρέω ἐκ implies "previous existence within" in Rev 3:10, then, rather than this passage being a proof text for pretribulationism, it would suggest that the church will be in the great tribulation which is here referred to as the "hour of testing." Accordingly, Rev 3:10 would then be interpreted as a promise to keep or guard the church in the great tribulation so that she may emerge victorious at the end.

OBJECTIVE

The author's objective is to demonstrate that τηρέω ἐκ implies previous existence *outside* the specified sphere in both passages. In seeking to demonstrate that the phrase does not imply previous existence within in John 17:15, the following terms and phrases which are diametrically opposed to each other will be examined: (1) τηρέω ἐκ and τηρέω ἐν; (2) ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ and ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ; and (3) ἐν τῷ ὄνόματι and ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ. After these considerations, four additional problems with Gundry's interpretation will be examined.

τηρέω ἐκ *versus* τηρέω ἐν

The first reason for rejecting Gundry's interpretation of the phrase "keep out of" as necessarily implying protection within is that John 17:15 says exactly the opposite. It should be noted that Christ doesn't pray "but that thou shouldst *keep* them *in* the evil one." They are not to be protected *within*, but *outside* this sphere. However, the following statement reveals that Gundry understands this phrase in John 17:15 to mean "keep in" rather than "keep out of" and has confused the sphere of the evil one's power with the world.

We cannot eliminate the parallel between the two verses by distinguishing a moral realm in John 17:15 and a physical realm in Revelation 3:10. For it is the physical presence of the disciples in the world *which places them in the moral sphere of the evil one* [Italics added].¹⁰

⁹As Gundry points out: "The parallels between John 17:15 and Revelation 3:10 are very impressive. Both verses appear in Johannine literature. Both come from the lips of Jesus. A probability arises, therefore, of similar usage and meaning" (Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 58).

¹⁰Ibid., 59.

Since Gundry conceives the sphere of the evil one's power to be co-extensive with the world, so that to be "in the world" means the same as to be "in the moral sphere of the evil one," it makes little or no difference to him whether Christ has prayed that the disciples should be kept in one or the other. Accordingly, Gundry understands the verse to mean that the disciples are to be kept from harm in the sphere of the evil one's power, the world. But the Lord simply prayed that while being in the world the disciples be kept *from* or *out of* Satan's power. This verse does not say that Christ prayed that the disciples might be preserved *in* the evil one's power, but just the contrary. Because the believers are of God, not of the world, they are enabled to be both *in* the world and yet *out of* the evil one's power.

It must of course be acknowledged that the disciples were once in the evil one's power, but this is totally irrelevant to the issue at hand. The question we are considering is whether the phrase $\tau\eta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega \ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa$ in John 17:15 suggests that the disciples were within Satan's power *when this prayer was uttered*. In discussing the necessary implication of the Greek preposition, the meaning of "previous existence within" must be limited in John 17:15 to the status of the disciples when Christ uttered this prayer. In Rev 3:10 the implication of previous existence within must be limited to the status of the church of Philadelphia when Christ made this promise. The necessary implication of $\tau\eta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega \ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa$ in John 17:15 is that the disciples were already *out of* the evil one's power; in like manner, the necessary implication of $\tau\eta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega \ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa$ in Rev 3:10 is that the church of Philadelphia was already *out of* the hour of temptation. If, on the other hand, our Lord's prayer in John 17:15 had been to *keep* them *in* the evil one's power, then the necessary implication would obviously be that they *were already in* his realm. And likewise, if his promise in Rev 3:10 was to keep the church of Philadelphia *in* the hour of temptation, then she would by implication be informed that *she will be* in this period of time.

That it is not $\tau\eta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega \ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa$ which necessarily implies previous existence within but rather $\tau\eta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega \ \acute{\epsilon}\nu$ ("keep in") can be seen from the four passages in the NT where $\tau\eta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega \ \acute{\epsilon}\nu/\acute{\epsilon}\iota\varsigma$ occur. What is the necessary implication of $\tau\eta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega \ \acute{\epsilon}\nu$ in Acts 12:5 if not that Peter *was in* prison? He could not be guarded in prison unless he was first in prison. What is the necessary implication of $\tau\eta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega \ \acute{\epsilon}\iota\varsigma$ in Acts 25:4 if not that Paul *was in* Caesarea? Again, Paul could not have been guarded in Caesarea unless he was first in Caesarea. We find the phrase again in 1 Peter 1:4 where we learn that our inheritance is "reserved in heaven." If it is being *kept* in heaven, it must by implication already *be* in heaven. In Jude 21 we are exhorted to "keep" ourselves "in" the love of God. Here again we find the phrase

τηρέω ἐν. Before we can *keep* ourselves *in* the love of God, we must first *be in* his love.

Now if these passages with τηρέω ἐν are antonymous parallels to those with τηρέω ἐκ, then whatever the necessary implication of one set, the other set must bear the converse implication. If τηρέω ἐν/εἰς in these passages has the obvious implication of "previous existence within," then τηρέω ἐκ in John 17:15 and Rev 3:10 must have the implication of "previous existence without." Before one can be *kept in*, one must already *be in*; and before one can be *kept out*, one must already *be out*. This relationship between being "kept in" and being in and between being "kept out" and being out may be illustrated by the following sentences: (1) "Teachers, please *keep* your students *in* the auditorium for the next fifteen minutes," and (2) "Teachers, please *keep* your students *out of* the auditorium until your class is called." In the first sentence, the phrase "keep . . . in" necessarily implies that the students "were in" the auditorium before the announcement was made. To "keep in" necessarily implies "previous existence within." In the second sentence, the phrase "keep . . . out of" necessarily implies that the students "were out of" the auditorium prior to the announcement. To "keep out of" necessarily implies "previous existence without."

ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ *versus* ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ

We have seen that τηρέω ἐκ does not imply previous existence within as does τηρέω ἐν, but just the opposite. The second set of antithetical expressions is found in the Johannine literature: ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ in John 17:15 and ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ in I John 5:19.¹¹ In I John 5:19 we read, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world is *in the power of the evil one*" (RSV, italics added).¹² This verse implies unmistakably that the believers *are not* ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ ("in the power of the evil one") as is the rest of mankind. Now if I John 5:19 implies

¹¹These phrases illustrate the Johannine use of absolute contrasts. Concerning such absolutes, Hodges writes: "Thus one encounters such polarities as 'light and darkness,' 'love and hate,' 'believe and unbelief,' 'from above and from below,' and many others. It is now evident, from the evidence of Qumran, that this dualistic mode of thought was very much at home in the conceptual milieu of first-century Palestine. It would be an error, therefore, not to bring this observation to bear on the passage under consideration" (Zane C. Hodges, "Those Who Have Done Good—John 5:28-29," *BSac* 136 [1979] 163).

¹²The πονηρός of I John 5:19 should be rendered "evil one." Buchell writes: "ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ is to be taken personally of the devil (cf. v. 18). The κείται ἐν . . . is perhaps par. to the μένειν ἐν ἡμοῖς of Jn. 15:1-10: As the believer abides in Christ, so that he is nourished and fruitfully sustained by Him, so the world lies in the devil, by whom it is controlled and rendered helpless and powerless, and finally killed (I Jn. 3:14)" (Friedrich Buchel, "κεῖμαι," *TDNT* 3, 654, n. 3).

that the believers are not in the evil one's power, then how can John 17:15 imply that they are? Neither the Scriptures nor the implications drawn therefrom contradict each other. An honest exegesis of the two phrases in their respective contexts demands the recognition of their sharp contrast. If one is ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, he is not also ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ. He is either *in* or *out of* the evil one's power. On the one hand, the implication of τηρέω ἐκ in John 17:15 is that the believers *are out of* the evil one's power. We are expressly told that "the wicked one toucheth him not" (1 John 5:18). On the other hand, the implication in 1 John 5:19 is that the unregenerate *is in* the evil one's power.¹³

One's exegetical integrity may well be called in question if, in an effort to avoid the antithetical nature of these two phrases and the argumentation based upon it, he renders ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ in John 17:15 "*in the sphere of* the evil one's power." If the disciples were merely *in the sphere of* the evil one's power, then what of the world of the unregenerate? Are they only *in the sphere of* the evil one's power? Or, are they actually *in* the evil one's power? If the ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ in John 17:15 does not actually suggest that the disciples were *in* (subject to) the evil one's power, but merely that they were *in the sphere of* the evil one's power (i.e., the world of mankind), then does the ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ in 1 John 5:19 suggest that the "whole world" of the unregenerate is, like the disciples, merely *in the sphere of* the evil one's power, i.e., in the world, rather than actually subject to the evil one? If so, the case of the disciples is no different from that of the unregenerate in respect to the power of the evil one. Although both the disciples and the unregenerates are accordingly *in the sphere of* the evil one's power, neither group is actually *in* the evil one's power. In effect, this unwarranted interpolation of "in the sphere of" erases this distinction.

ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι *versus* ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ

The contention that τηρέω ἐκ in John 17:15 necessarily implies previous existence within fails to recognize a third set of antithetical expressions which is found in the immediate context. In John 17:11b the Lord prays, "Holy Father keep them in thy name which you have given me." And in John 17:12a he says, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name; those that thou gavest me I have

¹³In commenting on ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, Sasse points out that this sharp contrast between the state of the believers and that of the unregenerate is expressed by another set of Johannine absolutes: "As believers in Christ are ἐν χριστῷ, so the unbelieving cosmos is ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, and as Christ is ἐν ὕμιν, so the ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, ὁ πονηρός, the wicked one, is ἐν τῷ κοσμῷ" (Herman Sasse, "κόσμος," *TDNT* 3, 894).

"kept." But in John 17:15 we read, "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one" (RSV). It should be evident that there is a parallelism between "in the name" and "out of the evil one."¹⁴ These two expressions describe spheres of power that are mutually exclusive. To be "in the name" necessarily means that one is "out of the evil one." One cannot be "in the evil one" and "in the name." The believers, being "out of the evil one" and "in the name," cannot be "in the evil one" without also being "out of the name." To be "kept out of the evil one's power" is the same as to be "kept in the name." As a result "none of them is lost," i.e., perish (v 12). Consequently, to be "in the name" and "out of the evil one" is the same as being "saved," and to be "in the evil one" and therefore "out of the name" is the same as being "lost."

Now if the believers are "in the name" and therefore "out of the evil one," then how can the τηρέω ἐκ of John 17:15 imply that they are "in the evil one"? Those who are "in the evil one" are the lost, not the saved. "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition. . . ." (v 12). Failure on the part of the Lord to "keep" the disciples would be tantamount to them perishing, not undergoing persecution. John 17:15b assures the believers that they will never experience eternal perdition, not that they will be kept or protected from earthly persecutions. We cannot therefore interpret τηρέω ἐκ in John 17:15 to mean that the believers are to be protected from harm while in the evil one's power. The phrase τηρέω ἐκ in John 17:15 cannot imply previous existence within. This phrase must mean preservation *outside* of the evil one's power in John 17:15 and preservation *outside* of the hour of temptation in Rev 3:10.

FOUR PROBLEMS CONSIDERED

Gundry's interpretation of John 17:15 and Rev 3:10 presents the following problems: (1) it results in a contradiction with regard to whether or not the disciples/church may expect divine protection; (2) it deprives the church of Philadelphia of any meaningful word of encouragement; (3) in the light of the unique character of the great tribulation, it will not permit any future fulfillment of Rev 3:10; and

¹⁴As Riesenfeld points out: "It is evident that there is parallelism between ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι (v. 12) and ἐν τοῦ πονηροῦ (v. 15). Hence ἐν here does not have an instrumental sense but a transferred spatial sense and can be rendered by "in the sphere of power of faith in thy name" as the opposite of the power of evil, which is to be kept at a distance. . . . The same applies in Rev. 3:10, where the transfigured Christ protects His community against (ἐκ) eschatological temptation" (Harald Riesenfeld, "τηρέω," TDNT 8, 142).

(4) it denies that the object of ἐκ denotes that from which the disciple/church is delivered.

A Discrepancy

The notion that τηρέω ἐκ in Rev 3:10 and John 17:15 implies previous existence within must be rejected because this would in effect result in a contradiction between these two verses. In demonstrating this, Gundry's interpretation is summarized as follows: (1) The church saints in Rev 3:10 are the tribulation saints found in the subsequent chapters of Revelation; (2) The promise made in Rev 3:10 is to exempt these saints from the testings of the hour; and, accordingly, (3) The church/tribulation saints will not suffer during this period of time. However, since the Scriptures indicate that the tribulation saints do suffer during this time, Gundry's interpretation flounders at this point. In n. 35, p. 59, Gundry writes, "The Church will suffer the wrath of Satan and the AntiChrist in the form of persecution." According to Gundry, the promise in Rev 3:10 only provides exemption from the plagues that God will send upon those who have the mark of the beast.

As a result of attempting to dismiss the charge of his interpretation of Rev 3:10 being inconsistent with the known fact that the tribulation saints (which he identifies with the church) do indeed suffer the wrath of Satan and the AntiChrist, Gundry has left himself exposed to still another charge. According to his interpretation, the phrase "keep out of the evil one" in John 17:15 means protection from being harmed by Satan while in the sphere of danger. And the phrase "keep you out of the hour of testing" in Rev 3:10 means protection from the events within this period of time. These events, however, from which the church is to be protected are limited by Gundry to the plagues God will inflict upon the ungodly. According to Gundry, Rev 3:10 does *not* promise the church exemption from the persecutions of Satan. So, then, according to his interpretation of John 17:15, the church *will be protected* from "dangers" which are instigated by Satan, but according to his interpretation of Rev 3:10, the church *will not be protected* from such.

An Empty Promise

Gundry's interpretation of John 17:15 and Rev 3:10 also fails to provide any measure of comfort to the church in this period of trials. If God will protect his saints from the plagues he will inflict upon the ungodly, we may well ask why he doesn't protect them against those persecutions directed at them by Satan. If in fact the church will enter the great tribulation, it would seem that the Lord would provide

something more in the way of protection for the church as she faces the most terrible period of persecution in history. It seems a misuse of language to speak of those who are not divine targets (i.e., the church/tribulation saints) as being "protected" when in fact nothing is actually done to prevent them from suffering at the hands of Satan. It is a mockery to conceive of anyone being "comforted" (and surely that is the intent of the promise in Rev 3:10) by the fact that he is only the target of Satan. If while a believer is in the crosshairs of one sharpshooter (Satan) who fully intends to kill him, he learns that another one (God) promises not to do the same, but will not however protect him from the other, what comfort is there in this? How can one rejoice over this "promise of protection"? What consolation is there in such "protection" if one is left utterly exposed to the "wrath of Satan and the AntiChrist in the form of persecution"? Like the fine print in some insurance policies, Gundry's footnote so limits the promise of protection in Rev 3:10 as to make it meaningless.

Lack of Correspondence

Some expositors today teach that the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are representative of seven different kinds of churches that have existed throughout the history of the church. However, most premillennialists understand these seven churches to represent seven periods of church history in prophetic outline. This assumes a certain correspondence between the character and experience of the local churches described in these two chapters and that of the universal church throughout its history. It is upon this correspondence that an eschatological interpretation of Rev 3:10 is based. If "the hour of temptation" refers to a period of persecution in the past, then the promise of Rev 3:10, however interpreted, has long been fulfilled. This passage is thereby denied any eschatological significance.

Assuming, however, that each of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 corresponds to a particular period of church history, whatever is said of one of these local churches represents the experience of the universal church in the corresponding period of its history. Whatever *τηρέω ἐκ* implies for the local church of Philadelphia in the first century *must be the same* as what it implies for the universal church. The *τηρέω ἐκ* cannot, on the one hand, imply that the local church of Philadelphia would be kept out of the hour of trial, and on the other hand, imply that the universal church would enter into the great tribulation and emerge victorious at its end. If the *τηρέω ἐκ* means "be kept from harm while in the hour of trials," then the church of Philadelphia must have entered into the hour of trial, and the universal church will likewise enter into this period of

persecution. If *τηρέω ἔκ* means "to be kept out of the hour of trials," then the church of Philadelphia was assured that it would never enter into this period, and the universal church would, in like manner, be exempted from this period of suffering.

However, Gundry's interpretation of Rev 3:10 can only be sustained by denying this essential correspondence between the experience of the local church and that of the universal church. In the pre-tribulationist interpretation of Rev 3:10 this correspondence is maintained. Both the local church of Philadelphia and the universal church are kept out of the hour of trial. Since the church of Philadelphia passed into the Lord's presence by death, the promise to keep her from the hour of trial was fulfilled centuries ago. However, according to 1 Thess 4:15, the universal church will survive unto the coming of the Lord. Unlike the church of Philadelphia, it will not be kept out of the hour of trial by death. The promise to keep her from the hour of trial must, therefore, be fulfilled by prior removal.

If the *τηρέω ἔκ* in Rev 3:10b implies previous existence *within*, then the church of Philadelphia would have been informed that she would enter into the great tribulation, be preserved within it, and emerge victorious at its end. This is what Gundry claims for the future fulfillment of this promise. But if *τηρέω ἔκ* implies previous existence *within*, then there can be no future fulfillment. Both pre-tribulationists and posttribulationists believe that the hour of testing in Rev 3:10 is the same as the great tribulation which is described in Matt 24:21 as follows: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, *no, nor ever shall be.*" This passage clearly states that there will only be *one* period properly called the "great tribulation." If the church of Philadelphia entered into it centuries ago, then the whole issue is irrelevant today. The very existence of this issue in the twentieth century assumes that the great tribulation has not yet arrived; it is still in the future. Whatever was promised to the church of Philadelphia in Rev 3:10 has long been fulfilled. Suggesting that the phrase *τηρέω ἔκ* necessarily implies previous existence *within* is complicated by the fact that the church of Philadelphia never actually entered into the great tribulation. Therefore *τηρέω ἔκ* in Rev 3:10 cannot imply previous existence *within*.

The promise to keep the church of Philadelphia from the hour of testing necessarily implies that it was already out of this period of suffering. And since the saints of this church died long before its arrival, it is impossible for them to enter therein. The promise also pertains to the church era at the close of this age. The church at the end of the age will also be kept out of the hour of testing, but not in the same manner: "Then we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall be caught up together with them in the

clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17).

The Object of ἐκ

If τηρέω ἐκ in Rev 3:10b implies previous existence within, from what is the church to be delivered? Latent in Gundry's treatment of Rev 3:10 is the basic assumption that the object of ἐκ in John 17:15b and Rev 3:10b (τοῦ πονηροῦ and τῆς ὥρας) designates the sphere in which the disciple/church is "guarded." The unexpressed threat from which the disciple/church is "guarded" must be read into the construction. Although Gundry is careful not to interpolate the words "from dangers" in his treatment of John 17:15 and "from the trials" in Rev 3:10, it is clear from his comments on the word *keep* and *hour*¹⁵ that some such phrase must be supplied. To Gundry it is not deliverance "from the evil one's power" (ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ) for which Christ prays but rather deliverance from the "dangers" in the sphere of the evil one. And it is not deliverance "from the hour of testing" (ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ) which Christ promises the church, but rather deliverance from the "events" within this period of time.

Gundry points out that the ἐκ of Rev 3:10b is cited in BAG under l.c. "of situations and circumstances *out of which someone is brought*" (italics added).¹⁶ On the surface this tends to support Gundry's contention that ἐκ with τηρέω means *out from within* and therefore strengthens the posttribulational position. However, a careful study of the other references cited by BAG under l.c. will show that τηρέω ἐκ in Rev 3:10b does not convey this thought. According to BAG,¹⁷ this use of ἐκ is illustrated in the NT by the following passages: (1) Gal 3:13 with ἐξαγοράζω, "redeemed us from *the curse of the law*"; (2) 1 Pet 1:18 with λυτρόω, "redeemed . . . from *your vain conversation*"; (3) John 12:27, Heb 5:7, and James 5:20 with σώζω, "save me from *this hour*" (John 12:27), "save him from *death*" (Heb 5:7), and "save a soul from *death*" (James 5:20); (4) Acts 7:10 with ἐξαίρω, "delivered him out of *all his afflictions*"; (5) John 5:24 and 1 John 3:14 with μεταβαίνω, "is passed from *death* unto life" (John 5:24) and "have passed from *death* unto life" (John 3:14); (6) Rev 2:21; 9:20; and 16:11 with μετανοέω, "repent of *her fornication*" (2:21), "repented of *the works of their hands*" (9:20), and "repented of *their deeds*" (16:11); (7) Rev 14:13 with ἀναπαύω "rest from *their labors*"; (8) Rom 13:11 with ἐγείρω, "awake out of *sleep*";

¹⁵Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 58-60.

¹⁶Ibid., 55, n. 23.

¹⁷BAG, 233.

(9) Rom 11:15 with ζωή, "life from *the dead*"; and (10) Rom 6:13 with ζῶω, "alive from *the dead*." In these references the object of the preposition (see italicized words above) expresses that from which one is delivered. According to Gundry, however, deliverance in Rev 3:10 *is not* from the object of the preposition, i.e., "the hour," but from the "events" of the hour.

The use of ἐκ in Rev 3:10b is not the same as the other references listed in BAG under 1.c. Rather than ἐκ in Rev 3:10b being used "of situations and circumstances *out of which someone is brought*," it is used of a situation or circumstance (the hour of testing) *from which the church of Philadelphia is kept at a distance*. The use of ἐκ in Rev 3:10b is more like that given by BAG under 1.d. "of pers. and things with whom a connection is severed or is to remain severed."¹⁸ Cited under this usage of ἐκ is John 17:15 and Acts 15:29,¹⁹ the two other passages in the NT where τηρέω is found with the same grammatical construction it has in Rev 3:10b. In Thayer's treatment of ἐκ, Rev 3:10b is cited along with these two other passages under 6. "of any kind of separation or dissolution of connection with a thing or person." According to Thayer,²⁰ the construction τηρεῖν τινα ἐκ found in these three passages means "to keep one at a distance from." This does not suggest previous existence within but the perpetuation of a distance between the object of the verb and the object of the preposition.²¹

CONCLUSION

Interpreting the phrase τηρέω ἐκ in John 17:15 as implying the previous existence of the disciples within the evil one's power results in the following complications: (1) The text does not read τηρέω ἐν; as we have seen, it is this phrase that implies previous existence within rather than τηρέω ἐκ; (2) If ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ implies previous existence within, as does ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, then the relationship of the disciples to the evil one is the same as that of the unregenerate; (3) If, on the one hand, the disciples are "in the evil one," as Gundry's interpretation demands, they are "out of the name" and therefore lost; if, on the other hand, the prayer of John 17:15b assured the disciples of being kept outside of the realm of the evil one, "they shall never perish" (John 10:28); (4) In identifying the church with the tribulation saints and then limiting this promise of protection in Rev

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Acts 15:29 has the intensified form, διατηρέω.

²⁰Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 190.

²¹Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 57.

3:10 to the divine plagues, Gundry has neutralized the prayer in John 17:15 by the limitations of the promise in Rev 3:10. Rather than the church being kept from harm in the moral sphere of the evil one, she will suffer bitterly from the hands of Satan and the AntiChrist; (5) Gundry's interpretation of Rev 3:10 robs the church of any real consolation; (6) The local church of Philadelphia would have actually had to enter into the hour of trial if *τηρέω ἐκ* necessarily implies emergence from within the great tribulation; and (7) If the object of the preposition denotes the sphere in which one is guarded, rather than that from which one is delivered, then Gundry's interpretation necessitates reading something like "from dangers" or "from the trials" into the texts.

Gundry has recognized the importance of John 17:15 in determining our interpretation of Rev 3:10 in that it is the only other passage where *τηρέω ἐκ* is found in the NT. If this phrase were to suggest the existence of the disciples within the evil one's power, then this same implication is also likely in Rev 3:10. If, on the other hand, John 17:15 does not imply the existence of the disciples within the evil one's power, then Gundry's contention that *τηρέω ἐκ* implies previous existence within the hour of temptation is unfounded. These are fair and reasonable conclusions.

The supposed implication of "previous existence within" of *τηρέω ἐκ* must not be allowed to overthrow the explicit teaching of the text. If Rev 3:10 is a promise of protection *in* the hour of testing rather than out of this period, then it would read as such. The Holy Spirit would then have guided the Apostle John to write the preposition *ἐν* rather than *ἐκ* in the text. The only difference between these two Greek prepositions is a single letter. But this single letter spells the difference between this passage teaching pretribulationism or posttribulationism, and no amount of sophistry can twist one letter of Scripture into another.

ANALOGY

The difference between being "*kept* out of" and being "*saved* (delivered, redeemed, etc.) out of"

At 2:00 A.M. Mr. Jones in Apartment 506 wakes up. He smells smoke and turns on the light, but there is no fire. Then he notices smoke coming under the door leading into the hall. He opens the hall door and sees that the smoke is coming from Mr. Smith's apartment, 509. At this time Mr. Smith wakes up. It seems that he had been smoking in bed and had fallen asleep. The cigarette fell to the carpet and caused the fire which has him trapped within the apartment. Now

Mr. Jones from 506 is out in the hall and is about to open the door to 509 so as to help Mr. Smith when he hears a fireman call out, "Don't open that door!" The fireman runs up the hall to prevent Mr. Jones from opening the door and thereby allowing the flames to spread. Mr. Jones tells the fireman that a man is trapped inside. However, the fireman informs him that Mr. Smith will be saved out of his burning apartment by another fireman who by being raised up on a ladder outside the apartment will provide the only means of escape. Later Mr. Smith is delivered out of the fiery apartment. He has suffered severe burns, but is expected to make a complete recovery.

Ironically, although critical of the sophistry of others, Gundry indulges in some of his own. He does this by seeking to prove that "keep *out of* the hour of trial" really means "keep *in* the hour of trial." It is only natural to ask that if this be so why the preposition ἐν ("in") was not used instead of ἐκ ("out of"). He answers that it is all a matter of "emphasis." He writes,

As it is, ἐκ lays all the emphasis on emergence, in this verse on the final, victorious outcome of the keeping-guarding. The same emphasis crops up in Revelation 7:14, where the saints come "out of the great tribulation."²²

To Gundry being "*kept out of*" the hour of trial means the same as "*coming out of*" the great tribulation.

Gundry's main argument is simply this: since ἐκ is used with τηρέω in Rev 3:10b, the preposition carries, he says, with it "the necessary implication of previous existence within" as it does in Rev 7:14 where it is used with the verb ἔρχομαι ("coming").²³ Would Gundry have us believe that Mr. Jones' situation in being *kept out of* the burning apartment by one fireman is the same as Mr. Smith's situation in being *saved out of* his burning apartment by the other? Of course not! Nevertheless, as we have seen, Gundry sees little difference between Rev 3:10 where the church is promised to be *kept out of* the hour of testing and Rev 7:14 where the great multitude is said to *come out of* the great tribulation. Would Gundry try to convince us that the fact that Mr. Jones was "kept out of" the apartment necessarily implies that he was within? Of course not! Now if being kept out of a burning apartment does not suggest "previous existence within," then being *kept out of* the hour of trial does not necessarily imply "previous existence within." The necessary implication of the church of Philadelphia being *kept out of* the hour of

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

testing is that *it was out*. The church will be kept out of the fiery furnace of the great tribulation so as to never enter therein.

The nation of Israel, however, will enter this time of fiery trials, for we read, "Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it" (Jer 30:7, see 37:7, LXX). Being "saved out of," unlike being "kept out of," *does* necessarily *imply* "previous existence within." Like Mr. Smith, who woke up in the middle of his flaming apartment, Israel will also wake up and be delivered out of the great tribulation, but not without great suffering.

In contrast to the first half of chap. 7 of Revelation, which concerns the sealing of the 144 thousand Jews, the last half (vv 9-17) concerns the saved tribulation Gentiles. They are said to "come out of" (ἐκ) the great tribulation. They, too, like Mr. Smith, come out of the fiery trial. This necessarily implies that they were first within.

In conclusion, with the help of this analogy, we have seen: (1) that to be "kept out of," as Mr. Jones was kept out of Mr. Smith's burning apartment, does *not* imply "previous existence *within*" but rather "previous existence *without*," and (2) that to be "kept out of" implies protection which prevents entrance within.