

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
INTERPRETATION OF THE PROPHECIES OF THE BOOK OF
REVELATION**

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**REVELATION 3:10 AND
UNCONDITIONALITY IN
APOCALYPTIC
PROPHECY**

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Background

The doctrine forever kept before S.D.A. members as the distinctive message that justifies the church's existence as a Christian organization, separate and unique, is the three angel's message (cf Rev 14:6-11) as proclaimed within their ranks. This message has, as its major elements, the S.D.A. sanctuary doctrine and also their idiosyncratic interpretation of certain time prophecies from Daniel and Revelation.

The influence of the sanctuary doctrine is not limited to the S.D.A. three angel's message. This doctrine has also had a pervasive influence in S.D.A. thinking on such matters as the nature of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the nature of atonement, the relationship between law and grace, justification, sanctification, perfection, sin, forgiveness, prayer and intercession, evangelism and many other subjects.

The second major element of the three angel's messages is the S.D.A. interpretation of certain time prophecies in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Historically, the development of the sanctuary doctrine came out of the study of these prophecies.

Indeed, so basic are these prophecies to S.D.A. culture and thought, that S.D.A.'s often call themselves "a people of prophecy." It is because the identity and existence of the S.D.A. church is perceived as being inexplicably tied to these prophetic time prophecies and the concepts related to the sanctuary doctrine that sociological factors come into play when either are brought into question. In this sense then, the sanctuary doctrine and the S.D.A. interpretation of time prophecies are political doctrines- doctrines that not only influence practice and belief, but also indirectly have ramifications that reflect on the organisation itself and, as such, any challenge to these doctrines initiates action within the church to ensure organisational self-preservation.

This political activity was both overtly and covertly evident when a challenge on these two doctrines was made in 1979-80, that had unparalleled consequences throughout the SDA church in the Western world. This challenge, which focused mainly around the work of Dr. Desmond Ford, was many-sided in its enquiry. One major area of enquiry was the traditional S.D.A. historicist's interpretation of Dan 8:14 ("Unto two thousand three hundred day and then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" K.J.V.). This text is indisputably the foundation of the S.D.A. message and identity and upon which their interpretation of the three angel's message of Revelation 14:6-11 is based. In challenging their interpretation of this text, Ford was bringing into question not only certain theological viewpoints, but also the whole profession the church makes to the rest of the Christian community and to the world at large. He was indeed "laying the axe at the root"!

One of the points raised by Ford was that there is no justifiable reason to preclude this text (Dan8:14) from an interpretation using historical-grammatical principles of interpretation (Ford, 1980 pp. 215-21). It was asserted that the S.D.A. interpretation of Dan8:14 is only gained when contextual and grammatical issues are ignored (Ibid).

A fulfillment of Dan 8:14 that did not include 1844 A.D. was further highlighted by Review editor Don Neufeld concerning the real possibility of a first-century A.D. Second Advent. Neufeld (1979) was the first in recent times to bring the exegetical tension between the traditional S.D.A. interpretation of Dan 8:14 and the possibility of a first-century A.D. Second Advent into general SDA church literature when he raised the question: **"If ...Jesus had come long ere this, what would have happened to the long-**

term time prophecies, the 1260-days and the 2300 days?”(1979) Neufeld suggested that these time prophecies would have been interpreted differently from what is presently offered by S.D.A. historicists.

Raymond Cottrell added to the argument by publicly giving a history of the problems associated with Daniel 8:14 and specifying the inadequacies of the present position of S.D.A. on this text.

The work of Ford, Neufeld and Cottrell threw up in public as never before the problems present in S.D.A. prophetic hermeneutics and brought into question the non-negotiable position that has traditionally been taken on the 1844 A.D. dating.

In response to Ford’s remarks at a public meeting, the Sanctuary Review Committee, comprising 125 individuals (almost all church employees), was convened at Glacier View Ranch, Colorado, for scholar and leaders to deliberate on the issues.

One of the issues that received attention was the possibility of a Second Advent occurring during the times of the early church - a point that was raised not only by Ford, but also by Cottrell and Neufeld (who died before the conference was convened).

Although one paper was presented at the conference in favour of the possibility of a Second Advent in the early church and also favoring the conditionality of apocalyptic prophecies (cf., [Cottrell, 1980a](#)), the general tendency was a move away from these hermeneutical positions (c.f., Cottrell, 1980, pp.4,18-19, 25: note 7, 22 (numbers 1-77)).

The Special Sanctuary Issue of *The Ministry* and its position on conditionality of apocalyptic prophecy

Although there has been some question (c.f., [Grant 1980](#), 63; [Utt, 1980](#), 63-64) as to the abiding value of the Special Sanctuary Issue of *The Ministry* ([Spangler, 1980](#)), which reported on the Sanctuary Review Committee, the world President of the church, Neal Wilson, gave an unqualified endorsement of the special issue ([1980, p.65](#)). Indeed, recent publications from the Biblical Research Institute have further advanced the arguments raised in the special issue of *The Ministry* back in 1980 (for instance, [Holbrook, 1986a, 1986b](#); [Shea, 1982](#).) In the next few pages, statements from this special issue of *The Ministry* have been used to illustrate the “endorsed” position of “The Nature of Prophecy”:

Q. Is it true that all Old Testament prophecies were to be fulfilled by the first advent of Christ?

A. Apocalyptic literature has an unconditionally and inevitability about it that lends to its predictions the aspect of absoluteness. God is in control of man’s affairs, for He is sovereign. No matter what evil powers do, good will triumph according to God’s foreknowledge. In harmony with this view, we see in Daniel the rise of specific world powers, a little-horn powers with a predetermined time of supremacy and a time period after which God would intervene in behalf of his people (see Dan. 7:25; 8:14). A careful review of these apocalyptic prophecies shows that they do not terminate at the first advent. At that time the fourth world empire, Rome, was in full control, and the little-horn power had not appeared on the scene, indicating that only a section of the prophecy had been fulfilled and

much was yet to come. Therefore, as far as Daniel's prophecies are concerned, it was not God's plan, after He gave Daniel this prophetic preview of salvation history, that all Old Testament prophecies were destined to be fulfilled at the first advent. (28, 29)

It is true that with God all things are possible, but His prophetic word to Daniel reveals that history would not be consummated in the everlasting kingdom within the first century A.D. It is unfruitful for us, who have had the privilege of seeing the sure fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies over the vast span of history, to develop theories regarding what could have happened but in reality did not take place. (29)

Q. Is this the unanimous testimony of the New Testament? (--that "the whole weight of New Testament testimony [is] that God's ideal plan was that Jesus should have returned in the first century A.D., not long after his ascension to heaven. This is clearly taught from Matthew to Revelation." (Ford 1980,295)

A. Although the New Testament stresses the soon return of Christ, it also cautions against being overly optimistic about an imminent return. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians brings this point out. These believers were under the impression that the day of the Lord was imminent. To correct this erroneous impression, Paul informs them of events that had to transpire before the Second Advent could take place.... Incidentally, Ellen G. White remarks on this point as follows: "Not till after the great apostasy, and the long period of reign of the 'man of sin,' can we look for the advent of our Lord. This period ended in 1798. The coming of Christ could not take place before that time" (*The Great Controversy*, p.356, italics supplied).

Paul's testimony shows that the whole weight of the New Testament does not indicate a first-century return of Christ. (29).

Q. Is this conclusion correct? (that "Christ's statement 'Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place' (Matt 24:34 R.S.V)" demonstrates that "the evidence is overwhelming that Christ was saying He planned to return to that very generation He was addressing. The decisive fact is that the expression 'this generation' occurs fourteen times in the gospels, and always refers to Christ's contemporaries" (Ford, 1980, 297).

A. In view of the nature of Christ's Olivet discourse, there is certainly no overwhelming evidence that Christ intended to say that He would return to the generation He was addressing. On the contrary, the immediate context of Matthew 24:34 appears to relate this text to the generation living at the time when the special cosmic signs in the sun, moon and stars were to occur [1780,1833]. (30)

Q. Were these time prophecies capable of a first-century fulfillment? (Dan 7:25; Rev11:2;12:16;13:5)

A. It should be realized that a first-century fulfillment of these apocalyptic time prophecies is possible only if the year-day principle is not an inherent, Biblical hermeneutic. How these prophecies would have been fulfilled in such a short span of time is a field requiring considerable speculation. It may be interesting, from an academic point of view, but unfruitful as far as its practical

relevance is concerned. A hypothetically possible fulfillment of these prophecies in the first century is robbed of any real significance by the fact that there was no first-century return of Christ.

There is no reason why the year-day principle should not be accepted as a Biblical principle, especially when the historical fulfillment of all the above time prophecies provides ample evidence of its validity....

It is, at times, alleged that Christ could not have come before A.D. 1844 if indeed the 2300-year-day prophecy were unconditional and thus reaches to A.D. 1844. The argument continues that, since Christ could have come before A.D.1844, the 2300-year-day prophecy must be conditional. Is it true that an unconditional 2300-year-day prophecy would have prevented Christ from returning before A.D. 1844?

God in His foreknowledge (which is not to be confused with predestination) gave the 2300-year-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 with the intent that its only fulfillment would take place in A.D. 1844, following which the heavenly sanctuary would experience the divine cleansing activity...

In scripture, history is the unfolding of God's plan purpose, a movement of events foreknown and announced to His prophets through predictions. In classical prophecy the conditional aspect emerges, particularly with regard to God's purpose for ancient Israel predicated upon the covenant and Israel's willing obedience of covenant obligations. But in apocalyptic prophecy, there is no such conditionality. In contrast to classical prophecy, apocalyptic prophecy is universal in scope, and cosmic in nature. It is not linked to a covenant obligation. God's foreknowledge made it possible to predict in apocalyptic prophecy the rise and fall of world empires and their historical succession in a most uncanny manner. The same applies to historical details about the work and timing of the Messiah (see Dan 9:24-27) and the time period of supremacy over the saints by the anti-God little-horn power in Daniel 7:25. This foreknowledge included also the longest prophetic time period known in Scripture, the 2,300-year-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14....

If we were to speculate that Christ could have come back to earth before A.D. 1844, it would still not follow that in such an eventuality, the 2300-year-day prophecy is conditional. The reason for this is fairly simple and is stated clearly in Daniel 8:26: "the vision of the evenings and the mornings which has been told is true; but seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence" (R.S.V). The sealing of the vision means particularly that its time element of "true," was to be sealed in the sense that its detail of the exact time was to remain veiled until this time, which was "many days hence" (R.S.V.), or "many days in the future" (N.A.S.B). The sealing or veiling of the time element would make it possible for Christ to come at an earlier point in history, at least on a theoretical level, without in the least rendering the 2300 year-day prophecy conditional or forcing it to refer to another time than the one intended by God, i.e., 457 B.C. to A.D. 1844. On a theoretical and speculative level the sealing of the vision would make it possible for Christ to come before 1844 if this were in God's design. The fact that the vision was unsealed, as it were, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with the time element being clearly and widely perceived for the first time, allowed for

other options on the part of God without rendering the 2300 year-day prophecy conditional or making it refer to something else.

Nevertheless, it is best to move away from the round of theory and speculation to that of reality. The reality is that in God's foreknowledge that prediction of this long time period was made and that he found its only divinely designed fulfillment in the events of a A.D. 1844, when a new phase of ministry involving cleansing, restoring, setting right and vindicating began in the heavenly sanctuary. (pp.30-31)

Q. Do prophecies, including those of Daniel, have high primary fulfillment or application for the original hearers?

A. ... because of the different types of prophecy... one should be careful of demanding that all prophecy is applicable to the original audience. This caution especially applies to the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation that contain prophetic parallelisms, each covering the history of the prophet's time until the end of time. The relevance of this type of prophecy to the original hearers goes only as far as their historical situation is incorporated in the prophetic symbolism. For them, the unfulfilled prophetic imagery functions simply as an assurance that God controls the affairs of man and that his triumph is certain. Because a major part of the prophecies does not apply to their contemporary situation, they can obtain no certainty as to the specific fulfillment.

Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that portion of the book of Daniel was to be sealed, "for it pertains to many days hence" (12: 4, R.S.V. c.f., verse 9). Thus to insist that Daniel was to be understood by its original readership is contrary to the nature of the book itself and to its plain internal statements. This concept of the sealing of the book of Daniel was generally accepted by Christian scholarship during the Reformation and post-Reformation era. Unfortunately, after the general rejection of the advent movement in the 1840s, together with its historical approach to prophecy, the second angel's message began its proclamation, and the moral fall of Babylon became a fact, resulting in a loss of prophetic understanding among Christian scholars. The current principles of prophetic interpretation held by Christian scholarship, therefore should not be taken as normative for Adventists, because of the scholars conflict with the biblical continuous-historical view of prophecy upon which the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as a prophetic movement, is based.

It is illuminating to compare E.G. White's views on these matters. Referring to Daniel and Revelation she wrote, "these messages were given, not for those that uttered the prophecies, but for us who are living amid the scenes of their fulfillment"(Selected Messages, book 2, p. 114). "Each all of the ancient prophets spoke less for their own time than for ours, so that their prophesying is in force for us"(Ibid, book 3, p. 388). In regard to Daniel's own understanding of what he was shown, she said, "His wonderful prophecies, as recorded by him in chapters 7 to 12 of the book bearing his name, were not fully understood and even by the prophet himself"(Prophets and Kings p. 547). "That part of his prophecy which related to the last days, Daniel was bidden to close up and seal ' to the time of the end', " "but since 1798 the book of Daniel has been unsealed (The Great Controversy, p. 356). (p. 31-32)

In the years since The Sanctuary Review Committee of 1980, this position on “The Nature of Prophecy” has consistently been emphasised and repeated, at least in official publications (Shea, 1982; Lehmann, 1984; Johnsson, 1986; Hasel, 1986; Bennett, 1986; Strand, 1983,a,b; Holbrook, 1983a,b; Neall, 1983; Editorial, 1983)

Accompanying this emphasis has been the distancing in print from any hermeneutical material that attributes any type of conditionality to apocalyptic. Typical of this is Johnsson (1986), who labels an article in the official Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary that contains such ideas, as “wooden” and “speculative.” (p. 267). He points out that one of Ford's basic mistakes was that he followed the prophetic hermeneutics enumerated by the Church's official commentary, howbeit, a little more rigorously than traditional S. D. A. exegesis (p. 268). A sad day indeed when a man is redressed for holding a position also taken by the author of the essays on hermeneutics that were incorporated into the commentary itself (see Cottrell, 1980b, 14a; Mason and McIntyre, 1985,p.56)

At least Johnsson can be commended for being frank and honest in acknowledging the strange amalgam of prophetic hermeneutics present in the commentary. This amalgam can be seen as symptomatic of the tension present (and presumably still is, unofficially) between those scholars who felt conditionality applied to apocalyptic, and those who felt it did not apply.

The Main Argument of this Paper

Having summarised briefly the history on the debate concerning the applicability of conditionality to apocalyptic prophecy that has occurred in the S. D. A. Church of late, I would like to now outline more specifically the purpose of this paper.

When Ford (1980, p. 178-188) examined those New Testament texts that highlighted the expectation of the believers in the Second Advent as an impending contemporary event, texts including Revelation 3: 10, he did not take full advantage of the latter. **It is the purpose of this paper to show that Revelation 3:10 clearly teaches that those people to whom John would send his book would encounter the time of universal testing that would culminate in the Second Advent. This argument, if it is what scripture is saying, obliterates the position of those who stand by an interpretation of the 2300-day prophecy and the 1260-days that cannot allow the possibility of these time prophecies having a fulfillment in the early Church.** If my arguments are correct, then Revelation 3:10 is the nemesis of the SDA historicist's interpretation. How can that be? Let's consider the implications of the issue.

Implications of this Argument

The major outcome of this study is that if the biblical text does address an advent that could have occurred within the lifetime of John's contemporaries then it would behoove us to study the document with reference to a possible consummation of all the things written in the Revelation within the lifetime of those first-century A.D. Christians.

Only after that exercise has been accomplished can we then look at the principles used to interpret the various events in Revelation to ascertain how that interpretation can be applied to a later time.

Consequently then, since traditional S.D.A. historicism has made no attempt to proceed along these lines, its exegesis of these texts must be brought into question. In trying to apply these prophecies to our own time, certain assumptions have been made on an *a priori* basis without any consideration to historical-grammatical hermeneutics. Once the assumptions are shown to be doubtful, the whole scheme of exegesis, which is based on those assumptions, must likewise be questioned.

Holbrook (1986a) has commented to this effect:

"In recent years however it has been argued by some that all prophecy-including not only general prophecy as it appears in the major and minor prophets but also the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation-are to be regarded as conditional prophecy. That is, it is suggested that the possible fulfillment of any prophecy in its primary intent was conditional on the obedience of God's people. Such a position, where it to be proved valid, would affect radically Adventist interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation." (p. 259)

Notice also a comment by the then-World President of the SDA Church, Neil Wilson:

The position you have taken in regard to all Old Testament prophecy meeting its fulfillment in the first century and having no meaning beyond New Testament times except as reinterpreted by the New Testament, is so radically different that it will divide us on almost every point of eschatology and prophetic interpretation. (1983)

Implications of this Conclusion on SDA exegesis of the Book of Revelation

How radically would the conclusions of this paper affect SDA interpretation of the prophecies of Revelation? In the following paragraphs are listed some of interpretations that would need a complete overhaul:

i. Chapter 2 and 3

The whole explanation of the historicist's application of these church epistles to long periods of the Christian era would be totally irrelevant.

ii. Chapter 6

- The six seals would not refer to events throughout the Christian era concerning the corruption of the Christian church and its persecution of other Christians.
- The signs in the sun, moon and stars as well as the great earthquake would not refer to some event in the 18th and 19th century, but more naturally refer to the times of John's contemporaries.

iii. Chapter 7

The seal of God would not be the issue over Saturday of Sunday worship as Sunday worship was not an issue in the first-century A.D. among Sabbath-keeping Christians.

iv. Chapter 8

The events in the seven trumpets would not represent the “principal political and warlike events that occur during the same time [of the Christian era]” [Smith, 1944, p.474](#).

There would be no Gothic invasion;
no Vandal conquest of Italy and northern Africa;
no invasion by the Huns;
no Odoacer, the first barbarian ruler of Italy;

v. Chapter 9

There would be no fall of Chosroes III, king of Persian in the first woe;
nor the rise of Mahometism and the Saracens;
there would be no fulfillment of the five months by Othman’s assault on the Greek empire in 1449;
there would be no prediction of the existence of the Ottoman empire for “391 years and fifteen days” ending in August 11, 1840 ([Smith, 1944, p.507,517](#)).

vi. Chapter 10

The angel with the little book would not represent the preaching of the time prophecies of the book of Daniel after 1798 by the Advent Movement in the 1840s and thereafter by the Seventh-day Adventist Church;
the eating of the little book would not refer to the disappointment of those believers in the Advent Movement who found their prediction of the return of Jesus in 1844 was not true;
the statement “that there will be time no longer” would not refer to the absence of any time prophecies that extend beyond 1844 A.D. since time would not have extended to that date;

vii. Chapter 11

The two witnesses would *not* be the Old and New Testament, since there was no Bible (as we know it) in the times of the first-century. Even the New Testament did not exist and the documents that would later become the contents of the New Testament had different circulation areas and were not readily available for all the churches everywhere. As can be seen from the Revelation, the documents that were later to be called the New Testament were still being written. And John's epistles were probably at this time still unwritten. Perhaps the Gospel of John was still to be written too. The 1260 days for the two witnesses prophesying in sackcloth is not 1260-years, as this would extend beyond the life of the first-century believers and the promises of the seven epistles would be invalid;

France is not the nation here since it did not exist.

The 3½ times would not apply to the French Revolution; the anger of nations under the seventh trumpet would not refer to a period of conflict between nations beginning with “the revolutions of Europe in 1848” ([Smith, 1944, p.545](#));

The opening of the temple of God in heaven in the seventh trumpet would not refer to the proclamation by the Seventh-day Adventist church of their explanation of the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 in terms of their explanation of the Day of Atonement;

viii. Chapter 12

The 1260-days of the woman in the wilderness would not refer to 1260 years; it is rather 3½ calendar years for the original readers to endure all these things and still survive until the Second Advent.

The woman in the wilderness would not refer to the Dark Ages;

ix. Chapter 13, 14

The leopard beast from the sea would not represent the Roman Empire in its Christian form, i.e., the Papal Roman Empire of the Dark Ages.

The beast from the earth would not apply to the USA since the USA did not exist. This refers to a power in the times of these believers - a power associated with the pagan Roman Empire. The concept of the pagan and the papal Roman empire is obsolete with this interpretation since the papacy did not exist at the time of these believers.

The wounding of the leopard beast does not refer to the loss of temporal power by the pope beginning with his imprisonment and brief abolition by Gen. Berthier in 1798.

The healing of the wound does not refer to the restoration of the political power of the papacy.

The mark of the beast and the seal of God cannot be the issue of the worship on either Saturday or Sunday because according to the SDA's own position, Christians at this time kept the Sabbath according to the commandment. A more feasible solution is the issue over Jesus worship versus emperor worship - an issue that had already become a daily issue in the lives of those early Christians living in the Roman Empire.

x. Chapter 17, 18

The power here referred to as the harlot would not be the papal Roman Empire as it did not exist at this time. It refers to the pagan Roman Empire.

As can be seen by the above brief survey of current traditional SDA explanation of the contents of the book of Revelation, this means nothing less than a total overhaul of the SDA position on this prophetic book and by implication a total revamping of their world view with their idiosyncratic notion of events that are to develop before the end of time. Indeed what would survive of their present explanation concerning the pre-advent events in the book of Revelation?

The Primary Meaning of Revelation 3:10.

The New Testament has many references to the imminence of the Second Advent of Jesus, most of them are the subject of some very creative, fanciful and usually erroneous

positions by SDA historicists in an effort to avoid the plain statement that the generation of Jesus' day was to see the end of all things. But there are a few texts that are more precise in their prediction. One of these is Revelation 3:10: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth," A.V.

This is a text, the implications of which have not been considered seriously by S.D.A. historicists. As will be illustrated later, this is evident by the confusing, incorrect and anachronistic position that S.D.A. writers take on this text.

To state the meaning of the text in its simplest form, it says that the elder (cf. [Note3](#)) and those members of the ancient Philadelphian church who would continue to follow their devotion to the gospel would be protected during the final time of testing that was about to come upon all the world. Many would query as to what is so radical about such a interpretation of the text. It can be shown, and indeed I hope to do so in this paper, that this time of testing mentioned in Rev. 3:10 is a proleptic reference to Revelation 13:13-17. That is to say, the time of testing from which these ancient believers were promised special protection is the final and universal test that immediately precedes the Second Advent, and is not merely some local or national crisis. Given this, and given that in SDA thinking, the last plagues of Rev15 and the second coming occur immediately after this event, the conclusion becomes patently obvious that the Lord is here saying to the elder and the church members back in the first-century A.D. that they would see it through to the second coming of Jesus, and that they would be among the living who would see the appearing of Jesus in the clouds of heaven.

This interpretation then, raises the question of the conditionality of the Second Advent of Jesus and indeed of the events preceding the advent (not to mention the prophecies of those events). For some readers, this interpretation of Rev. 3:10 is obvious and is not a point worth belabouring. But within the S.D.A. historicist's prophetic scheme, this interpretation is intolerable

The implication of such an interpretation of Rev 3:10 is that all of the pre-Second Advent and Advent prophecies in the book of Revelation could have been fulfilled within the lifetime of the then-existing Philadelphian church members. This implication would then beg the question: "If the message of Revelation points to a possible Second Advent in the era of the early church, how can the present S.D.A. historicist's prophetic scheme accommodate such a concession?" In the S.D.A. historicist's prophetic scheme only one meaning of the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation is offered as the intended meaning of those prophecies - the S.D.A. historicist's meaning.

To now change this position and acknowledge that there is another meaning of the prophecies of Revelation that is more fundamental and true to the text is to throw into question the credibility of the S.D.A. historicist school and the truthfulness of their exegesis. This would follow because the S.D.A. historicist's interpretation would be seen as later or secondary interpretation of the time prophecies. If, according to historical-grammatical principles, a secondary interpretation has not been drawn using the principles involved in ascertaining the original interpretation, both the arguments and the conclusions of their interpretation would be questionable to say the least. How could they say they have followed these principles if they deny any interpretation that applies to the first-century A.D.?

The Four Arguments Explored.

Having outlined the background, the subject, and the implications of this study, I hope now to substantiate the positions asserted above:

- Firstly, that the meaning of Revelation 3:7-13 applies in its fullest and most direct sense to the first generation readers of John's Revelation in the Asia Minor Philadelphian church in the first-century A.D.;
- Secondly, that the time of testing referred to in Revelation 3:10 is the eschatological crisis of Revelation 13:13-17, and is not some local or national crisis, and that it cannot be read any other way;
- Third, that this crisis is said to occur within the lifetime of the elder of the Philadelphian church to whom the epistle was addressed and;
- Fourth, that the S.D.A. historicist's scheme of the seven churches - periods is anachronistic when it comes to this text.

I. The Intended Audience for this Epistle

The first point to be made is that the text of Revelation 3: 7-13 applies in its fullest and most direct sense to John's contemporaries in the Asia Minor Philadelphian church. This point is well stated in the [Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary](#):

The messages to the seven churches applied to conditions in the church in John's day. Had this not been so, these messages would have mystified and discouraged the Christians in the churches of Asia who were to read them (see on Rev 1:3). John would have proved to be a false prophet if the messages he addressed to his churches had not revealed the true situation in those congregations, and had not been appropriate to their spiritual needs ([Nichol, 1957, p.737](#)).

And again we read of the message to the Ephesian believers:

It is reasonable to conclude that the characterization of, and admonition to the church at Ephesus was particularly appropriate to the needs of the church at the time the message was written.... By analogy, the same is true of the message to the other churches."

Let it be said that while this commentary endorses a historical - grammatical interpretation of the seven messages to the churches it also endorses both the historicist's approach, and a 'devotional' approach ([Ibid, p.725](#)).

This historical-grammatical interpretation is of course the major position of conservative Biblical scholars and can be illustrated by just a few quotes from other writers:

"...Nor are the thoughts of the Christian books alien from and unfamiliar to the period when they were written. They stand in closest relation to the period. They are made for it; they suit it; they are determined by it... Similarly, the seven letters are the growth of their time, and must be studied along with it. They belong to the last quarter of the first century; and it is about that time that we may look for the best evidence as to the meaning that they would bear to their original readers" ([Ramsay, 1909, pp.52, 53, 56](#)).

" We have come very generally to call these seven paragraphs epistles. In reality, they are not such. No one of them is in complete epistolary form; they are special words addressed to the respective churches individually, but included in the one common epistle (the book is in the form of a letter cf. p.255) sent to all the seven. From this very fact then, as well as from the admonition at the close of each, Let everyone hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, it is clear that like the rest of the book each several message is also meant for all. While in each case the condition and circumstances of the particular congregation addressed are directly aimed at, there is in every 'epistle' spiritual truth for all. Every great revelation, whether O.T. prophecy, or N.T. epistle is given in view of definite contemporary and local circumstances, but it brings in this form truth of universal significance." (Beckwith, 1919, pp.446f)

"It seems much more probable that the letters are letters to real churches, all the more so since each of the messages has relevance to what we know of conditions in the city named. This does not mean that the letters originally circulated as individual units (though Charles takes this view). They were probably in this book from the first, and intended to be read by others than members of the churches named. John has addressed himself to the needs of the little churches but has dealt with topics which have relevance to God's people at all times and in all places. He is writing to the churches, but he is also addressing the churches as a whole." (Morris, 1969, p.57f)

" Another important landmark for the guidance of the interpreter is to be found in the purpose of the book and the historical surroundings of its origin. The Apocalypse is cast in the form of a letter to certain Christian societies, and it opens with a detailed account of their conditions and circumstances. Only the most perverse ingenuity can treat the messages to the Seven Churches as directly prophetic. The book starts with a well-defined historical situation, to which reference is made again at the end, and the intermediate visions which form the body of the work cannot on any reasonable theory be dissociated from their historical setting. The prophecy arises out of local and contemporary circumstances; it is, in the first instance at least, the answer of the Spirit to the fears and perils of the Asian Christians toward the end of the first century." (H.B. Swete, 1977, ccxvii - ccxviii)

In recent SDA publications we notice the work of Dr. Jon Paulien entitled The Deep Things of God, on the hermeneutics for the Apocalypse. He includes a full chapter on "The World of the Book of Revelation," wherein he explores the local issues pertinent to the churches of Asia Minor at the time of John's writing:

The original readers of Revelation therefore, seem to have been Christians whose position in society was becoming more and more precarious because of their faith. Concerned about where things were going in the future, they looked to John to provide direction and comfort in their situation....The churches of Asia Minor are seriously divided in how to relate to society and the problems around them. It is a period of both external and internal stress. So John wrote the book of Revelation not only to encourage the faithful in a time of impending persecution, but also to confront the churches about their fractured condition....the book of Revelation clearly had a powerful meaning for its

original time and place. It would have created discussion all through the churches of Asia Minor.... (2004, pp.22f, 28).

Lee Greer III endorses this position in his paper:

It has been noticed by students of Revelation that although seven major churches in the Roman province of Asia were chosen for specific address, the epistle must have been very early understood to be written to all the churches, similar to Paul who as 'the apostle to the nations [ethnoi]' likewise wrote epistles to only seven major churches, to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians (Muratorian Canon, ~200-300 CE; see also Charles, 1920). His other epistles were individually addressed.

Within the overall form of Revelation as an apocalyptic circulating epistle, the messages of the heavenly Son of man figure to each of the 7 churches evidence the conduct of a present-tense pre-Advent judgment of each of the churches, affirming strengths and convicting of weaknesses, calling for repentance and steadfastness in light of the immediate nearness of the Advent-Parousia with its executive judgment of rewards. Each of the 7 churches is throughout assumed to be existing and present as a contemporary church on that great final day of rewards. This is in continuing harmony with the immediate expectation of the Advent-Parousia found throughout the NT (see Appendix 3 below). (2003) [His Appendix III lists the relevant verses: "References indicating the urgent immediacy of the Advent expectation by the writers of the NT, and their first audiences in the apostolic church of the 1st century CE: Mark 1:15 = Matt. 4:17; Mark 13:30-31 = Matt. 3:2-12 = Luke 3:3-17; Matt. 10:23; 16:28; 19:23; 24:34-35 = Luke 21:32-33; Matt. 24:14; Luke 4:16-20; cf. John 21:22-23; Acts 2:16-21; 3:19-20; Rom. 13:11-12; I Cor. 7:29-31; 10:11; I Thess. 4:13-18 ~ II Thess. 2:2 - 3:5; Heb. 1:1-3; 9:25-28; 10:25, 27, 37; James 5:1-3, 8-9; I Peter 4:7, 17; I John 2:18; Rev. 1:1-3, 4, 11 (7 churches in Asia – present tense); 22:7, 10-12."]

Jacques Doukhan, in his publication *Secrets of Revelation*, says of the messages to the churches:

We should not take the seven churches on a strictly literal level. Indeed, their number hardly reflects the actual count of Asian churches, which were far more numerous. The Apocalypse does not include the two churches of Colossae and Heirapolis, both mentioned in the New Testament. Indeed, the seven churches of the Apocalypse represent the church as a whole, an interpretation by a third-century C.E. manuscript. [Doukhan footnotes: "Canon Muratorianus: The Earliest Catalogue of the Books of the New Testament, ed., Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Oxford, 1867), pp. 19, 45."] The concluding statement of each letter, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches," seem to address a larger audience. The letter speaks to all the churches, and anyone may benefit from their content, a point explicitly brought out in the fourth letter to Thyatira. It contains the phrase "all the churches" (Rev. 2:23).

The seven churches were chosen not only as part of the prophet's familiar surroundings (he'd been there and knew them), but also for their symbolic meaning. Extracting prophecy from a geographical location was common practice in Israel...Even the sequential order of the churches follows a certain geography –

the route of the traveler. [Doukhan footnotes: "See W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, updated ed., Mark W. Wilson (Peabody, Mass.: 1994), pp. 131-133."] (2002, pp.28f)

In concluding this first assertion - that the meaning of Revelation 3: 7-13 applies in its fullest and most direct sense to the first generation readers John's Revelation in the Asia Minor Philadelphian church in the first-century A.D., it need only be said that very little can be raised against it, and nothing that cannot be easily and thoroughly refuted.

Yet some, sensing the eschatological implications of Revelation 3:10 might raise the argument that only the devotional aspects of the seven messages are primarily applicable to the first-century church, and not the eschatological elements. For example, it might be said that the spiritual aspects of the message to the church in ancient Philadelphia are particularly applicable to their situation, but the mention in verse 10 of the final and universal time of testing applies only to the historical period of the Christian church, that is dubbed "Philadelphia."

I would answer this by saying firstly that there is no indication from Jesus to the ancient Philadelphian Church that they were to read their message thus. To all intents and purposes, the entirety of their message is addressed to them. He says to these ancient believers: "Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you..." It cannot be construed any differently. If the first-century A.D. Philadelphians were the ones who kept the word of His patience, then it was also the first-century A.D. Philadelphians who were promised to be preserved during the imminent global time of trouble, soon to occur. Secondly, I would advance the point that the entire correspondence of Jesus to the seven churches in first three chapters is eschatological. It concentrates on the eschatological-spiritual condition the believer is to seek after in order to receive the Lord with rejoicing at His appearing. A third point in reply to this objection is that there are insuperable problems involved in assigning the eschatological time of testing to the historical period that is classified as "Philadelphian" by S.D.A historicists, and I refer the reader to the section entitled "[Anachronisms S.D.A. Historicism](#)" for a discussion of these.

II The Time Of Testing in Revelation 3:10

The second assertion to be considered is that the time of testing referred to in Revelation 3:10 is *the* eschatological crisis of Revelation 13:13-17, and is not some local or national crisis, and that it cannot be read any other way.

a. Which crisis in the book of Revelation shall come on all the world?

Some may wish to say that the time of testing referred to in Rev 3:10 was just one of many fierce persecutions that the early Christians encountered. Therefore it is essential that this time of universal testing be defined as specifically as Scripture allows.

According to Jesus, who is speaking here in verse 10, this coming season of testing is not just any testing episode that the Philadelphian believers would face as Christians, but it is *the* hour/season of testing. The definite article is not being used here without meaning, anymore than the definite article in the phrase "*the* beast which comes up from the Abyss" in Revelation 11:7 is not being used without meaning; anymore than the definite article in

the phrase "*the* tree of life" in Revelation 2:7 is not being used without meaning. In these examples, there is no prior mention or description of these things which are qualified by a definite article. The definite article is in a sense a surprise, because it expects the reader to know *which* hour of testing, *which* beast from the abyss, *which* tree of life that the Lord is referring to. Yet in the latter two examples, although there is no prior information within the Apocalypse on the subject in question, there is more information later in the book. (For the beast from the abyss, see Revelation 17, and for the tree of life see Revelation 22:1.2.)

Similarly, one would also expect to find a reference to this time of testing in the later chapters of Revelation. This style of forward (proleptic) referencing would not be out of place here in the Revelation because it is Jesus Himself who is talking in Revelation 3 and He would be cognisant of all the Revelation as He was communicating it, and the use of the definite article for a detail of the Revelation that does not occur until later may just indicate that the whole communication was present in his consciousness as He spoke, and that He was not merely dictating words as they came from God.

Furthermore, chapter 1:1 states that the Revelation is a product of the mind of God the Father, and since the written messages are a verbatim report by John of the messages given by the Father to Jesus, which were to be conveyed to the respective churches, it is not so surprising to expect the work to have evidences of literary unity (including the use of prolepsis) - as one body of material that has been divinely created with the skilful use of human grammar, semantics, idiom and metaphor.

Turning now to define the phrase - the hour of testing in Revelation 3:10, we find that, although there is no other occurrence of this phrase in the rest of the book, the qualifying local clause: "which shall come upon the world to try those who live upon the earth" confines the type of event referred to, as a *global* crisis. And while the events outlined in the Revelation portray many crises, during which Christians and non-Christians alike would be sorely tested, most of those crises, in the Revelator's terminology, only affect a "third" or a "quarter" of humankind (see for example, Revelation 6:1-11; 8:5 to 9:21).

There is only *one* crisis in the book of Revelation that affects the entire world and that is the crisis precipitated by the beast from the earth (Revelation 13:11-18). Not only is this crisis *the* universal crisis, but according to God's response to this provocative action by the little-horned beast as recorded in Revelation 14:6-11, it is *the final* moral and spiritual crisis to be brought upon humankind, and the close of this crisis is the end of mercy towards unrepentant sinners. (see Revelation 14: 9-20). Joseph Bates said in the *Review and Herald*, in November, 1850 on this text:

Jesus, in verse 10, promises to keep all from the hour of temptation, or trial, that have kept the word of his patience. That is, all that are patient waiters in this state of the church, he will keep, when the decree goes forth from the Dragon [Rev.xiii,15] to kill them. Then Jesus is to come quickly, and the true church is exhorted to hold fast their experiences in the past, verse 11. (Gordon, 1983b, p.143)

Edwin Thiele, in his *Outline Studies in Revelation*, endorses this view of Rev. 3:10 alluding to a future global event with statements from Ellen White:

To be kept from the hour of temptation Rev. 3:10; Mal 3:2, 3; Ps. 91:14; T. V.5, p.297.

Twentieth Century New Testament: “You kept in mind my teaching as to endurance, and therefore I will keep you in mind in the hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world, the hour that will test all who are living upon earth.”

Moffat’s Translation: “Because you have kept my call to patient endurance, I will keep you safe through the hour of trial which is coming upon the whole world to test the dwellers on earth.”

Just before us is the “hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” All whose faith is not firmly established upon the word of God will be deceived and overcome... Those who are earnestly seeking a knowledge of the truth, and are striving to purify their souls through obedience, thus doing what they can to prepare for the conflict, will find, in the God of truth, a sure defense. “Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee,” is the Saviour’s promise. He would sooner send every angel out of heaven to protect His people, than leave one soul that trusts in Him to be overcome by Satan. (1950, p.560)

“Though God’s people will be surrounded by enemies who are bent upon their destruction, yet this anguish which they suffer is not a dread of persecution for the truth’s sake; they fear that every sin has not been repented of, and that through some fault in themselves they will fail to realize the fulfillment of the Saviour’s promise, ‘I will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world.’” G.C., p.619. (1959, pp.67f)

Lee F. Greer III, in his study on “*The Revelation: The Covenant and the Christ*” suggests the same eschatological implications for the universal crisis in Rev 3:10:

“The hour of trial [tys w/ras tou peirasmou]” is an articular phrase indicating reference to an event familiar to the author's audience namely, the expectation in early Judaism / Christianity of an unprecedented episode of trouble, great distress and suffering to immediately precede the final victory of the kingdom of God (Aune, 1997 cit. Volz, Eschatologie, pp. 147-63). Hence, the phrase is multi-allusional. The earliest echo of such an idea goes all the way back to Jacob (eponymous Israel) in his darkest hour when he wrestled supernaturally crippled with a Night Stranger before reconciling with his brother Esau (Gen. 32-33). This is reflected in Jer. 30:7 MT 'Alas! for that day (is) great, because none (is) like it, and it (is) a time of trouble for Jacob, but he shall be saved from it.' These ancient motifs are re-echoed eschatologically in Dan. 9:27; 12:1; Zech. 12-14; T. Mos. 8:1; Jubil. 23:11-21; II Apoc. Bar. 27:1-15, and in Mark 13:7-20 = Matt. 24:15-31; Luke 21:20-24; Rev. 7:14 among other places; Aune, 1997 ref. Volz, Eschatologie). This episode of distress was also conceived of as 'the woes of the Messiah' (Isa. 26:16-19; Hos. 13:13; Mic. 4:9-10; Hag. 2:6; Mark 13:8; Matt. 24:8; Aune, 1997 cit. Volz, Eschatologie), or more precisely, 'the birth pangs of the Messiah.' (<http://www.jesusinstituteforum.org/Rev2-3HCE.html>) [Greer’s references include: Aune D. 1997. Revelation. (Vol. 1: Revelation 1-5). In: D.A. Hubbard and G.W. Barker (Gen. eds.), J.D.W. Watts (OT ed.), R.P.

Martin (N.T. ed.), Word Biblical Commentary (52A). Dallas, TX: Word Books, Word, Inc., but there is no bibliography for Volz.]

Jean Zurcher, in his commentary on the book of Revelation, also endorses this view:

The third result: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (3:10). We have here a direct reference to events at the end of the world as predicted in the Old Testament: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (Daniel 12:1). (1980, p.54)

b. Is this crisis a time of testing?

Given then that this final crisis is the one and only *universal* crisis mentioned by John, the next question to be asked is whether this final and universal crisis is a time of testing for all those who dwell on the earth? This is answered by looking at the intentions of this beast from the earth and what part the human family take in the beast's plot.

The following texts from Revelation 13:12 and 13:15 make it clear that the beast from the earth seeks to enforce the worship of the beast of Revelation 13:1-4 and its image:

"...And [he] made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast whose fatal wound had been healed. (13:12 NIV)

" He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. (13:15 NIV)

The two methods of persuasion used by this beast in accomplishing his intentions are deception and then coercion through economic sanctions.

In regard to deception, we read in Revelation 13: 13-14:

"And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered then to set up an image on honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived." (NIV)

In regard to coercion through economic sanctions we read in Revelation 13: 16,17:

"He forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead so that no-one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name." (NIV)

In response to these intentions of the beast from the earth, God sends his persuasive message also with accompanying life of death warnings:

Then I saw another angel flying in midair and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour

of His judgment is come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.'

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured out full strength into the cup of His wrath." (NIV)

Therefore we can see that the issue is over man's worship, and there is a contest between God and the beast from the earth for the universal abolition and disregard for the other's worship among the human family by imposing terrible threats on those who participate in the worship each other forbid. The part which every person involved must play is to choose which command and threat to heed and which to ignore. There is no neutral ground here.

I think there is enough evidence here to say that this final and universal crisis is a time of testing, a time of trial of the hearts and motives of every person affected. It is the final test - the final opportunity - to display loyalty to God by those who are alive at the time. Their eternal destiny is dependent upon the outcome of this test.

From the foregoing then, we can conclude that the hour of testing of Revelation 3:10 is the universal and final test precipitated by the beast from the earth enforcing false worship and culminating in the final separation of the righteous and the wicked. It is thus defined by the Revelator and the depiction of this final crisis as the *only one* which affects "every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev14:6; 13:16 NIV) is clear enough to assert that the hour of testing in Revelation 3:10 is the global crisis depicted in Revelation 13:13-17.

Smith, at his comments on Rev 3:10 refers the readers to his comments on Revelation 13: 13-17, where he calls this trial "the closing test":

Thus closes Revelation 13, leaving the people of God with the powers of earth in deadly array against them and the decrees of death and banishment from society upon them and the decrees of death and banishment from society upon them for their adherence to the commandments of God. Spiritism will be, at the time specified, performing its most imposing wonders, deceiving all the world except the elect. (Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2: 8-12) This will be the "hour of temptation," or trial, which is to come, as the closing test, upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth, as mentioned in Revelation 3: 10. What is the issue of this conflict? This important inquiry is not left unanswered. The first five verses of the following chapter [Rev 14: 1-5] complete the chain of this prophecy, and reveal the glorious triumph of the champions of the truth. (1944, p. 623)

This is the same conclusion C. Mervyn Maxwell came to when he calls the hour of trial in Rev. 3:10 "the final tribulation":

The time of trouble that occurs in connection with Christ's coming is the reverse of an earlier tribulation described in the words of Matthew 24:9, "They will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death." In this earlier tribulation the saints are delivered to death. In the final tribulation the saints are delivered from death. Revelation 2:10 speaks of the earlier tribulation, "You shall have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Revelation 3:10 speaks of the final tribulation. “Because you have kept my word of patience, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming in the whole world. (1981, p.299)

William Miller had an entirely different view of this than what is presented by Smith. Probably following the lead from standard Protestant historicist texts of the time, Miller presents a very novel interpretation of Rev.3:10. No comment can be made about it, except that it is so typical of historicist commentators of the period, and so absolutely irrelevant to the text itself. His lead in interpretation of this text is not repeated today by SDA historicists, so it can be disregarded as relevant in this discussion. It is just noted in passing to show that the view on Revelation espoused by early SDA pioneers, as expressed by Smith above, did not come from Miller.

10th verse, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth.” This part of the prophecy was fulfilled on or before the French Revolution, when Atheism and Deism made such rapid progress through Europe or the Roman government, which in prophecy is called the earth. See. Rev xii.9. And it is a fact that through this age of profligacy and corruption, the church retained her principles as pure and ...th (?) as little defection as any age in modern times, although ...en (?) of the world were led away by the plausible writings of Voltaire, Hume, Tom Paine, and others, yet it had no effect on the christian church: and the promise, ‘I will keep thee from the hour of temptation,’ was fully and faithfully accomplished; and the very means that satan used to destroy the religion of Jesus Christ, (or the twelve fishermen,) was the means of bringing the church out of the wilderness. And those governments of the world which had for more than twelve centuries persecuted the children of God, now granted free toleration for all men to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. And from this data we may see the “angel flying through the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth.” Here the church began to awake to the subject of missions, and while the world was tempted and tried, the kingdoms of the earth shaken to their center, (yet not destroyed) while the civil power of the mother of harlots, the inquisition of Spain, and the horrible means of torture, persecution and slavery and cruelty, were all swept away in one revolution, the church, by the power of Him who had promised to “keep them,” passed through the fiery ordeal without the smell of fire on her garments. (1936, pp.118-119)

III The Contemporary Philadelphians in John’s Time would see the Second Advent.

We have seen in the previous section that the time of trouble mentioned in Rev. 3:10 is a universal time of trouble, and further, that it is a time of *testing* of the hearts of all men and woman on Planet Earth. The argument of this paper is that the historicist’s application of the seven messages to the churches as seven consecutive historical periods has insuperable problems when it comes to locating this universal time of testing in the Philadelphian period as the text indicates we must, if we are to use the methods of the historicist. We have shown earlier that only two options are open to SDA historicists to choose. If their historicist application of this message to the nineteenth century cannot

cope with this anomaly, then they have no choice but to admit it applies to the *other* period in time where they acknowledge the messages apply – the times of the first-century believers who were the recipients of the Apocalypse in the first place. On the basis of this assertion then, I would conclude that the ancient Philadelphian overcomer was promised that God would keep him in the crisis precipitated by the beast from the earth that would culminate in the wrath of God and the second coming. Thus it is an implicit promise that the overcomers would see the Second Advent in their day (though not all would escape the punitive measures of the beast's death decree (cf., Rev 20:4; and Note 7 in Appendix)).

Notice the same conclusion stated by Greer:

v10 – 'keep the word of my patience' – This commendation may well be a reference to an eschatological injunction from Luke's version of Jesus' Olivet Discourse for Christians in trial and persecution, 'In your patience [ypomony] you will gain your souls' (Luke 21:19, and possibly appearing also in Rev. 1:9; 13:10; 14:12). 'I also will keep you from the hour of trial [kagw/ se tyrysw/ ek tys w/ras tou peirasmou]' does not refer to removal of the saints as in the 'pre-tribulation rapture' doctrine, but to protection from the temptation as in John 17:15 'I do not ask that You take them from the world, but that You should keep them from the evil [tyrysys autous ek tou ponyrou].' 'the hour of trial...being about to come on all the inhabited world [tys w/ras tou peirasmoutys mellousys erchesthai epi tys oikoumenys olys]' is another clear reference to the immediacy of the final hour about to overtake the world.

(<http://www.jesusinstituteforum.org/Rev2-3HCE.html>)

Furthermore, as Morris (1969), Swete (1911, p.29), Beckwith (1919, p.451) and Nichol (1957, p.745) point out, when the Revelator says "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches," (Rev3:13 NIV) he is also applying the message of the reality of seeing the second coming to every contemporary first-century church member.

Thus the promise to the church members in ancient Ephesus to eat from the tree of life (Revelation 2:7) also holds true for a Smyrnan believer (cf. Revelation 22:2: nations will eat from that tree, not just Ephesians). Similarly, the promise to the ancient Philadelphian believer to be kept during the crisis over the mark of the beast also holds true for any other believer who was a contemporary with the ancient Philadelphian group addressed by this 'epistle'. This is obviously the case because apart from the support of Revelation 3:13, verse 10 says that this hour of testing comes on all the world - Philadelphians, Romans Corinthians, Pergamonians, Laodiceans included.

Before leaving this section, in summary of the assertions raised, let it be said that the time of testing in Revelation 3:10 is *the* eschatological crisis of Revelation 13:13-17, which is the only crisis described by John as universal. Not only is it the *only* universal crisis, it is the *final* crisis, and it is indeed a time of testing for all human kind - believer and unbeliever. The promise to be preserved during that time was not restricted to those ancient believers in Philadelphia but, as Revelation 3:13 proves, this would apply also to their contemporaries who were faithful to their calling. Therefore, this clearly shows that a Second Advent was possible for John's contemporaries.

As an aside, this conclusion also leads us to another consideration concerning the most cherished of all texts in the SDA church – that of Rev 14: 6-12. The announcement

by the angel that “the hour of his judgment is come” would not apply to 1844. It could have come in the times of the early church – a very unpalatable position for SDA historicists. 1844 is not a preordained time in the history of the world.

a. Some Objections to this Point Addressed

Some, seeing the implications of these points will raise objections and so, before I look at the anachronisms in the S.D.A. historicist's scheme in relation to this text, I shall address a few objections that may be raised against the conclusions of this section.

xi. God would “keep” them by not having the crisis during their lifetime

Some might acknowledge that the text of Revelation 3:10 does apply to John's contemporaries at Philadelphia, but they get around the statement concerning the Philadelphian's preservation by God in the imminent universal time of trouble by saying that John's contemporaries are kept from the hour of testing because of God's providential care that kept the crisis from occurring during their lifetime. Thus the faithful overcomers have all passed into the grave and their souls have been kept from being touched by the universal hour of testing. In this sense then, God has fulfilled his promise to these faithful overcomers.

This objection is invalid at a few points. The first is that the promise of Revelation 3:10 does not say that God will keep the universal test from coming on the world, but rather, it says that this test is coming and that “ I will keep you from being morally and spiritually affected by it.” That is to say, God's "keeping" is related to the person/s being addressed, and not to the occurrence/ non-occurrence of the crisis. This is not to say that God doesn't avert crises, but rather, that the text in this case does not explicitly state that this will be the goal or object of God's "keeping" activity.

The second point at which the objection is invalid is the idea that the concept of "keeping" by God includes the protection that death provides from the evils of this world. Although the apostle John uses the word "keep" (τηρω) around 35 times out of a total N.T. usage of 75, none of his uses refer to a "keeping" by God of the believer which includes death as the means of accomplishing this preservation. Also, let it be observed that the precondition to this preservation in Revelation 3 is keeping the word of His patience and not by dying. (See further comments on this in Note 5, and Note 7 in the Appendix.)

xii. The Epistles apply primarily to the seven periods of Church History, not to the first-century A.D. church.

A second objection to the implications of Revelation 3:10 raised in this section is that the messages to the seven churches apply primarily to those periods of Christian history (i.e., the S.D.A. historicist's scheme) and only secondarily to the actual churches which were the initial recipients of the messages. To answer such an objection I would refer the reader back to section entitled “[The Intended Audience for this Epistle.](#)”

This objection denies the most basic of all the principles of interpretations. Let me quote again from H.B. Swete on this point:

The Apocalypse is cast in the form of a letter to certain Christian societies, and it opens with a detailed account of their conditions and circumstances. Only

the most perverse ingenuity can treat the messages to the Seven Churches as directly prophetic. The book starts with a well-defined historical situation, to which reference is made again at the end, and the intermediate visions which form the body of the work cannot on any reasonable theory be dissociated from their historical setting. The prophecy arises out of local and contemporary circumstances; it is, in the first instance at least, the answer of the Spirit to the fears and perils of the Asian Christians toward the end of the first century. (H.B.Swete, 1977, ccxvii - ccxviii).

xiii. The promises to the first-century A.D. church were only symbolic and their real fulfillment was to occur in the historical period assigned to Second Advent in our time.

A third objection that could be raised is that although the message applied primarily to the ancient Philadelphian believer, and secondarily to the period of Church history dubbed "Philadelphian" by the S.D.A. historicist's scheme, the fact that this final and universal time of testing did not occur in either period infers that the trials of the early believers and the trials of the Advent pioneers were just symbolic of the trial that would be encountered by those believers who shall indeed face the final and universal time of testing. In reply I would assert that there is no room in the text to entertain such an interpretation. Jesus said to the ancient Philadelphian believer (or if you want, to the believers in the "Philadelphian" period of Church history), "because *you* have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep *you* from the hour of trial which is coming upon all the world,," The personal pronoun puts to rest the suggestion that Jesus isn't really inferring that the ancient Philadelphians (or believers in the "Philadelphian" period) would encounter the final and universal test "which is coming....."

The central and most crucial aspect of the reference in Revelation 3:10 to "the time of testing which is coming on all the world, is the phrase "which is coming." The temporal location of this crisis is really the basis of my argument and one of the points at which S.D.A. historicism shows itself to be wanting.

To be strictly correct to the historicist's interpretation, this time of testing which is coming could only have come during the time of the Philadelphian church, and so by the time we get to the Laodicean period, the global time of testing has occurred and now we can refer to it as "the time of testing that came (past tense) on all the world" to test them all.

S.D.A. historicists have traditionally placed "the hour of testing" in the future (White, 1888, 560) and have not seen the event as one that is confined to the "Philadelphian" period of church history. It is suggested that the phrase "which is coming" merely states that this crisis is in the future, and that one day it will occur. It could be asserted that there is no hint in the text at all that this closing test on all mankind had to occur in the "Philadelphian" period of church history.

The rejoinder to this assertion is that the text demands the occurrence of this crisis within the "Philadelphian" period. This is supported by the second person pronoun in the text: Because you Philadelphians have kept the word of My patience, I will keep you Philadelphians from the hour of testing which is coming on the whole world to test those who live on the earth. (I have used the plural with the pronoun "you", because although the epistle is explicitly addressing the elder of the church, it is also addressed implicitly to

the church, whose spiritual atmosphere is directly affected by the elder who is the immediate recipient of the epistle.)

The burden of proof is upon S.D.A. historicist's to show how the Lord could help the believer living in the "Philadelphian" period of church history from being overcome in the hour of testing when, according to their assertion, the hour testing doesn't occur during the "Philadelphian" period, but rather during the "Laodicean" period. To my mind there would have to be some break between the first clause ("Because you Philadelphians have kept the word of My patience") and the following clause ("I will also keep you from the hour of trial...") in order to divorce the hour of testing from the experience of the believers to whom this epistle applies. And that is impossible because of the syntactic link "because" (etc)- between the first clause and the second clause.

Furthermore, it is because of the syntactic link between these two clauses as well as the unmistakable association between the pronouns "you...you" and the crisis which is coming that brings the reader to the conclusion that this hour of testing will come while the "you" he is referring to in verse 10 is still alive. I cannot see how the elder of that ancient Philadelphian church could have understood it any differently. When it said "you", he would have understood it to mean himself, would he not? Then what else could he have understood from the statement: "I will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth" than that he would not only encounter the last crisis of the world but that he would also be preserved from being overcome? Was the Lord deceiving him, giving him a hope of actually seeing it all finish in his lifetime, when in fact God was not really meaning what He was saying?

The only possible response that I can conceive of, that could be used in an attempt to nullify these observations is to somehow conclude that when Jesus was addressing the elders of these seven Asia Minor Churches back in the first-century A.D., he wasn't really meaning that His messages to these elders applied to them! And I do not know how this conclusion could be reasonably substantiated. The argument that Jesus was not really referring to the last crisis, has already been answered.

xiv. This promise doesn't apply to the Philadelphians.

To deny this anachronism, they would have to say (and indeed this is one way the text can be wrested from its true sense to accommodate S.D.A. historicism) that although the rest of the message to the "Philadelphian" period of the church is applicable to the time period assigned, this promise should not be included in the "Philadelphian" message, but more correctly should apply to overcomers in the "Laodicean" period. That is to say, in traditional S.D.A. thinking, it is the overcomers in "Laodicea", not those "Philadelphia", who are kept from "the hour of temptation which shall come upon the world to try those who dwell upon the earth"!

Given that *all* the promises (Revelation 3:10 excepted) in the seven messages to the churches are applied by S.D.A. historicist's to the period represented by the appropriate church, it is quite anomalous that only *one* exception should be made for this promise that applies to the "Philadelphian" period. Where is the precedent justifying such a violent treatment of the text?

Notice this statement from the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, that discusses the fanciful theory of spiritual "membership" transfer from one "church (i.e., a particular spiritual state) to another:

"if two or more periods are to be considered as existing simultaneously the consecutive pattern is broken, the individual messages cease to have any chronological relationship to history, and there remains no valid basis for assuming that the Laodicean message has any more particular import for our time for any other. The message to any one of the seven "churches" is specifically applicable to the Christian Church at a particular "churches" represent seven consecutive periods of time spanning the Christian era and that each message has a specific application to but one period of time. Only thus can Christians of any period be considered as belonging to a particular "church" and only thus can the Laodicean message be applied in a special way to the "church" in our time.... The proposal that Laodiceans must leave their "church" and become Philadelphians in order to be saved is based on the idea that each "church" represents a particular spiritual state or condition. Indeed, each of the seven does have its own problems, and the counsel, warning and promise to each are appropriate to it. (Nichol, 1957,764).

From this statement then, the validity of including the promise of Revelation 3:10 in the "Laodicean" period is ruled out and S.D.A. historicists are in an inescapable dilemma: The Revelator puts the final and universal time of trouble in the "Philadelphian" period; S.D.A historicism has located this time of testing in the "Laodicean" period; yet according to our own defense, each promise is appropriate only to its own period and cannot be applied to another period. Either the time of testing occurred between the late 1700's and 1844 A.D. or the S.D.A. historicist's application of the seven epistles to seven consecutive periods of time has "no valid basis" since the messages of Philadelphia and Laodicea are not "specifically applicable to the Christian church" at the appropriate time in history.

xv. The mention of the crisis in Rev 3:10 is conditional on the churches' response to its responsibilities

One attempt around this anachronism could be to say that Revelation 3:10 only expresses the possibility that the final, universal hour of testing (and the subsequent events) could have occurred during the "Philadelphian" period; the occurrence / non-occurrence of this event was dependent upon the church's response to the "Philadelphian" message.

Apart from the fact that this argument supports the applicability of conditionality to apocalyptic prophecy (the very point which current S.D.A. historicism is arguing against), it falls short on other grounds. Johnsson (1986) says that

"Apocalyptic predictions are usually unconditional. Only where the covenant setting with Israel predominates is conditionality present; and then it indeed is present. Elsewhere the divine sovereignty and foreknowledge portray history on the grand scale.' (p. 286).

Accordingly, Johnsson would say that Revelation 2 and 3's cryptic history of the church is guided by the foreknowledge of God, otherwise how could an accurate statement concerning the future state of the church in any period of history A.D. be given?

(see Appendix [note 5](#)). Thus Johnsson would argue that Revelation 2 and 3 are an expression of God's foreknowledge. Although someone may say that since the church is the new Israel (cf. Rev2:9; 3:9), conditionality applies to the seven "epistles", Johnsson would reply by saying that although there are conditional statements in the seven "epistles", the statement concerning the coming hour of testing has no explicit conditional element attached to it. The only conditional statement in this regard is the *individual* believer's choice when the crisis occurs.

Therefore, because S.D.A. historicism sees the portrayal of the seven periods of church history as given through the foreknowledge of God, the statement concerning the final and universal hour of testing occurring during the "Philadelphian" period is not according to their own argument, subject to conditionality. Thus the objection that Revelation 3:10 only expresses the possibility that this final, universal hour of testing (and subsequent events) could have occurred during the "Philadelphian" period has no support, as long as apocalyptic prophecy is seen as the product of God's foreknowledge and not just an expression of His will and purpose (see Appendix [note 5](#)).

xvi. The close of probation before 1850 and the offer of mercy in the Laodicean period (post 1844)

A further complication for a historicist's approach to the epistles is the existence of the Laodicean message *after* the Philadelphian message. Even if the universal time of testing is acknowledged as being said to occur during the "Philadelphian" period, the problems are made even more troublesome.

It is generally conceded among S.D.A. historicists that when the time of testing over the mark of the beast is finished, probation for mankind generally is closed (cf. Rev 14:9-11), man's response to God's last warning message has been made, and every case is decided for life or for death. If then, in S.D.A. historicist's thinking, each "church" period is consecutive and probation for humankind finishes when "the time of testing which occurs during the "Philadelphian" period is finished, how come there is another period – "Laodicean" – which still offers the opportunity for repentance (cf Revelation 3:18-20)?

xvii. The time of testing only began in the "Philadelphian" period but it is still developing during our day. Its full manifestation is still future.

This position tries to harmonise their assertion that the final crisis will occur in the future (which is clearly the Laodicean period in their thinking) and the statement that the Philadelphian believers were to experience it (i.e., Christians in the late 18th century to early 19th century). We shall look at SDA writers who asserted this view shortly. This is such a ridiculous argument it is worth spending a little time delineating just how crooked this type of thinking really is.

For there to be a time of testing for the Christians in the late 18th century to early 19th century of the scale referred to in Rev 13 (that SDA's say is the crisis refers to in Rev 3:10) certain things, according to their understanding need to have developed.

They include:

The miracles of deception by the image of the beast since these inspire the people to follow the dictates of the image of the beast and introduce the issue of the "hour of testing."

The forming of the image of the beast of Rev 13 since it is the image of the beast that precipitates the test;
The imposition of the mark of the beast and its worship since this is the issue in the “hour of testing” and;

Adventists would balk at saying such a thing because they understand immediately the implications in their own writings of such a position. But for the benefit of those not familiar with these implications, I will explain them in more detail using SDA sources to define the terms so they may see the reason for the embarrassment of SDA members in endorsing this line of reasoning.

The Miracles of Deception by the Image of the Beast

In the following quotes we read of a revival that encourages the imposition of the mark of the beast. It is a precursor to this test, and as such should occur before the image of the beast enforces Sunday worship:

“As spiritualism more closely imitates the nominal Christianity of the day, it has greater power to deceive and ensnare. Satan himself is converted, after the modern order of things. He will appear in the character of an angel of light. Through the agency of spiritualism, miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and many undeniable wonders will be performed. And as the spirits will profess faith in the Bible, and manifest respect for the institutions of the Church, their work will be accepted as a manifestation of divine power.” (E. White, 1888,p.589)

“Papists, Protestants and worldlings will alike accept the form of godliness without the power, and they will see in this union a grand movement for the conversion of the world and the ushering in of the long expected millennium. (loc.cit.)

Through Spiritualism, Satan appears as a benefactor of the race, healing the diseases of the people, and professing to present a new and more exalted system of religious faith; but at the same time he works as a destroyer.

And then the great deceiver will persuade men that those who serve God [i.e., keep the Sabbath-F.B.] are causing these evils.

The miracle-working power manifested through spiritualism will exert its influence against those who choose to obey God rather than men. Communications from the spirits will declare that God has sent them to convince the rejectors of Sunday of their error, affirming that the laws of the land should be obeyed as the law of God. They will lament the great wickedness in the world and second the testimony of religious teachers that the degraded state of morals is caused by the desecration of Sunday. Great will be the indignation excited against all who refuse to accept their testimony. (Ibid. 590f.)

Those who honor the Bible Sabbath will be denounced as enemies of law and order, as breaking down the moral restraints of society, causing anarchy and corruption and calling down the judgments of God upon the earth. Their conscientious scruples will be pronounced obstinacy, stubbornness, and contempt of authority. They will be accused of disaffection towards the government.

Ministers who deny the obligation of the divine law will present from the pulpit the duty of yielding obedience to the civil authorities as ordained of God. In legislative halls and courts of justice, commandment keepers will be misrepresented and condemned. A false coloring will be given to their words; the worst construction will be put upon their motives.

The dignitaries of church and state will unite to bribe, persuade or compel all classes to honor the Sunday.” (*Ibid*, p.592)

Is there any SDA foolish enough to say this final revival first started to develop in the 18th century during the “Philadelphian” period and has been carried forward since then? Especially when Ellen White in 1888 and 1911 (the dates when the book Great Controversy was published) placed this revival in the future?

The Forming of the Image to the Beast

“The image to the beast represents that form of apostate Protestantism which will be developed when the Protestant churches shall seek the aid of the civil power for the enthronement of their dogmas.” (*Ibid*, p. 445)

“When the leading churches of the United States, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Protestant hierarchy, and the infliction of civil penalties upon dissenters will inevitably result.” (*loc. cit*)

Again, is there any SDA foolish enough to say this event happened during the Philadelphian period, when Ellen White in 1888 and 1911 placed it in the future?

The Imposition of the Mark of the Beast and its Worship

“Through the two great errors, the immortality and Sunday-sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of Spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hands of Spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.” (*Ibid*, p.588)

“But when Sunday observance shall be enforced by law, and the world shall be enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath, then whoever shall transgress the command of God, to obey a precept which has no higher authority than that of Rome, will thereby honor popery above God. He is paying homage to Rome and to the power which enforces the institution ordained by Rome. He is worshipping the beast and its image.”(*Ibid*, p.449)

“As men then reject the institution which God has declared to be the sign of His authority, and honor in its stead that which Rome has chosen as the token of her supremacy, they will thereby accept the sign of allegiance to Rome – ‘the mark of the beast.’ And it is not until the issue is thus plainly set before the people, and they are brought to choose between the commandments of God and

the commandments of men, that those who continue in transgression will receive ‘the mark of the beast.’” ([loc. Cit.,](#))

Again, is there any SDA foolish enough to say the test over the mark of the beast and the seal of God has been in place now for 200 years, especially given that Ellen White places it in the future as does the official publications of the church?

Now although SDA’s may want to say that these things have not occurred yet, how can the Christians in the late 18th century to early 19th century be tested *at all* on these matters unless these events have developed? Yet SDA’s clearly endorse the view that Rev 3:10 refers to the final test over the mark of the beast. Therefore the things listed above should have occurred *before* the introduction of the testing issue (Sunday versus Saturday). This is the only way the Philadelphian believers could be tested and kept by God during the final test that was coming on the whole world.

Assume for the moment that the time of testing does continue from the Philadelphian period throughout the present Laodicean period into the future. This means:

Ellen White was mistaken when she said the issue was future;

Official SDA documents such as [Questions on Doctrine](#) have misled the wider Christian community by saying SDA’s do not teach that Sunday-worship versus Sabbath-worship is the mark of the beast issue *yet*;

The image of the beast, the miracles he performs and the imposition of the mark of the beast and the seal of God have been underway at least since early 19th century;

It would be interesting to read an explanation as to how, even though these events have not yet occurred but rather will occur in the future, they have been a testing issue for Christians for over 200 years.

IV Anachronisms of S.D.A. Historicism

The final task of this paper is to look at the S.D.A. historicist's interpretation of the text and highlight the anachronism inherent in their interpretation. Indeed, this is hardly necessary as readers have seen the inevitability of this conclusion from the foregoing material.

S.D.A. historicists have traditionally seen the seven messages to the churches as messages for seven consecutive periods in the history of the Christian church. These periods cover the Church from its inception and continue down to the Second Advent. The Church at Philadelphia is seen as symbolic of the second last period in the history of the church (generally dated from the later years of the 18th century till 1844. see [Appendix note 4](#)). The Laodicean period follows on from it, and continues until the Second Advent. What period did the SDA pioneers assign to the Philadelphian period, and what dates does modern SDA scholars give to this period?

Dating of the "Philadelphian" period – The SDA pioneer’s view.

Notice James White’s reasoning in an 1851 article “The Parable – Matthew XXV,” for seeing the Philadelphian period as applying to the period just before and just after 1844.

This language [Rev 3:7-8] is addressed to only one church of the seven. Adventists have agreed in applying them to seven periods, or states of the church. This language does not apply to the Sardis, [nominal church,] neither to the Laodicean church, but to the Philadelphian, the church of Brotherly Love, that came out of the different sectarian bodies, and were united in the Advent faith in 1844. All denominational tenets were laid aside, and although the Advent brethren came out from the different sectarian bodies yet all were perfectly united on the great subject of Christ's coming. To this church, one door is opened, while another is shut. "Behold, I set before thee an open door." This door Christ opens, while he shuts another. As the Philadelphian church applies to no other period than the time of the termination of the 2300 days, when Christ closed his work for the world in the Holy, and opened the door of the "holiest of all," the conclusion seems irresistible that the open and shut door of Rev. iii, 7,8, refers to the change in the position and work of our Great High Priest in the Heavenly sanctuary. He then closed the work or "door" of the daily ministration in the Holy, and opened the door in the most Holy. "The tabernacle of the testimony" was then opened; but before this could be done, the "door," or work of Christ's continual mediation in the Holy had to be closed. This may well be "likened" to the shut door in the parable. ([Gordon, 1983b](#), p.165)

And again James White says:

Adventists were agreed that the seven churches of Rev ii and iii, symbolized seven states of the church, covering the entire period from the first advent of Christ to the second appearing, and that the sixth state addressed represented those who with one united voice proclaimed the coming of Jesus, in the autumn of 1844. This church was about to enter upon a period of great trial. And they were to find relief from it, as far as ascertaining their true position is concerned, by light from the heavenly sanctuary. After the light should come, then would also come the battle upon the shut and the open door. Here was seen the connecting link between the work of God in the past advent movement, present duty to keep the commandments of God, and the future glory. And as these views were taught in vindication of the advent movement, in connection with the claims of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, these men, especially those who had given up their advent experience, felt called upon to oppose. And their opposition, as a general thing, was most violent, bitter, and wicked.

The shut and open door of the heavenly sanctuary was the strong point upon which this matter turned. If we were right on the subject of the cleansing of the sanctuary, the preaching of the time was right, and the entire movement has been right. ([Gordon, 1983b](#), p.230)

It should be noted that the position of the SDA pioneers on the identifying the Philadelphian message included a *variety of time periods* around the Advent movement, the Seventh Month movement, the Albany Conference in 1845, and even up to 1856. Bates, Edson, and others located the beginning of the *Laodicean* period at the Albany conference, chaired by William Miller, where all new theories on the Disappointment of 1844 were rejected. ([Damsteegt, 1977](#), pp.148, 134) William Miller, in his *Lectures*, said, "this *Laodicean* church began about A.D. 1798, and will last for forty-five years." ([1836](#), p.124)

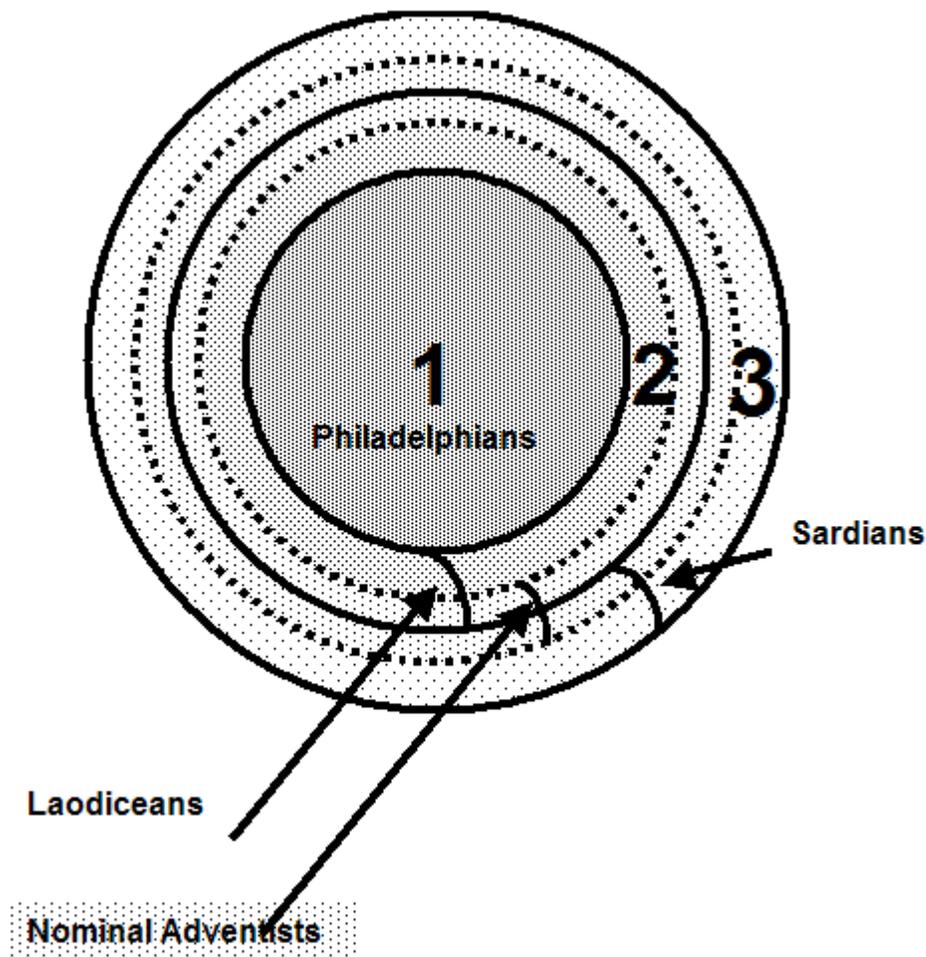
Damsteegt documents the idiosyncratic definitions of the major Adventist writers concerning the period of “Philadelphia.”

Bates and others symbolized the churches from which the Adventists had separated themselves as the Sardis Church (Rev. 3:1-6). The Sabbatarian Adventists he identified with the Philadelphian Church (Rev. 3: 7-13) and the nominal Adventists [those who rejected “the validity of the seventh month movement” (p.147)] with the Laodicean state of the church (Rev. 3:14-22). [Damsteegt footnotes: “Bates, SAWH, pp. 34, 35. The Albany conference of May 1845 was seen by some as the starting point of the Laodicean church. Cf. Letter, E. L. H. Chamberlain to Jacobs, DS, Aug 11, 1845, p. 22; Edson, Time of the End, p. 24. Cf. Turner to Snow, pp. 137, 138. When in 1845 the spirit of “brotherhood” was broken among Adventists, they were identified by some as the Laodicean church (Letter, Hill to Snow, p. 100; Snow, “The Laodicean Church,” JS, June 12 and 19, 1845, pp. 108, 117) Snow alluded to the relevance of the name Laodicea (“judging of the people”) under the present pre-Advent judgment (ibid, p. 117).”]

Thus, ecclesiological self-understanding of the believers developed around three concentric circles. The inner circle represented the true Israel of God, the Philadelphian Church, which observed the Sabbath; the second signified God’s people among the “nominal Adventists” and in the churches, who had not rejected the Sabbath doctrine and were unaware of its implications; the outer circle embraced the remaining “nominal Adventist” and church people, who had rejected the Sabbath doctrine as binding for Christians, and equated them with unbelievers. [“the nominal Adventists” were “the Laodicean state of the Church.”] (*Ibid*, p. 148)

Here we see the invocation of *three* states of the church simultaneously, forcing us to concede they are not viewing these messages as historically-sequential messages but spiritual-condition messages, applicable to any group with the requisite spiritual qualities. In their view of the three circles and how the “nominal Adventists” fit into it, there appears to be an overlap of the Laodicean group as being a part of both the second circle *and* the outer circle, since they defines Laodicean” as being “nominal Adventists;” yet there are mentioned two groups of “nominal Adventists:” those who “had not rejected the Sabbath doctrine and were unaware of its implications;” and those “nominal Adventists” “who had rejected the Sabbath doctrine as binding for Christians.”

Expressed graphically we have the following:



Explanation of the Graphical Model:

1. **The Philadelphians**, the true Israel of God, held to:
 - The validity of the Midnight Cry (the seventh-month movement) and;
 - The binding nature of the Seventh-day Sabbath (the Sabbath doctrine);
2. **The Laodiceans** were comprised of two classes, both of whom did not understand the binding nature of the seventh-day Sabbath, and were either:
 - Those who had nominally been a part of the Midnight Cry (i.e., nominal Adventists);
 - Those who were not a part of the Midnight Cry, (or did not reject it?);
3. **The Sardians** were comprise of those who had rejected the Sabbath doctrine, whether they be either:
 - Those who had nominally been a part of the Midnight Cry (i.e., nominal Adventists);
 - Those who had not been a part of the Midnight Cry.

This model of classification is evident in these comments of Damsteegt:

During 1852 the mission of Sabbatarian Adventists among non-Adventists continued to be successful...these new converts, according to J. White, consisted

of individuals who came out of “the churches and the world at the ‘eleventh hour’ and youth from Adventist parents. As biblical evidence that people could still be saved from the fallen nominal Sardis church, he indicated that there were “ ‘a few names even in Sardis’ (from which the Philadelphian church came out,) ‘which have not defiled their garments.’ Rev, iii, 4...They are coming out of Babylon. (Ibid, p. 277)

And again:

After the 1844 experience, Sabbatarian Adventists identified themselves with the much desired character of the Philadelphian church, other Adventists with the Laodicean church, and non-Adventists with the Sardis Church. (Ibid, p. 244)

Other important writers of the time had different views. Crosier and others felt the Philadelphian term applied to the period before the Disappointment, when the Midnight Cry was being given:

Crosier’s sanctuary treatise of 1846 referred not only to a continuation of atonement after 1844 but also to the existence of a period of transition from the Gospel dispensation to the next dispensation. [Damsteegt footnotes: “See supra p. 131. At that time he expected the Gospel dispensation to end in the spring of 1847 ([Crosier], Remarks, p.2)”] He said that this transition time was partly characterized by the text, “Thou must prophesy again” (Rev. 10:11), “whatever the nature of this prophesying may be.” [Damsteegt footnotes: “Crosier, ‘Law of Moses,’ pp. 43, 44.”] Although his position on the shut door was not clearly defined because of his transition period and the absence of the term “shut door,” and analysis of his term “open door” may provide some insight. Crosier’s remark that “the Philadelphian church, having ‘an open door’ [Rev. 3:8] gave the Midnight Cry” seems to suggest that he adhered to a door-of-access concept. Adventists who advocated this kind of shut door referred to the period before the Disappointment when the Millerites, the Philadelphian church, proclaimed the Midnight Cry as a period of great access to the people – as having an open door - in contrast to the impossibility of gaining access after October 22, 1844. (Damsteegt, p. 157)

Still another view, one that became the position of James and Ellen White, was that the Philadelphian period ended in 1856, when the Laodicean period started:

The Laodicean message (Rev. 3:14-20), according to J. White, was a “special call to the remnant,” directing the attention of believers to a work of preparation for the imminent judgment of the living so that their sins would be blotted out before the completion of Christ’s sanctuary ministry. [Damsteegt footnotes: “In 1856 there was a shift in the ecclesiological self-understanding from the Philadelphian church to the Laodicean church. See infra, pp. 244-248.”] (Damsteegt, *ibid*, p.168)

At the last-mentioned reference of his work, i.e., pp. 244-248, Damsteegt develops an explanation of “the ecclesiological self-understanding” of the Sabbatarian Adventists at that time. He says:

There were two categories of eschatological motifs: (1) the Remnant motif....(2) the Laodicean motif, which succeeded the Philadelphian motif, and reflected the spirituality of the believers, contributed to an anti-triumphalistic dimension in ecclesiology, and created a spirit of self-investigation resulting in greater dedication towards missionary endeavor. (p. 243)

After the 1844 experience, Sabbatarian Adventists identified themselves with the much-desired character of the Philadelphian church, other Adventists with the Laodicean church, and non-Adventists with the Sardis Church. As time passed, however, it became increasingly apparent that the spiritual condition of Sabbatarian Adventists did not adequately resemble Philadelphian characteristics. In 1851, E. G. White brought out that “the remnant were not prepared for what is coming upon the earth. Stupidity, like lethargy, seemed to hang upon the minds of most of those who profess to believe that we were having the last message.” She also portrayed critically the lack of sacrifice for mission activities among those believers “who were not willing to dispose of this world’s good to save perishing souls by sending them the truth, while Jesus stands before the Father, pleading his blood, his sufferings, and his death for them.” A self-critical attitude developed. In 1854, J. White ventured to say that “the reason why the work does not progress more rapidly is because so many who profess the truth are not real Bible Christians....In 1855 the attitude of Sabbatarian Adventists towards mission was of such a nature that it was compared with the experience of the people of Meroz who were cursed because of their sin of doing nothing (Judg. 5:23).

In the face of declining spirituality and lethargic missionary endeavor, it seemed incongruous to continue styling Sabbatarian Adventists with the Philadelphian Church. When in 1856 J. White brought out (possibly through the influence of his wife), that the present condition of the believers was that of the Laodicean church of Rev. 3, it came as a surprise to many, but was readily conceded, only confirming as it did the current spiritual lethargy. [Damsteegt footnotes: “it is not quite clear whether he was influenced through one of his wife’s visions or that she confirmed his views. Cf. E. G. White, TC, No. 3, 1857, p.1 (T1, 141); TC, No. 5, p.4 (T1, 186). Already in 1853, there was suggestion that Rev. 3:18 had relevance for believers (N. W. Rockwell to J. White, RH, Sept. 8, 1853, p. 71). In 1855 E. G. White pointed to the significance of Rev. 3:15, 16 (TC, [No. 1], 1855, p.16 [T,1, 126])”] However, this shift in ecclesiological self-understanding from a triumphalistic, to an anti-triumphalistic attitude was immediately accepted and provided a powerful incentive to awaken believers to participate in missionary activity. J. White explained the hermeneutic for such interpretation by stating that:

“it has been supposed that the Philadelphian church reached to the end. This we must regard as a mistake, as the seven churches in Asia represent seven distinct periods of the true church, and the Philadelphian is the sixth, and not the last state. The true church cannot be in two conditions at the same time, hence we are shut to the faith that the Laodicean church represents the church of God at the present time.” [Damsteegt footnotes: “J. White, “The Seven Churches,” RH, Oct. 16, 1856, p. 189. Cf. J. White, “Watchman, what of the Night?” RH, Oct 9, 1856, p. 184.”] Regarding the conditional promises to the

Philadelphian church, he said that they were “yet to be fulfilled to that portion of that church who comply with the conditions, pass down to the Laodicean state, and overcome” (“Seven Churches,” p. 189)

From this time onward, the tenor of the ecclesiological self-understanding was more anti-triumphalistic.....The Laodicean message, functioning as a criterion for self-evaluation, became an integral part of the SDA theology of mission and helped create a better climate for mission work after it was used quite indirectly as a basis for self-criticism.(Damsteegt,*ibid*, pp. 244-247)

We turn now to the ideas of Stephen Haskell. Writing in 1905, Haskell sees the message of the Millerite movement as the message to the church of Sardis, and those who accepted it became a part of the new Philadelphia church:

The Saviour, walking in the church of Sardis, found a few whose garments were undefiled. There were those in whom life remained after the body was dead; and to these the call came to separate from the lifeless form, that their own life might be saved. The message of the soon coming of Christ was a universal message. It offered an opportunity to all to repent, and as many as believed, took up the cry with the enthusiasm which characterized the Apostolic Church....Some who heard the advent message, accepted it through fear; others were attracted by the forcible arguments; but whatever may have been the motive, all were tested, and those who accepted because of real love for the Saviour, composed the Philadelphian Church. (1977, p.82)

He then discussed the calculation of 1844, the validity of using 457 BC as a starting point, the open- and shut-door concept, the introduction of the seventh-day Sabbath at this time, and then he makes an interesting statement regarding the ending of the Philadelphian period:

The message to the Philadelphian period reaches to the end of time, and all who receive the crown will have passed through its experiences. (p.86)

And just to make sure the reader understands what he said, he repeats the point in the next paragraph:

The last church to which John was bidden to send a message was Laodicea. The messages to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, separately cover a period extending to the second coming of Christ; but in addition to the experiences portrayed in the fifth and sixth messages, that which is directed to Laodicea is also applicable...for the Laodicean message is given to the people at the time when the investigative judgment is in progress...(Ibid)

It is an enigma how Haskell can justify the argument of seeing the messages to Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea as all being applicable till the end of the world rather than sequential as he has the first four. His very first sentence of his chapter “The Message to the Churches,” says, “the messages to the seven churches covers a period in ecclesiastical history, extending from the time of Christ’s first advent to His second coming.” (p.39) What he should have more correctly said was that the messages to *four* churches covers most of that period and the last three cover the experience of the Advent movement and Seventh-day Adventist church! That would have been closer to the mark. That no-one else of note has followed Haskell’s views is comment in itself of the validity of his position.

Another twentieth-century version of this attempt similar to Haskell's to try and make the text harmonise with historicism is found in *The Seven Epistle's of Christ*, by Taylor Bunch:

Verse 10 pictures a world crisis: "Because in spite of suffering you have guarded My word, I in turn, will guard you from the hour of trial which is soon coming upon the whole world, to put to the test the inhabitants of the earth." (Weymouth.) It is evident that this is still future, which fact is proof that the Philadelphian condition will be revived and continue to the very end. It seems that the last four of the seven churches continue in some respects till the coming of Christ. Just before the end the church and the world must pass through the crucible so as to separate the dross from the gold. Before Christ returns there must be a clear distinction between the church and the world, and this is made possible by the great crisis.

The distinction between true and false professors of religion is not always apparent at the present time. Malachi 3:2,3 pictures Christ as a silversmith refining and testing His people. The fiery trials of the furnace burn out the dross till He can see in them the reflection of His own image. "The word of My patience" doubtless includes the whole gospel, which is the teaching which finds its central truth in the patience of Christ. True Christians will be kept from falling, because they have kept His word. In Deuteronomy 4:34 the plagues of Egypt are called "temptations." Those who keep the Word of Christ's patience during the last crisis will be kept from the seven last plagues. The language indicates that pressure will be used to compel God's faithful remnant to let go of their hold on His truth. It is to this time that Revelation 12:17 applies. (c1947, pp.204f)

Just how Bunch conceives of not one, but *four* messages representing the Church all at the same time, and all being correct is a question he did not explore. This conception virtually destroys the premise of the messages being representative of different periods of history. It nearly reverts to the notion that all the messages describe some aspect of the church somewhere around the world at any point in time. Thus the historicist's use of the seven messages as a historical continuum is annulled.

Before concluding this section on the pioneer's dating of the Philadelphian period, I wish to look a bit closer at a statement of James White mentioned a little earlier. Damsteegt quotes White as saying:

"it has been supposed that the Philadelphian church reached to the end. This we must regard as a mistake, as the seven churches in Asia represent seven distinct periods of the true church, and the Philadelphian is the sixth, and not the last state. The true church cannot be in two conditions at the same time, hence we are shut to the faith that the Laodicean church represents the church of God at the present time." [Damsteegt footnotes: "J. White, 'The Seven Churches,' RH, Oct. 16, 1856, p. 189. Cf. J. White, 'Watchman, What of the Night?' RH, Oct 9, 1856, p. 184. Regarding the conditional promises to the Philadelphian church, he said that they were 'yet to be fulfilled to that portion of that church who comply with the conditions, pass down to the Laodicean state, and overcome.' ('Seven Churches,' p. 189)"] (1977, p.245)

Notice here, James White says in effect, that those Sabbatarian Adventists who were a part of the Advent movement (i.e., the Philadelphian period), and were still alive when the end came (and including, the global time of trouble ahead) would have the promises of the Philadelphian period fulfilled to them, that is, they would be protected during the eschatological time of trouble. This explicitly indicates he saw the global time of trouble, mentioned in the Philadelphian period, as occurring in the Laodicean period. This also means he did not see the Great Disappointment of 1844 as applying to this “time of trouble” in Rev. 3:10. Notice also he points out the additional condition “and overcome,” indicating he was not referring to them being dead, but very alive, alive enough to “overcome.”

In changing his view of the fledging group of Sabbatarian Adventists from a Philadelphian church to a Laodicean church, White had to readjust his interpretation of the time of trouble in Rev. 3:10. He undoubtedly still saw it as the events depicted in Revelation 13:13-17 and beyond. He never changed that opinion in moving his view of the Sabbatarian Adventists from Philadelphians to Laodiceans. How he did accommodate this exegetical dilemma of having the universal time of trouble in a period in the past was to decide that it refers to *the believers who lived in the past Philadelphian period, and who will experience the universal time of trouble in the Laodicean period, and survive through to the second coming.*

It seems he saw the time for the Laodicean period as *at least finishing in his lifetime, and the lifetime of those who experienced the Midnight Cry.* The problem for James White is that his explanation is incorrect. When he died there were people still alive who experienced what they classified as the Philadelphian period, so there was still hope that these people would experience the universal time of trouble and be overcomers just as the message to the Philadelphians indicated. Therefore, his logic was still plausible, even though admitting that this time of trouble would occur in the Laodicean period.

That we are now in the 21st century, with no survivors of the period he classified as the Philadelphian period, indicates (1) his view is anachronistic; (2) there is no-one who would be able to claim the promise to the Philadelphians – it was thus a false promise. The promise to the Philadelphians is misplaced, if we accept White’s explanation, because if apocalyptic prophecy is not written in terms of any conditionality, then there was no way the delay in time between the Philadelphian period and the eschatological global time of trouble would allow God to promise something to the overcomers in the Philadelphian period which in his foreknowledge he knew would occur only when Laodicean believers would be alive to experience it. It could occur neither during the Philadelphian period, nor during the period when survivors of the Philadelphian period were still alive.

James White’s efforts to explain the enigma of the promise to the Philadelphians is invalid. What he does affirm that is used by SDA historicists today however, is the fact that the time of trouble mentioned in Rev. 3:10 is a future event, occurring in the Laodicean period, and that it did not refer to the Great Disappointment or any of the other trials of the Adventists before, during or after 1844 up to the time of his writing in 1856. Another point he does affirm is that the promise of the Philadelphians is for those who experience the eschatological time of trouble, which SDA historicists say is still ahead.

In summarising the views of the pioneers, we can see a fluidity of ideas, but even taking a conservative view, we can summarize their view of the Philadelphian period as going no later than 1860s, certainly before the Seventh-day Adventist Church was formed in 1863. However, the view of the SDABC, that 1844 is best chosen as the year of demarcation for the beginning of the Laodicean period, is a very sensible choice, and represents a balanced consensus view.

Dating of the "Philadelphian" period. – Contemporary SDA Historicist's views.

The dating of the "Philadelphian" period of church history has a few variations in contemporary SDA commentaries.

Uriah Smith

The updated editions of Uriah Smith (1944) by staff of the SDA publishing houses still allows the definition of the Philadelphian period from "great religious awakening in the nineteenth century...up to the autumn of 1844." (p.386) Smith sees the Laodicean period as applying "to believers under the third angel's message, the last message of mercy before the coming of Christ (Revelation 14:9-14)... This is then, the final message to the churches before the close of probation.... the message to this church brings to view the closing scenes of probation. It reveals a period of judgment." (p.391) Thus for U. Smith the beginning of the "investigative judgment" dated on Oct 22, 1844 is the demarcation line between the "Philadelphian" period and the "Laodicean" period.

A. J. Wearner

A. J. Wearner, in his 1931 book Fundamentals of Bible Doctrine, under the section on "the Church of the End – The Remnant," argues that the Laodicean period began when the third angel's message began:

Isaiah 10:20. 22; Romans 9:27,28; 11:23; Jeremiah 23:3; Joel 2:28-32; Revelation 3:14. 'Laodicea' signifies 'the judging of the people,' or, according to Cruden, 'a just people.' The message to this church brings to view the closing scenes of probation. It reveals a period of judgment. It is the last stage of the church. Consequently it applies to believers under the third angel's message, the last message of mercy before the coming of Christ.... While the work of the great Day of Atonement is in progress, and the investigative judgment is going forward upon the house of God, there is a period during which the just and holy law of God is taken by the waiting church as their rule of life."-Uriah Smith, in "Daniel and the Revelation," page 391. (1931, p.170)

LeRoy Froom

LeRoy Froom, in his fourth volume of *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, (1982) borrows the chart of William Gage (1842-1907), to summarise the positions Froom had been supporting throughout the four volumes. In that chart, pictured on pp. 1128-1129, he locates the "Philadelphian" period from the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 to the events of 1844. He then sees the Laodicean period taking over until the "Seven Last Vials."

Jacques Doukhan

Contemporary SDA historicist Doukhan paints the historicist's "Philadelphia period" around the same period, but with a more broader sweep of the brush:

The letter to the church of Philadelphia reflects its tormented past. Again, prophecy takes over historical detail to illustrate its message. Like the city of

Philadelphia, colonists have founded the prophetic church of Philadelphia. The church of Philadelphia is the church of missions, expanding beyond the European frontier to Africa and the Americas (end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth).

The church of Philadelphia is characterized by its hope in the kingdom of God. This is the time in history probably the most preoccupied with eschatological hope. Such hope seized people in the United States, Germany, Scandinavia, France, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. A historian of the time, John B. McMaster, reports that nearly 1 million people out of the 17 million people in the United States participated in this movement. Their expectation were all the more serious because they seemed reinforced by biblical prophecy. Religious leaders even determined a precise date for the prophetic calculations: 1844. (2002, pp.41, 43)

Seventh-Day Adventist Commentary

Moving on to other contemporary comments on the parameters for this period, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* says of the Philadelphian period:

When the historical application is made, the message to Philadelphia may be thought of as appropriate to the various movements within Protestantism during the latter years of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th whose objective it was to make religion a vital, personal affair. (1957, p. 757)

And the additional note on Revelation 2 says:

Philadelphia. Inspiration has presented this as the church of the great Second Advent awakening. Various beginning dates have been suggested as appropriate for this period. Some propose the year 1833, which witnessed the last great sign in the heavens foretold by our Lord (see on Matt. 24:33), and which was closely connected in point of time with the early proclamation of the advent message by William Miller. Others suggest 1798, the beginning of the “time of the end” of Dan. 11:35. (see comment there), which would also be acceptable. Still others favor the date 1755, which is commonly accepted as marking the first of the specific signs of the end foretold in Rev. 6:12 (see comment there), considering that this choice comports well with the character of the Philadelphia church as the church of the advent awakening. There is general agreement among Seventh-day Adventist expositors that the year 1844 should be considered as marking the close of the Philadelphian period and the opening of the Laodicean period (see on Dan. 8:14).

Laodicea. For the year 1844, as marking the beginning the beginning of this period see the foregoing on “Philadelphia.” Being the last of the seven, the Laodicean period continues till the end of time. (*Ibid*, p. 745)

It should not be overlooked that although the SDABC takes this position of definite dates here, it does have a caveat earlier in the article:

The application of the various messages to the seven churches to the seven consecutive periods of church history (see on 2:1) naturally suggest the utility of a series of transition dates to facilitate the coordination of the several messages with their respective historical periods. In attempting to assign such dates,

however, it is well to remember that: (1) The prophecy of the seven churches is not a time prophecy in the usual sense of the term, for no specific chronological data accompany it. It is concerned primarily with successive experiences of the church, and differs considerably from such prophecies as those concerning the 1260 days of Dan. 7:25, the 2300 days of ch. 8: 14, and the 70 weeks of ch. 9:25. (2) Major eras of history can hardly be marked off by exact dates. So used, dates are at best convenient landmarks of a rather general sort, not exact boundary markers. Actual transition from one period to another is a gradual process. Nevertheless it is well to select approximate dates as an aid to correlating the messages with the corresponding events of history. Some would suggest different dates from those given below and use different phrases to describe the various periods. However, these variations in dates and names do not materially affect the over-all message found in the letters to the seven churches. (1957, pp. 752-753)

How Nichol could say on the one hand that: "the message to any one of the seven "churches" is specifically applicable to the Christian church at a particular time in history only on the basis that the seven "churches" represent seven consecutive periods of time spanning the Christian era and that each message has a specific application to but one period of time (1957, p.764) and yet say on the other that "the actual transition from one period to another is a gradual process" (1957, p.753) implying an intervening period where both church epistles applied to the church body is a question that escapes an easy answer. If the period of the Philadelphian church is at its longest 1755-1844, that gives us a period of 89 years. What period of overlap would he allow on both sides of this period? 20 years? 30 years? 40 years? This would leave the actual period of that particular history of the church only 10-40 years at most. Out of two thousand years of church, he is prepared to say the writer of the Apocalypse identified the sixth of seven great spiritual periods of the church as only lasting 10-40 years at the most? I can hear some reader chuckling in amusement.

Notice further:

...if two or more periods are to be considered as existing simultaneously, the consecutive pattern is broken, the individual messages cease to have any specific chronological relationship to history, and there remains no valid basis for assuming that the Laodicean message has any more particular import for our time than for any other. (Nichol, 1957, 764)

Nichol seems to have forgotten his statements on p.752f. and he seems to naively assume that "consecutive" is a concept, or pattern which applies readily to the history of the Christian church.

In summary, this brief survey of both pioneer and contemporary SDA-historicist thought on the location of the Philadelphian period sees its start in the late eighteenth century and its end around the end of the first half of the nineteenth century. The important thing to note is that by the end of the 1850s, with the exception of Stephen Haskell virtually all SDA historicist writers viewed the Philadelphian period as being in the past, and the Laodicean period as the current stage of the messages to the churches. And more importantly, this was and is the position of the writings of Ellen White. One need only look at the abundance of material in the Index on her writings to confirm how much she had to say on this.

SDA use the term "time of testing" in Rev 3:10 to refer to the crisis in Rev 13.

Now in traditional S.D.A. historicism, the time of temptation described in Revelation 3:10 is described as "Satan's final effort" (White, 1888, 561). The following quotations from standard works give the usual conceptualisation:

Just before us is "the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth" Revelation 3.10. (White, 1888, 560; see note 1).

Hour of temptation. Here not a specific length of time, whether literal or prophetic, but a "season", or "time." Hour is used here in the same sense as in ch3.3. In harmony with the repeated reference in the Revelation to the imminence of Christ's return (see on ch1:1), the 'hour of temptation' doubtless refers to a great time of testing preceding the Second Advent. (Nichol, 1957, 759).

As the Jewish nation, at the first advent turned from the Saviour, and rejected the Son of God, so many in 1844 crucified the Son of man afresh. But He will one day be lifted up in the eyes of all men; and those who have followed close beside Him, entering by faith, within the second veil, will be seated on thrones and will reign with Him. To the disciples in Gethsemane, was given an opportunity to drink of the cup of which he drank. To the faithful ones in 1844, it was likewise, given to drink of the cup of the world's scorn. To such is the promise "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Before His second coming, there will be such a time as the world has never seen. God's people will be saved from this; for He will hide them in His pavilion. (Haskell, 1905, 84-85).

Thus closes Revelation 13, leaving the people of God with the powers of earth in deadly array against them and the decrees of death and banishment from society upon them for their adherence to the commandments of God. Spiritism will be, at the time specified, performing its most imposing wonders, deceiving all the world except the elect. (Matthew 24:24; Thessalonians 2:8-12.) This will be the "hour of temptation" or trial which is to come, as the closing test, upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth, as mentioned in Revelation 3:10. What is the issue of this conflict? This important inquiry is not left unanswered. The first five verses of the following chapter complete the chain of this prophecy and reveal the glorious triumph of the champions of the truth." (Smith, 1944, 623).

Llewellyn A. Wilcox wrote a book focusing exclusively on the SDA view of the end-time events. This work relies extensively on the writings of Ellen White to put the pieces of the puzzle together as understood by her. At both the beginning and the end of the book he has a special section explaining that the book was written only for a SDA readership. In defining "the times of trouble *before us*" he says:

The tempest of which we speak is not the hailstorm of the Seventh Plague (Rev 16: 1 7-21), nor even primarily the effect of 'those awful scourges known to

mortals' which precede it during the Time of Trouble. It is the mingled wrath of man and of Satan during the period between the making of the Image to the Beast and the deliverance of the saints.

This entire period is doubtless covered by the term "the Hour of Temptation" in Rev 3:10. The general phrase, "the time of trouble" is frequently in the Spirit of Prophecy in reference to both the "Short Time of Trouble" and the "Great Time of Trouble," as they are often called. (Wilcox, 1966, p.112)

Clearly, in Wilcox's view, this time of trouble in Rev 3:10 is still future, and occurs just before the last plagues of Revelation, and the second coming of Jesus. In the period that Wilcox calls the 'Short Time of Trouble; he lists the following events:

"National apostasy and ruin (of the USA); Sign to Get Out of the Cities;" "Economic Boycott;" "Increasing Persecution;" "False Revivals;" "Martyrdoms;" "Sabbath proclaimed more fully;" "God's Last Call out of Babylon;" "Endowment under the Latter Rain;" "'Loud Cry' of the Third Angel;" "Many Join Purified Remnant;" "'Seal' and 'Mark' of the Beast Impressed;" "Two Classes in the World;" "Sins or Names Blotted Out;" "The Visible Shaking;" "Sealing Angel Renders Report;" "Probation for All Closes." (Ibid, p.98) It would be an uninformed Adventist who could say these events occurred in the past.

In clarifying his dichotomy between the short time of trouble and the Great Time of trouble he says: "We do know that a short time of trouble, during which the latter rain falls (EW 85, 86), precedes the great Time of Trouble, during which the Plagues fall (GC, chapter 39). (Ibid, p.189)

And further notice this recent statement from Mervyn Maxwell:

[Rev3:10 quoted] The reference is to the tribulation spoken of in Daniel 12:1, "a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time." From this [emphasis his] tribulation, Daniel 12:1 says, "your people shall be delivered." In Revelation 3:10, likewise, Jesus promised to "keep" the Philadelphians "from the hour of trial."

The supreme final hour of trial will come at the end of the world, when Michael shall arise (Daniel 12:1) after the books have been examined in the pre-advent judgment (Daniel 7:9-14) and just before the resurrection (Daniel 12:2) at the second coming. (1985, p.111-112)

Thus, although all those writers quoted above place "the hour of temptation" in the future, they correctly see this time of testing as the final and universal one that precedes the Second Advent. This is the anachronism of their own paradigm in interpreting the book of Revelation using their historicist's method. And it is unsolvable – at least as long as they cling to historicism as their method of interpretation. It is their nemesis.

Why is this position anachronistic?

Following on from the above assertions, S.D.A. historicism should say, to be consistent, **that the faithful believers who lived through the "Philadelphian" period of church history (generally held by them to occur between the late 18th century and just after 1844) were kept by God during "Satan's final effort" to deceive the world, and furthermore, that the events of Revelation 13:13-17 occurred during this same**

period of the church. The implications of the scheme that interprets the churches as consecutive periods is that **since we are no longer in the "Philadelphian" period but rather in the next period-the "Laodicean"- the last great crisis of the world is behind us, probation for the human race closed nearly 150 years ago, the issue over the mark of beast is long past, the seven last plagues have already fallen, and the Lord's coming is really history and not prophecy.**

The present position of S.D.A historicist's in regard to the text of Revelation 3:10 is anachronistic and produces some awkward questions:

Why does the Lord promise to preserve the faithful ones of the "Philadelphian" period of the church from the final and universal time of testing if in fact they cannot encounter it?

Second, if the S.D.A. historicist's scheme is correct in saying that it is the overcomers in "Laodicea" not "Philadelphia" who go through the final time of testing, why is there no mention by the Lord in Revelation 3:14-21 to preserve the "Laodiceans", and yet He promises this preservation to a "church" period which doesn't need it?

Third, if a mention of the time of testing is important enough to be included in a message to a "church" period that cannot encounter it, how much more important it would be assumed to be that it should be referred to in the message to the "church" period that does encounter it!

Fourth, why is there no mention of the universal time of temptation *at all* in the Laodicean message if "each message has a specific application to but one period of time" (Nichol, 1957, p.764)? Is this time of testing completed by the time of the Laodicean period?

If the time of testing only began in the Philadelphian and continues through the Laodicean period to the end of time, how come this time of testing is only placed in the future, both by Ellen White and the official church documentation?

How can the time of testing occur in the Philadelphian period if the necessary precursors to the test – the deceptive miracles by the beast, the forming of the image to the beast- did not occur during that period, but rather are still future?

If the time of testing has been going on for the last 200 years then it is quite correct for SDA's to tell people who reject the Sabbath truth that by their rejection of the Sabbath, they have earned themselves the mark of the beast!

Is it possible to have a time of testing over the mark of the beast and the seal of God in the Philadelphian period without the formation of the image of the beast?

The outcome of all this is that SDA historicists have a dilemma.

They could deny that the Philadelphian message is intended for the nineteenth century, since the universal testing time did not occur during that time nor did the imposition of the seal of God or the mark of the beast.

Alternatively, they could say that the reference in Rev 3:10 to the universal time of testing does not refer to Rev 13. This is difficult since they endorse that view.

They could re-date the time periods allocated to the "Philadelphian" and the "Laodicean" period, but this would be difficult given that Ellen White supports the view that we have been in the Laodicean period since the 1850s. They could take a new position if they see the validity of my paper and say that the messages to the seven churches are not prophetic, but instead, are only pastoral. They could merely deny that the messages to the seven churches are a prophetic history of the Christian church.

Conclusion

The outcome of all this is that SDA historicists are forced to acknowledge that the "Philadelphian" message was not properly intended for the nineteenth century since that application is anachronistic. Consequently, if the historicist's hermeneutic is insupportable, it would be much more natural to take the messages just as they read and accept that Jesus the Revelator intended this message primarily for the Philadelphian church and by extension, ("Whoever has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches") the first-century Christian church. There is no indication that time on this earth was to extend beyond that generation. This interpretation, however unpalatable, fits the text most naturally.

This conclusion has four concomitants:

First, the ancient Philadelphian believers could have encountered the final and universal hour of testing that would have come on all the world and culminated ultimately and swiftly in the Second Advent;

The first attendant conclusion follows because, in the view of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary itself, the seven epistles of Revelation have only two applications which have historical referents: the first-century A.D.; and then to those historical periods so classified as corresponding to each epistle (Nichol, 1957, p. 737). Since therefore the second application is anachronistic, a simple process of elimination reduces the application of the epistles to only one option - the audience to whom John originally sent the book. And in line with Revelation 3:10, the universal and final crisis was possible in their day and so also was the Second Advent.

Secondly, that all of the pre-advent material in the book of Revelation addresses primarily an first-century advent;

The second attendant conclusion is an extension of the first: since the Second Advent is stated as a real possibility for the early church, it follows that all the pre-advent and advent material of the Revelation would have been fulfilled in their day as well if the advent had occurred.

Thirdly and most importantly, conditionality is a characteristic of apocalyptic prophecy.

The third attendant conclusion - that apocalyptic prophecy, like all other prophecies involving human beings in the action, has conditionality as a characteristic - follows because the book of Revelation is apocalyptic and yet it clearly refers to the real possibility of the early church experiencing the Second Advent (given the validity of the arguments in

this study). In addition, it is full of the interplay of human actions on history. It is not written from the foreknowledge of God.

Imagine for a moment, the elder of the ancient Philadelphian Christian community, receiving this document from John, and discovering in that document the Lord's promise to him personally to protect him through the impending spiritual storm about to burst on his world, and keep him safely through to see the Lord coming the second time. What a thrill would have pulsed through his heart when he read the words! God was saying he would see the Lord coming again before he saw death! And then cast your mind forward and see the elder again on his death bed, bewildered by the turn of events in his life – the Lord had not come; the impending storm, though threatening, had not burst in full fury against God's people; and here he was waiting for death to take him to his grave. What bewilderment would have tortured his soul! "Why did not the Lord come like He said He would?" "Why am I to sink into the grave instead of rising into the skies with my Lord?" "Why are these things so?" I am sure these were questions that failed of finding satisfactory answers for him. But conditionality is the only thing that can address these agonising issues. God did not write this letter to this elder from his divine foreknowledge. It was His divine will and purpose to fulfill His promise to this faithful old man, but other things came into play which prevented that from happening. What those other things were, are a matter of conjecture, but prevent the realisation of that precious promise to that faithful Christian it did. It was God's will and purpose to destroy Nineveh, but other things came into play which prevented it from happening. In that case it was the sincere repentance of the city. This prevented the realisation of that dire threat to that sinful city. God's promises and threatenings alike are conditional.

In essence, the argument that apocalyptic prophecies are interpreted differently from the general genre of prophecy is a fabrication used to exempt the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation from being examined in their historical-grammatical context. This is wresting the Scriptures and hammering them into a mould they will not fit. It is far better to let the text guide us to a conclusion in harmony with its original intention than to continue to do violence to the text and kidnap it and force it to do something it was never designed to do.

Fourth, the necessity of correct document analysis

Since the book of Revelation addresses primarily a Second Advent that could have occurred in the lifetime of John's contemporaries, the following interpretations mentioned at the beginning of this paper are totally irrelevant to those readers, and we must look at the book of Revelation first and foremost as it would have been understood by those initial readers, before we can work out how to apply them to our age. In essence, as summarised earlier in the paper, these are the following adjustments that would need to be done in the SDA interpretation of the book of Revelation:

xviii. Chapter 2, 3

The whole explanation of the historicist's application of these church epistles to long periods of the Christian era would be totally irrelevant.

xix. Chapter 6

- The six seals would not refer to events throughout the Christian era concerning the corruption of the Christian church and its persecution of other Christians, because that period of time would not have occurred;
- The signs in the sun, moon and stars as well as the great earthquake would not refer to some event in the 18th and 19th century, but more naturally refer to the times of John's contemporaries.

xx. Chapter 7

The seal of God would not be the issue over Saturday of Sunday worship as Sunday worship was not an issue in the first-century A.D. among Sabbath-keeping Christians; it only became so when the calendar was standardized in the fourth century throughout the Roman Empire;

xxi. Chapter 8

The events in the seven trumpets would not represent the "principal political and warlike events that occur during the same time [of the Christian era]" [Smith, 1944](#), p.474.

There would be no Gothic invasion;

No Vandal conquest of Italy and northern Africa;

No invasion by the Huns;

No Odoacer, the first barbarian ruler of Italy;

xxii. Chapter 9

There would be no fall of Chosroes III, king of Persian in the first woe;

Nor the rise of Mahometism and the Saracens;

There would be no fulfillment of the five months by Othman's assault on the Greek empire in 1449;

There would be no prediction of the existence of the Ottoman empire for "391 years and fifteen days" ending in August 11, 1840 ([Smith, 1944](#), p.507, 517).

xxiii. Chapter 10

The angel with the little book would not represent the preaching of the time prophecies of the book of Daniel after 1798 by the Advent Movement in the 1840s and thereafter by the Seventh-day Adventist Church;

The eating of the little book would not refer to the disappointment of those believers in the Advent Movement who found their prediction of the return of Jesus in 1844 was not true;

The statement "that there will be time no longer" would not refer to the absence of any time prophecies that extend beyond 1844 A.D. since time would not have extended to that date;

xxiv. Chapter 11

The two witnesses would *not* be the Old and New Testament, since there was no Bible in the times of the first-century. Even the New Testament did not exist

and the documents that would later become the contents of the New Testament had different circulation areas and were not readily available for all the churches everywhere. As can be seen from the Revelation, the documents that were later to be called the New Testament were still being written. And John's epistles were at this time still unwritten. Perhaps the Gospel of John was still to be written too. The 1260-days for the two witnesses prophesying in sackcloth is not 1260 years, as this would extend beyond the life of the first-century believers and the promises of the seven epistles would be invalid;

France is not the nation here since it did not exist.

The 3½ times would not apply to the French Revolution; the anger of nations under the seventh trumpet would not refer to a period of conflict between nations beginning with “the revolutions of Europe in 1848” (Smith, 1944, p.545);

the opening of the temple of God in heaven in the seventh trumpet would not refer to the proclamation by the Seventh-day Adventist church of their explanation of the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 in terms of their explanation of the Day of Atonement;

xxv. Chapter 12

The 1260-days of the woman in the wilderness is 3½ calendar years to enable the original readers to endure all these things and still survive until the Second Advent.

It would not refer to 1260 years; the woman in the wilderness would not refer to the Dark Ages;

xxvi. Chapter 13, 14

The leopard beast from the sea would not represent the Roman Empire in its Christian form, i.e., the Papal Roman Empire of the Dark Ages.

The beast from the earth would not apply to the USA since the USA did not exist. This refers to a power in the times of these believers - a power associated with the pagan Roman Empire. The concept of the pagan and the papal Roman Empire is obsolete with this interpretation since the papacy did not exist at the time of these believers.

The wounding of the leopard beast does not refer to the loss of temporal power by the pope beginning with his imprisonment and brief abolition by Berthier in 1798.

The healing of the wound does not refer to the restoration of the political power of the papacy by the USA.

The mark of the beast and the seal of God cannot be the issue of the worship on either Saturday or Sunday because according to the SDA's own position, Christians at this time kept the Sabbath according to the commandment. A more feasible solution is the issue over Jesus worship versus emperor worship - an issue that had already become a daily issue in the lives of those early Christians living in the Roman Empire.

xxvii. Chapter 17, 18

The power here referred to as the harlot would not be the papal Roman Empire as it did not exist at this time. It refers to the pagan Roman Empire.

As can be seen by the above brief survey of current traditional SDA explanation of the contents of the book of Revelation, this means nothing less than a total overhaul of the SDA position on this prophetic book and by implication a total revamping of their world view with their idiosyncratic notion of events that are to develop before the end of time. Indeed what would survive of their present explanation concerning the pre-advent events in the book of Revelation?

What are the implications of the conclusions of my paper for the interpretation for the book of Revelation as traditionally presented by teachers in the SDA church?

If the Revelator meant his message to address a possible first-century A.D. Second Advent, then the next step for careful students would be to:

Interpret how the message would have been interpreted by the church at that time;

Only after seeing how the prophecy would have been understood by the original audience can we then re-apply those prophecies to the time immediately preceding the Second Advent whenever it occurs;

This re-application can only be done following the same principles used to obtain a meaning of the Revelation for the first-century Christians.

And this is where SDA scholarship becomes sticky - it becomes an organisationally-political exercise and not a mere pursuit of understanding. Their explanation of the *raison d'être* of the SDA church is intrinsically intertwined with their explanation of the prophecies of Daniel and by extension, the expansion of this exposition of Daniel into the book of Revelation.

Although some modern SDA scholars want to shy away acknowledging the central pillar of the 2300 days as the foundation of the SDA faith, the history of the SDA church places it "fair and square" in centre stage. It is the reason why the little band of believers who survived the disillusionment of the aftermath of the 1844 movement kept "the faith" that was taught by Miller and later clarified by Hiram Edson, O.R.L. Crosier and Franklin B. Hahn. This small group of scattered remnants of the Advent movement felt that their new understanding of the significance of the 1844 movement was correct and therefore "the torch" of God's truth had been passed from Miller to them to carry to as many as possible until the Lord's work in the Most Holy Place was finished. It was this group of people who formed the SDA church.

Their interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were "core business" as far as they were concerned. This is why I refer to these matters as political, not just exegetical. The very definition of the SDA institution is intertwined with their exegesis of these two prophetic books. Read any SDA explanation of the meaning of Revelation 10. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is referred to there in the chapter! Take Revelation 12. The Seventh-day Church is referred to there as the "remnant"(verse 17)! They are God's special people above all other Christian churches in the world today with a special mission to extract members from Christian churches and the general population! Take Revelation

14. Read any SDA explanation of the meaning of Revelation 14. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is referred to there in the chapter!

Notwithstanding this prowess over the superior position the SDA church has (in their view) in the book of Revelation, the only true way to understand a document is to ascertain its meaning in relation to the audience for whom it was originally intended.

The Ellen G. White Estate has been arguing the same point since the inception of the Estate in relation to the writings of Mrs. White. “Time and Circumstance” is their catch phrase to understanding her documents correctly. This phrase means that her writings must be read in their historical context, and interpreted with those constraints in mind. So many weirdo’s with their “off-the-planet” interpretations of the writings of E.G. White would have corrected their interpretations had they spent the time to use this principle. We can make Ellen White say anything about everything if we ignore the correct rubric. Why should we not apply that same principle to the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation? This principle is a universal rule for doing any document analysis. Nothing less will yield a correct understanding of the text, regardless of the genre of the document. And without working through this step, it is impossible then to be able to reapply the text to those believers who *will* live through the things described in the book of Revelation when the events on this planet do develop into “the final countdown.” This is even more the case at this present time with the increasing number of scholars of some influence in the halls of SDA institutions promulgating the erroneous concept that apocalyptic prophecy is *not* conditional.

Final Comments

Dr Desmond Ford was absolutely on the mark with the following comments made in the Glacier View manuscript:

But first, of much greater importance is the whole weight of New Testament testimony that God’s ideal plan was that Jesus should have returned in the first century A.D., not long after His ascension to heaven. This is clearly taught from Matthew to Revelation and recognized by the vast majority of New Testament scholars. (1980, p.178, Italics his)

What is the meaning of these statements written in the first century – “I am coming soon;” “the time is near;” “what must soon take place;” “if you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.....” Many are the expedients which have been invented – not to explain these statements, but to explain them away.... We repeat – the evidence is overwhelming that the book of Revelation was written to nerve the church of that day to complete the gospel commission. Heaven intended that faithful believers of that generation might see Christ come in the clouds and be caught up to meet him without passing through the portals of the tomb. (*Ibid*, p.186, 188)

Many scholars have convincingly argued along these lines. In this paper we have met irrefutable evidence endorsing the view of Ford and many other writers. Yet with all the evidence provided in this paper, supported by a host of credible Adventist writers, will this mean anything to those who from time to time assess and adjust the beliefs of the SDA church? Definitely not. Notice this statement made by Robert Olson when he published a polemic paper against the ideas of Des Ford in 1981:

Ellen White asserts positively, however, that any new interpretations of Scripture, if correct, will be in harmony with our distinctive doctrines. She declares, “One will arise, and still another, with new light, which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit....We are not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith.” – Selected Messages, book 1, p. 161 (Olson, 1981, p.44.)

According to this statement, there is no possibility for the church to change its views on this matter. According to this statement, the SDA position will *never* be shown to be incorrect in regard to its exposition of those texts it uses to support its “special points of faith.” Anachronistic or not, the current SDA historicist view on the book of Revelation must be the truth. To endorse my arguments would be to violate the principle enunciated above by Olson. But if one was to accept my observations of the message to the Philadelphians as being correct, then the above statement of Ellen White is incorrect, since the special points of faith have, as their basis, the historicist’s method of prophetic interpretation. Furthermore, her following statement *must be also regarded as incorrect*:

“Not till after the great apostasy, and the long period of reign of the ‘man of sin,’ can we look for the advent of our Lord. This period ended in 1798. The coming of Christ could not take place before that time” (1950, p.356, italics supplied).

As one can see from the section at the start of this paper on the implications of my research for the historicist’s interpretation of Revelation, their whole system has been shown to be incompatible with a first-century fulfillment of the book of Revelation. Am I fatalistic in believing this paper has a position that could never be accepted by the SDA church? Yes. But is this attitude a realistic view? I think so. Notice this statement on the books of the *Conflict of the Ages* series, which endorses the views I have argued against:

In my books, the truth is stated, barricaded by a “Thus saith the Lord.” The Holy Spirit traced these truths upon my heart as indelibly as the law was traced by the finger of God, upon the tables of stone. (1884, p.546)

But I consider my paper to be a correct interpretation of the time of testing in Revelation 3:10 and I believe that view will stand the test of greater minds than mine. In the face of the evidence related to Rev. 3:10, others will conclude, as I have, that this text is indeed the nemesis of the SDA historicist argument that the NT texts regarding the imminence of Christ did not literally mean what they said. These NT texts do indeed mean what they say, and they mean it for the original readers or hearers of the message. The coming of Christ could have taken place in the first century AD.

The Seventh-day Church has unequivocal evidence *not only* that the Lord intended to return in the times of the original readers of the Apocalypse, *but also* that the historical teaching Seventh-day Adventists espouse in interpreting the book of Revelation does not fit the text – it is anachronistic, and should be disregarded if they are to retain any sense of integrity in Biblical interpretation. Revelation 3:10 provides the material for both of these points. They can no longer espouse a historicist’s interpretation of the books of Revelation and consider themselves to be rightly dividing the word of truth. The comfort of the traditional works of SDA pioneers and those before them supporting the traditional

SDA-historicist view is no comfort to those who walk in the light of this evidence. The reasoning of former generations is to be jettisoned in favour of clear Biblical evidence.

In conclusion: *The second coming of Christ could have occurred a short time after Christ's ascension. This is the thrust of the entire New Testament. There is no place in this interpretation for a preordained prophetic period extending beyond their lifetime.*

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Appendix

Note 1. Ellen G. White's References on Revelation 3:10

Some other references to the text or phrases in this text in the writings of Ellen White that indicate the time of trouble referred to in this text is still future, include the following:

Just before us is the “hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” All whose faith is not firmly established upon the word of God will be deceived and overcome...Those who are earnestly seeking a knowledge of the truth, and are striving to purify their souls through obedience, thus doing what they can to prepare for the conflict, will find, in the God of truth, a sure defense. “Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee,” is the Saviour’s promise. He would sooner send every angel out of heaven to protect His people, than leave one soul that trusts in Him to be overcome by Satan. (1950, p.560)

The great crisis is before us.... In the time of trial before us, God's pledge of security will be placed upon those who have kept the word of His patience.... (1948b, p.404)

"... they fear that every sin has not been repented of, and that through some fault in themselves, they will fail to realize the fulfillment of the Savior's promise: I 'will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world.' Revelation 3:10" (1950, p.619)

The more we learn in reference to the early days of the Christian church and see with what subtlety Satan worked to weaken and destroy, the better we shall be prepared to resist his devices and meet coming perils. We are in the time [c1881-1889] when tribulations such as the world has never yet seen will prevail. "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has but a short time." But God has set bounds that Satan cannot pass. Our most faith is this barrier; and if we build ourselves up in the faith, we shall be safe in the keeping of the Mighty One. "Because you have kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth." (1948a, p.297)

And the following reference uses the text in a more general sense:

"And for those who in the midst of conflict should maintain their faith in God, the prophet was given the words of commendation and promise: 'I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name.' 'Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.' The believers were admonished: 'Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.' 'Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.' verse 8, 10, 2, 16." (1911, p587f)

Note 2. Meaning of the Names for the various schools of interpretation of prophecy.

Some scholars, when referring to the system of principles used by Seventh-day Adventists to exegete prophecy, use the term "continuous-historicists" (Holbrook, 1983b, p.21 Spangler, 1980, p.31). Other names that have been used in this paper to refer to this same system include "traditional historicists," "SDA historicists" or "SDA historicism" or even just "historicists". These phrases, wherever they occur in this paper are to be seen as addressing the same system of hermeneutics.

On the other hand, these terms are not to be confused with the "historical" or "historical-grammatical" system of hermeneutics; a system of hermeneutics that differ from traditional SDA historicists when a comparison of the principles of interpreting apocalyptic prophecy is made. This system involves a much more valid and reliable set of principles. They are more rigorous and conclusions can be independently validated, a feature difficult to achieve using a subjective system like SDA historicism.

Although there is a close similarity between the nomenclature of these two competing systems of interpretation, do not assume that their methods or conclusions must be similar. They are as different from each other as day is from night.

Note 3. The Angel of the Church.

The term "angel" in Rev 1:20 to Rev 3:22 does not refer to the same creatures who are described by the same name in Rev 4 to Rev 22. The usage of "angel" in the seven epistles does not refer to heavenly beings, but instead is a reference to sinful human beings- sinners by nature but Christian believers in heart -who are the local authority for the church being addressed. The evidence for such a conclusion is the following:

They are commanded to repent of sin (2:5,6; 3:3,19). This is indeed a strange command if the term referred to sinless heavenly beings;

These persons cannot be sinful angels because they are referred to as lovers of God (2:2-4, 13, 19,3:8) and are promised a place in heaven, two factors that rule out a reference to sinful angels;

These persons are subject to physical death (2:11); and also the possibility of encountering the second death (2:11);

They suffer torture and imprisonment (2:10), fear (2:11) and live among men (2:13,14);

They were previously ignorant of God (2:4; 3:3);

They are subject to self-deception, pride, arrogance and compromise (3:15-17);

Their eternal destiny is intertwined with the outcome of the selection of the saved and the lost at the second coming of Christ (2:25; 3:11);

Their whole spiritual life is dependent on the ministry of Jesus (2:5, 16; 3:2,3,5).

The conclusion that these Christian sinful human beings are also the elders of each respective church comes from the fact that the epistles are addressed to persons who have the authority in the local church to decide who should or should not teach in the church, and who are the major teacher of the congregation (2:2,3,6,14, 15, 16,20).

These two responsibilities together seem sufficient to warrant the conclusion that the "angel" of each church being addressed by the Lord is the elder of the church.

Note 4. Revelation 1 to 3: Apocalyptic??

There are some who would not find argument with the conclusion that Revelation 3:10 clearly indicates that John's contemporaries could have been among those to experience the final climax that would have culminated in the appearing of the Lord Jesus in the clouds of heaven. They would merely dismiss it by saying that this statement in Revelation 3:10 is not an apocalyptic statement, but rather, is only epistolary and hortatory in nature and not a statement to the effect that the event could have actually occurred. This position allows them to acknowledge what is obvious in Revelation 3:10, and yet still cling to the theory that conditionality does not apply to apocalyptic.

This position raises the question as to whether in the SDA view of things, the first three chapters of the Revelation are apocalyptic. According to two lists of the distinguishing characteristics of apocalyptic prophecy (Nichol, 1957, p.753f.; Strand, 1980, pp.3-5), the basis of the messages to the seven churches in a vision; the prose literary form; the striking contrasts between the forces of good and evil; the eschatological

emphasis; the extensive use of symbolism; the use of composite symbolism (e.g., a two-edged sword protruding from a human mouth); and the origin of these messages in a time of distress and perplexity, all augur in favour of Revelation 1-3 being classified as apocalyptic. (For other statements that classify the entire book as apocalyptic, see LaRondelle, 1974, p.230; Neufeld, 1974, p.113; Holbrook, 1986a, p.290; Johnsson, 1986, p.277; Nichol, 1957, p.723-726; Hasel, 1986, p.322; Methods of Bible Study Committee, n.d., p.8; Strand, 1980, p.2,21; 1983, p.20)

To those who wish to separate the apocalyptic vision of the Son of man in Revelation chapter one from his allegedly "non-apocalyptic" messages to the seven churches as recorded on chapters two and three, let it be said that the text offers no such artificial dichotomy. There is no natural separation between what is seen by John as recorded in chapter one and what is heard by him as recorded in chapter two and three. Chapters one to three are all part of one section of a much larger vision. The first natural division occurs in ch. 4:1 where we read "after this, I looked and behold...."

John called this book "The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ" (1:1). Now does this apocalypse begin in ch.4 or ch.1? Does not he call his entire work an apocalypse? Are we going to presume that we know more about his own work than what he himself knew, thus qualifying us to rename his work as "The Non-Apocalypse 1-3 followed by the Apocalypse (4-22)"?

Note 5. God's "Keeping"

Even though some of the faithful ones are beheaded during the campaign to make all humankind worship the image to the beast (Revelation 20:4), they nevertheless experience part of that hour of testing which would come upon all the world. Does the Lord fail then of fulfilling the promise of Revelation 3:10 to those who are martyred?

This depends on whether the "keeping" promised by God means spiritual preservation, physical preservation or both. My argument would be that the "keeping" is related to the "testing" which these believers would face; a "testing" which may or may not include martyrdom as the only spiritually viable alternative. God promises to successfully guide them through the test and still remain faithful. And for the martyrs, their success culminates in their death.

LaRondelle says on this matter:

God's keeping or protecting power is necessary because the Church exists in the sphere of the evil one. In Revelation 3: 10 Christ promises the Church in Philadelphia: 'Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.'

R. H. Gundry comments perceptively on these texts, both in John and Revelation: 'The plain implication is that were they absent from the world with the Lord, the keeping would not be necessary. Similarly, were the Church absent from the hour of testing, keeping would not be necessary.' J. F. Walvoord disagrees. He argues: 'The thought of the Greek [terein ek] is to 'keep from,' not to 'keep in,' so that the Philadelphia church is promised deliverance before the hour [of trial] comes.' This appeal to the meaning of the Greek is refuted, however, by Jesus' use of the same Greek verb in John 17:15, where He places

this expression ('to keep from') in full contrast to the idea of removing the Church out of the world. Instead, Christ promises protection that results in a victorious rescue through God's keeping power. Concerning the great, countless multitude before the throne of God, one of the elders speaking of John declares, 'These are they who have come out of great tribulation' (Revelation 7 : 14). The emphasis is not on the period of tribulation, but on the victorious emergence of the saints out of it...

Christ promises to keep the Philadelphian church from the eschatological hour of trial. If this indicates a pretribulation rapture of the Church out of the world, why does not God's similar promise to ancient Israel concerning the Babylonian exile indicate a pretribulation rapture from the Babylonian trial? 'It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.' (Jeremiah 30 :7). This text merely promises deliverance from the time of Jacob's distress after Israel has gone through the exile. Neither does Revelation 3: 10 require a pretribulation rapture for the Philadelphian church, but rather it offers divine protection during the time of testing tribulation and persecution. (1983a, p. 193)

Ford in his commentary on the book of Revelation, *Crisis*, says:

Verse 10 has often been discussed. What means the promise that the faithful will be kept from the hour of temptation? Does it mean to be kept OUT of it or to be kept IN it? We think Hoeksema has it right when he answers these questions.

" In the first place, the question arises: why should the church of Smyrna be cast into the midst of that tribulation and the church of Philadelphia be excused? In the second place, we may notice that the entire conception that the faithful church shall be delivered before the persecution of Antichrist comes is false and dangerous. It is false, for it is not in harmony with Scripture. Christ warns His people more than once that this hour shall come, and that they must remain faithful unto the end. Why all these warnings of tribulation, with which Scripture abounds, if they that are faithful shall not be in the hour of temptation? And dangerous the conception is, because it puts the church to sleep. The church which expects to be received in the air before the great tribulation comes does not prepare itself for the battle and for the hour of temptation. That hour shall catch her unexpectedly. And therefore, we must not labor under this illusion, but must expect to be in tribulation, and must prepare to the evil day, putting on the whole armor of God. In the third place, the tribulation which is mentioned here is pictured as coming over the whole earth; and it is not likely that the faithful little church of Philadelphia would escape the attention of the enemy. It is exactly the faithful church which must endure persecution. In the fourth place, the original may very well be interpreted to signify that the little church of Philadelphia would indeed be cast into the midst of temptation and be tried with all the world, but that in that tribulation the Lord would keep her, so that she would come out of it unharmed.

" The latter is indeed the meaning. Not that the church shall be kept from tribulation is her glory and comfort. Not that she shall not meet with tribulation must be her assurance; for it would be false. But that in the midst of suffering and persecution, when the enemy rages and the temptation to deny the Lord is strong and fierce, the Lord by His grace will be sufficient to keep the church, so

that she endures to the very end – that is the meaning of the text. [Ford footnotes: “H. Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh*, pp.132-133.”]

Caird, Mounce, Ladd and Bruce, and others agree. Even more importantly, the sealing and measuring spoken of in chapters 7 and 11 are the symbolic portrayal of the “keeping” promised in 3:10. “Keeping” does not mean “removing.” (1982, pp.300-301)

These thoughts are echoed by Isbon Beckwith:

....in the interpretation of this difficult sentence, it should be observed (1) that *πειρασμός, πειραζώ, trial, try*, always include the idea of testing. (2) This idea of testing shows that the words *ἡ οἰκουμένη ὅλη, the whole world*, upon which the trial is to come, refer, not to the physical world, but to men; *all mankind* is meant, as in 12⁹. (3) The second clause, *to try them that dwell on the earth*, which merely repeats the first, (after the writer’s manner...) must be understood likewise of mankind universally, Christians and non-Christians alike. The phrase *οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, those that dwell on the earth*, is common in apocalyptic writings, and for the most part refers to the wicked (because the ‘world’ at large is thought of as hostile to God); sometimes the good are meant, as in En 37², 40⁶; sometimes all mankind, as in En70¹; so here. It appears then, a certain inference, that a trial spoken of in our passage is that of the distresses, the ‘messianic woes,’ foretold in the following visions as coming upon the world before the parousia. These are not to test the saints only; our author distinctly recognizes the ‘woes’ as testing the wicked also, and as designed to lead to repentance, see on 9²⁰, cf. also 11¹³, 16¹¹. Does the promise then mean that the Philadelphians or any of the saints, are to be exempted from these trials? Elsewhere our book, like the eschatological chapters in the Gospels, represents the ‘woes’ as coming on all the saints alike; cf. 7¹⁴, 13¹⁰14¹², Mt 24^{7-13, 22}, par. And this is implied in the case of the Philadelphians in the immediate context; the words ‘hold fast, that no one take thy crown,’ the condition of the promise ‘he that overcometh,’ etc., imply the continuance of the struggle till the Lord comes. In fact, the language of the promise, ‘keep thee from the hour,’ etc., if taken strictly, does not mean the contrary; the *ώρα, the hour, the period, or season*, of the woes is one from which none could be kept, all living must pass through it. The true meaning of the promise is suggested by the analogous words, Jno. 17¹⁵, ‘I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one’ (*τηρησης αὐτος ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ*), i.e., safe from the power of Satan, which will continually assail them. The Philadelphians and those who have shown the same Christian steadfastness are promised that they shall be carried in safety through the great trial, they shall not fall. ...

To the above interpretation the objection is raised (Bouss. Blj. al) that testing can be understood of Christians only, and that therefore the trial spoken of must refer to some predicted calamity which will try the saints, not the world, such as the reign of the Beast, or the Roman persecution. From this trial the Philadelphians are promised exemption, while the saints in general, to whom the words ‘those that dwell on the earth’ are specifically referred, must pass through it. The Philadelphians have already stood their fiery test and will be spared the stress and storm about to come upon the others. Answer to this argument is

contained in what is said above. The further objection to the interpretation adopted above is made, that the promise would contain nothing as the peculiar reward apparently offered to the Philadelphians. But the language does not imply any reward peculiar to the Philadelphians as contrasted with others who had shown like fidelity; the persons addressed are, as in all the epistles, typical, and the same promise would be expected in the case of any whose present steadfastness made them worthy of this assured succor in the severe trial of the future. (1919, pp.483-484)

And Henry Barclay Swete says:

In the foreshortened view of the future which was taken by the Apostolic Age this final sifting of mankind was near at hand, not being, as yet clearly differentiated from the imperial persecution which had already begun.... To the Philadelphian church the promise was an assurance of safekeeping in any trial that might supervene – an appropriate promise. (1911, p.56).

Note 6. The End of the Time of Testing - in the "Philadelphian" period or the "Laodicean" period?

The sense of the idea of God keeping the Philadelphian overcomers faithful during the trying ordeal which they would encounter implicitly demands that the time of testing also finish during their lifetime, for how would they know that they have been "kept" unless the ordeal finishes and they find that they have endured it faithfully? There will be some who will be faithful until they are beheaded (Rev 20:4), and for them the seal of their witness with their blood is the end of the ordeal as far as they are concerned, and they can truly say that God has kept them from the hour of temptation. But there will be many who will endure the ordeal without losing their life, and these could only say that God has kept them if the ordeal is past. If this point is correct, then this would pose problems for those who view the churches as representative of historical periods because, as has been noted earlier, the end of this ordeal is the end of human probation as far as God's mercy is concerned, and yet the historicist has after the Philadelphian period, a period where mercy is still extended to hypocrites (see Rev3: 14-20) who would be under the wrath of God if they did not repent.

It may be argued that the tense of the verb just means that God would allow the consummation of the crisis to carry over into the Laodicean period, thus extending the cut-off point of God's mercy for sinners.

The problem with this argument however is that no-one is going to say that the issue over the mark of the beast has been a part of world history since the "Philadelphian" period. Notice the following quote from Pastor George Vandeman, illustrious SDA evangelist and speaker of some note during the 1960s and 1970s and author of many widely circulated books at that time, including Planet in Rebellion. He places the mark of the beast in the future:

The issue is much the same today. It concerns the law of our God. But today it is the fourth commandment that has been challenged. The time will come when you will be asked to bow down. The crowd will bow down. Will you bow down with them? Or will you stand true to God though the heavens fall?

But notice: Not a soul, as yet, has received the mark of the beast, for it has not yet been enforced by the laws of the nation. You see, God never brings a soul face to face with an issue on which his eternal destiny depends until that soul sees clearly what is involved. But when the issues are clearly defined, when informed men and women deliberately turn their backs on truth, trample His flag-His Sabbath- in the dust, and march under the banner of a challenging power, they make themselves candidates to receive the mark.

When the nations decree obedience to the substitute Sabbath, then all who have knowingly disregarded truth and trampled upon God's law will receive, as a natural consequence of their continued disobedience, the mark of the beast. For they will obey man rather than God, then as now. Little by little they have been turning away from truth, deciding against it, until in the last climactic hour they stand with the mark of apostasy upon them! ([Vandeman, 1960, p.388](#))

A second quote from the official SDA publication Questions on Doctrine echo the sentiments of Ps. Vandeman. The title of the chapter is:

a. When the Mark Will be Received

Do Seventh-day Adventists teach in their authorized literature that those who worship on Sunday and repudiate in its entirety the Seventh-day Adventist teaching as a consequence have the mark of apostasy, or "the mark of the beast"? Does not Mrs. White teach those who now keep Sunday already have the mark of the beast?

Our doctrinal positions are based upon the Bible, not upon Mrs. White's writings. But since her name has been introduced into the question, an explicit statement from her pen should set the record straight. The following was penned by her in 1899:

"No one has yet received the mark of the beast. The testing time has not yet come. There are true Christians in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion. None are condemned until they have had the light and have seen the obligation of the fourth commandment. But when the decree shall be forth enforcing the counterfeit Sabbath, and the loud cry of the third angel shall warn men against the worship of the beast and his image, the line will be clearly drawn between the false and the true. Then those who still continue in transgression will receive the mark of the beast." -Evangelism, pp. 234, 235. (Italics supplied.)

This has been her uniform teaching throughout the years-excerpts twisted out of their setting by detractors notwithstanding. This position is sustained by the same writer in The Great Controversy:

"But Christians of past generations observed the Sunday, supposing that in so doing they were keeping the Bible Sabbath: and there are now true Christians in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion, who honestly believe that Sunday is the Sabbath of divine appointment. God accepts their sincerity of purpose and their integrity before Him. But when Sunday observance shall be enforced by law, and the world shall be enlightened concerning the

obligation of the true Sabbath, then whoever shall transgress the command of God, to obey a precept which has no higher authority than that of Rome, will thereby honor popery above God.... As men then reject the institution which God has declared to be the sign of His authority, and honor in its stead that which Rome has chosen as the token of her supremacy, they will thereby accept the sign of allegiance to Rome- "the mark of the beast." And it is not until the issue is thus plainly set before the people, and they are brought to choose between the commandments of God and the commandments of men, that those who continue in transgression will receive "the mark of beast."-Page 449. (Italics supplied.)

“Sunday-keeping is not yet the mark of the beast, and will not be until the decree goes forth causing men to worship this idol Sabbath. The time will come when this day will be the test, but that time has not come yet.” - Ellen G. White Manuscript 118,1899.

To your inquiry, then, as to whether Mrs. White maintained that all those who do not see and observe the seventh day as the Sabbath now have the "mark of apostasy," the answer is definitely No.

We hold firm conviction that millions of devout Christians of all faiths throughout all past centuries, as well as those today who are sincerely trusting in Christ their Saviour for salvation and are following Him according to their best light, are unquestionably saved. Thousands of such went to the stake as martyrs for Christ and for their faith. Moreover, untold numbers of godly Roman Catholics will surely be included. God reads the heart and deals with the intent and the understanding. These are among His "other sheep" (John 10:16). He makes no mistake. The Biblical principle is clear: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Seventh-day Adventists interpret the prophecies relating to the beast, and the reception of his work, as something that will come into sharp focus just before the return of our Lord in glory. It is our understanding that this issue will then become a worldwide test. (**Seventh-day Adventists, 1957, pp. 183-185**)

Clearly it can be seen from the above quotes that the SDA church places the Philadelphian ordeal in the future. But the future is the Laodicean period since by their own statements, they see the Laodicean period as extending up to the close of human probation.

Therefore the act of saying the Philadelphian ordeal will occur in the Laodicean period – a clearly unacceptable and inconsistent position, even by their own literature (see SDABC quoted above (**Nichol, 1957, 752, 764**)) - highlights the fatal flaw in applying these messages to historical periods throughout the Christian era.

But, unless they are willing to say

the “shut door” theory was correct and scriptural after all and ;

there has been no mercy for sinners since 1844, and;

the issue of the mark of the beast and the seal of God was concluded in 1844;

they have no choice but to acknowledge the historicist’s hermeneutic has founded permanently on the rocky shores of the Isle of Patmos.

Note 7. "To Keep" and 2 Peter 2:9

An occurrence of $\tau\eta\rho\omega$ in the N.T. which may be used to argue that God's "keeping" activity includes the restraining power of death as the means of accomplishing this preservation is 2 Peter 2:9:

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. (A.V.)

If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment while continuing their punishment (margin: or "unrighteous for punishment until the day of judgment"). (N.I.V.)

The argument would run something like this: In 2 Peter 2:4, the angels who sinned are "reserved unto judgment", which is to say that they are kept unchanged in their standing or their condition before God until the day of judgment with no possibility of having it changed. In verse 9 Peter uses just two groups to describe humankind, the godly and the unjust, and those who are the unjust are said to be also "reserved" or "held" (N.I.V) until or for the day of judgment. The term "the angels"(v.4) refer to the entire group of rebellious angels. The term "the unjust" (v.9) is also a generic noun referring to all of the wicked. But since the wicked cannot be understood as being reserved in the same way as the rebellious angels, who are not under the power of death, the "holding" or "keeping" of the wicked must refer to their dead status and the impossibility of having their standing or spiritual condition at the time of death changed; it is preserved impeccably by the Spirit of God (Eccl 3:21; 12:7).

In this sense then, death is one of God's "keeping" agencies which could be referred to in Revelation 3:10, and the ancient believers to whom this promise in Revelation was first sent will realize the fulfillment of this promise (albeit posthumously) when the universal time of testing arrives because death has placed them beyond the reach of this ordeal, and therefore they will remain untouched by any evil. So whenever the time of testing occurs, Gods promise to those believers will then be fulfilled. This argument neatly allows the validity of the assertion that this promise of revelation 3:10 applies to John's contemporaries and at the same time denies that the eschatological events associated with the final and universal time of testing were a possibility within their lifetime.

However plausible this argument may seem, it has serious flaws. The "delivering" activity by God for the righteous and his "keeping" activity for the unjust are done while the unjust and the righteous are still alive. This is demonstrated both by the examples that Peter uses to illustrate his point in verse 9, and it is also illustrated by the grammar which Peter uses. Firstly, in his illustration of his point in verse 9, Peter refers his readers to the example of Noah and his contemporaries; and also to Lot's experience in Sodom and Gomorrah. The deliverance of the righteous in both the cases cited was executed while they were still alive. Secondly, by the parallelism of verse 9, where the keeping of the unjust and the deliverance of the righteous are put in juxtaposition with each other, there is a strong, although only implied, argument that the keeping by God of the unjust is done while the unjust are alive.

This is further supported by the observation that God does not need to exercise his knowledge on how to keep the unjust if they are dead because neither the powers of God or Satan, nor the unjust themselves are able to change the standing of the unjust in the

light of the criterion for judgment while the unjust are dead. This is the case because a change in status before God's standard of judgment involves an act of the will, and given the condition of soul-sleep in death, no act of a person's will can be effected while he/she remains dead. Extra support for this conclusion comes from a comparison between τηρω in ch2: 4, and its use in verse 9.

In ch2: 4, the angels who are "kept" by God, are alive; they may be confined, but they are nonetheless alive. Just as God's keeping power over wicked angels is exercised while they are still alive, so God's keeping power over wicked humans is exercised while they are still alive.

Looking more closely at the two examples of deliverance of the righteous and destruction of the unjust which Peter uses, it will be noticed that Peter infers God's knowledge on how to both deliver the righteous and destroy the wicked from God's past demonstrations of these actions. Since them, Peter can say as a result of these divine acts that God knows how to deliver the righteous, it would rightly follow that the way in which God "keeps" the unjust until judgment day can also be derived from these past acts. This conclusion is supported by Jude 7 which says that the judgment of God on Sodom and Gomorrah is set forth as an example of God's judgment on the wicked in the last judgment:

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of external fire.(N.I.V.)

The question may then be asked, how does these past examples of God's judgment illustrate God's "keeping" of the unjust? This sense of keep has the flavour of "reserving" the unjust for judgment. In both the examples of Noah and Lot, their contemporaries encountered the judgment of God and God worked his execution of this judgment so that none of the wicked escaped judgment, and none of the righteous came under God's awful judgment. In this sense, their experience is an example of the last judgment in that none of the wicked will escape God's punishment, and none of the righteousness will miss out on eternal deliverance.

This concept of God's reserving activity over the unjust is also supported by TDNT:

The verb is used in the N.Y. in the following senses: b. "to keep" until a given point in time, e.g.,...the fallen angels and unrighteous men whom God keeps, so that they will not escape judgment 2Pt.2.4,9; Jd 6b, also the world 2Pt 3:7,..."

A further question that needs to be asked then is how does God reserve the unjust until they receive the rewards of their evil deeds? If this action of God is done while they are alive, how is it accomplished? My answer to this question is that this work of God is nearly identical to his work for the righteous and the fallen angels.

Both the righteous and the wicked are kept until the day of judgment: the former is kept in righteousness, out of sin; the latter is kept in sin. The agent of this separation is temptation. Circumstances and situations are encountered by the mere fact of being alive, and moral choices are involved in many of these circumstances and situations. And this is where temptation enters. With choice and an innate evil nature, the temptation to do evil when it is expedient, convenient or comfortable is a very real force.

God's method of salvation is a science in that it is effected in a predetermined, mutually exclusive manner which has no relation to living in sin or indifference. The exercise of faith and obedience is crucial to deliverance from temptation to do evil. The exercise of disobedience is crucial for temptation to evil to be successful in coercing a person to yield to sin. There is no arbitrary classification of deliverance or yielding when a person is faced with temptation. Rather, it is defined very clearly by God, the person's conscience and common sense, and it is revealed by the exercise of the will.

God knows how to deliver the righteous out of temptation; God also knows how to keep the wicked until they receive their punishment in the day of judgment. How does God keep the unjust wicked until they are punished? The answer to this question must be endorsed by the manner that God kept the antediluvians and the evil inhabitants of Sodom, Gomorrah and their satellite towns until they received their judgment.

The way in which God confirms a sinner in his evil ways is to "delay" His judgment that rewards righteousness and punishes evil. This is referred to by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 8:11-14:

When sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them and their days will not lengthen like a shadow. (N.I.V).

Psalm 50 also alludes to this delay of judgment:

These evil things you have done and I have kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face. (v.21 NIV) "cf v.3 'Our God comes and will not be silent' "

Notice also other references in Scripture:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The man who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Galatians 6:7-9 NIV.

This text exhorts those who believe to persevere in their trust of the soon coming judgment. In fact the nonexistence of God's judgment on good and evil in this life has been a subject which has elicited a lot of trauma, anxiety and pain since sin made its presence felt in the world.

There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too I say is meaningless. Eccl. 8:14, NIV.

The surety of coming judgment was the message that Enoch preached to an unbelieving generation:

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly

way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." (Jude 14,15 NIV)

Their unbelief in his message constituted a denial of God's judgment on evil or good, at least as far as it related to their own actions. Because sinners do not believe in the message of judgment, God allows them to deceive themselves in regard to the security of their position and allows them to be lead captive into sin, thus confirming them in their wickedness.

Notice the following statements of Scripture:

"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened...Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts... furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the Knowledge of God, he gave them over to depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness...(Romans 1:21,24,28,29 NIV.)

They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie, so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (2Thess. 2:10-12, NIV.)

Neither the antediluvians nor the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah believed that God would step into history and execute judgment on wickedness, and this unbelief is confirmed by their contempt towards the one proclaiming a soon coming retribution on evil. So pervasive is this attitude in sinners that Peter says that those who live just before the Second Advent display the same mould of mind:

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say "where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." (2Peter 3:3,4, NIV.)

So in summary, it has been argued here that the unjust who are reserved unto judgment, are reserved while they are alive; and they are reserved in wickedness, imprisoned by their false belief regarding God execution, or better "non-execution", of punishment on evil, and reward upon righteousness. The righteous, who were delivered out of temptation and kept in righteousness, were alive; the wicked, or unjust, who were reserved until judgment, were alive and were kept in sin under the power of temptation, and although they knew God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continued to do these very things but also approved of those who practised them. (cf Romans 1:32, NIV.)

Thus the use of $\tau\eta\rho\omega$ in 2 Peter 2:9 does not give any support to the assertion that those to whom the promise applies in Revelation 3:10 means that they will be kept from the universal, end-time hour of temptation because they will be dead and thus immune from the power of temptation. There is no text in the N.T. which supports such a definition of "to keep."

Note 8: The Views of Other Scholars on the “keeping” in Rev3:10

Some readers might still have lingering ideas that the “keeping” of Rev 3:10 refers to them being kept from experiencing that unprecedented time of trouble, so an enlightening exercise is to look at the views of many other scholars and writers who have commented on the text. In scanning a selection of commentaries on the Revelation, a significant but small group of commentators did not mention this section at all, nor do they go into a discussion of the implications of the text.

Among those who did make a comment, there were two distinct groups: those who saw this promise as applying to be “kept” by God *when they experienced* the time of trouble. The second group were those who saw the “keeping” as meaning they would be “*kept from experiencing*” the time of trouble, by being raptured before event transpired. Typically, those who endorsed the second view were those who subscribed to the rapture doctrine.

Here then are the pertinent comments from a variety of authors. They are no means exhaustive, but they give a sample of the two camps of thought. Readers can judge for themselves which view carries the day.

Commentators who are noncommittal regarding the “keeping” in Rev 3:10.

Homer Hailey

“I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world [inhabited earth], to try them that dwell upon the earth.” As the saints in Philadelphia have kept the word of His patience, so Christ will keep (tēreō, protect) these from the hour of trial. “Hour” is here used of a season, a period of trial. “From the hour of trial,” from out of the midst of (*ek*); “but whether by *immunity from*, or by *being brought safely through*, the preposition does not clearly define” (Alford). The question seems best determined by the context: the trial that was to come upon the whole inhabited earth was to test “them that dwell upon the earth.”

The word *earth* (*gē*) occurs 81 times in the course of the book and is used in numerous ways. It is frequently used as a metonymy for the realm or world of unregenerate men. This use will be pointed out in various places where the redeemed are distinguished from “them that dwell upon the earth,” earthlings or earth-dwellers. The church will have its trials which test faith, but it will be kept from the trials which would affect the earthlings, the world of the unregenerate. Those of the world, those in conflict with Christ and His church, will be, in this instance, the ones tried. (1979, pp. 152f)

Leon Morris

10. *Since* introduces the reason, but grammatically it might be the reason for the preceding (the triumph of the Philadelphians over them of Satan’s synagogue), or the following (Christ’s keeping them in the hour of temptation). There seems no way of deciding the point. *My command to endure patiently* is more literally, ‘the word of my steadfastness’ It is a curious expression and seems to mean ‘the teaching which was exemplified in my steadfastness’ (so

Swete; cf. 2 Thes. 3:5; Heb. 12:1-2). The same verb (*tēreō*) is used of Christ's keeping the Philadelphians as of their keeping his word. There is a justice about it all. He does what is right.

Keep you from (ek) the hour of trial might mean 'keep you from undergoing the trial' or 'keep you right through the trial.' The Greek is capable of either meaning. The trial is a very thorough-going test, for it will *come upon the whole world*, and test *those who live on the earth*. John usually uses this expression to mean the heathen world... Its use here accordingly may be another indication of compassion. The heathen are not simply judged and punished, but tested. God is giving them another opportunity. (1987, p.79)

Commentators who say the “keeping” in Rev 3:10 means *being prevented from experiencing the time of trouble.*

Donald Grey Barnhouse

Those who keep the Word of God are aware that great judgments are to come upon this world. They look about them in the world and see that the hatred which crucified Christ still reigns, and that wherever there is not active hatred, there is polite indifference to the claims of God. They know that the clouds of God's wrath have been gathering for ages, and that the judgment stroke must one day fall upon the inhabitants of the earth. Will the Church pass through the great tribulation? Let the risen Lord answer this question most definitely. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of the tribulation, the one which is about to come on all the inhabited world, to test those dwelling on the earth." Escape was definitely promised by the Lord Jesus Himself (Luke 21:36). If the Church is to come through the tribulation judgments that are to come upon this earth, then, say it plainly, there is no blessed hope in the Bible.

But the believer is not to presume upon the grace of God because he knows that he is to escape the vials of wrath which are to be poured out upon the inhabitants of the earth.

(1971,pp.)

J. B. Smith

Verse 10. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

The reference here is to the patience of Christ, as in 1:9. Compare also II Thessalonians 3:5 where the literal rendering is: "The Lord direct you...into the patience of Christ." The believers at Philadelphia followed the example and teaching of Christ who likewise endured the contradiction of sinners (Hebrews 12:3), and they had the mind of Christ who was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Phillipians 2:5, 8; Hebrews 12:2.

Now this, as Trench observes, follows the benign law of recompense – *because thou hast kept...I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation.* The words just quoted call for careful consideration due to the fact that an erroneous interpretation at this time will disqualify the student from arriving at a true view

of what is to follow in succeeding chapters. Suffice it to say that the two prominent but conflicting views are held regarding this passage. Continuing our heads as above, we will take up the crucial words of the passage in hand.

The assuring pledge is most emphatic (lit): Also *I you* will keep. This is again the emphatic *I* of the Lord. *You*, too, is emphatic by position. This double emphasis, “I have loved thee) (verse 9) and *Also I thee will keep*, in such close proximity, is probably unsurpassed in Scripture as expressing the boundless affection and good will of Christ for His people.

We next consider the word *temptation* (Greek: *peirasmos*, meaning trial). The word occurs in Luke 8:13 in the parable of the sower. In the parallel passages of Matthew 13:21; Mark 4:17 we have “tribulation” or “persecution”; hence *temptation* is used as the equivalent of both of these. Again in Revelation 2:10 we have the word “tribulation,” a different word, and also the verbal form *peirazo*, *try* –the latter being uniform with the word “try” in the verse under study. Obviously, therefore, the hour of trial may be equated with the time of tribulation yet to come. Thus Dr Hatch, after quoting 3:10, remarks: “...with evident reference to the tribulations which are prophesied later on in the book.”

“*Hour*” is John’s favorite word for a time period whether long or short. It is somewhat synonymous with season, a word usually employed by the Synoptists, except that it frequently occurs in an ominous sense.

Since the tribulation will immediately precede the coming of the Lord in whom John was writing have long since passed away, it is evident that Philadelphia, as well as the other churches, is representative of the church universal.

Now comes the crucial question: What is meant by the passage, *I ...will keep thee from the hour of temptation?* What parallel passages, if any, throw light upon these words? In reply, note that commentators have a well-beaten track to John 17:5 and to nowhere else. The charge that commentators follow one another as sheep is well sustained in this case. The passage referred to reads, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [lit., the evil one].” The point of comparison is, of course, in the expression “keep from” [Greek: *tereo ek*], which is common to both. It is claimed that just as Jesus prayed that God would keep the disciples immune from the snares of the evil one, so He Himself would keep the faithful secure and unharmed in the midst of the judgments and plagues of the tribulation period.

There are serious objections to such a view. The points of similarity are too slender to warrant such sweeping and far-reaching deductions. As a matter of fact, the differences between the two passages outweigh the resemblances; hence the effort to explain the latter by the former obscures rather than elucidates the meaning.

In the John passage the disciples were already in the midst of evil. Indeed, they were in the midst of evil when they became disciples. In the Revelation, the plagues of the tribulation period were still in the future. In fact, they are still future in our day.

The judgments and plagues of the tribulation should not be regarded as evil or of the evil one, because the Lord sends them in order that “the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9).

It is not true to fact that saints of the tribulation period will be exempt from suffering or martyrdom. Two great groups (6:9-11; 7:9-14; and 14:1-3; 15:1-3), besides individuals and smaller groups of saints (11:7-10; 12:11), will die as martyrs during that period. These are not saints of the church age, for they are repeatedly distinguished from them as further studies will show.

In John, immunity is promised from a person—the evil one; in Revelation, from a time period—the hour of trial which is yet to come. The examination of John 17:15 has shown that it cannot be consistently used as a guide or criterion in the interpretation of this passage. Indeed the passage fails to shed light on the very place where it is most needed and that is, not merely about being kept from (*tereo ek*), but about being kept from *what*. Here the passages are dissimilar, for the one tells about a personage, and the other about a time period. Before looking elsewhere for light or direction, not the remaining portion of the verse.

The *hour of temptation* or *period of tribulation* is to come upon all the inhabited world and the purpose is to try the earth dwellers. The earth dwellers apparently are a special class of obdurate sinners distinct from the nations of the world. This is the first of the twelve occurrences. The word is in the participial form. Denoting their continuance in complacency and obduracy. While the plagues are sent in particular to try them, in no instance do we read of any of them repenting. In this they are like Pharaoh of old who hardened his heart more and more as the judgments continued.

It should be noted in particular that the plagues and judgments incident to the hour of trial are sent to try the earth dwellers, *not the church*, thus implying that the church will be no longer on earth when the tribulation opens.

There are numerous other passages teaching this same truth, i.e., the pretribulational rapture of the church, the most convincing and unmistakable being those appearing in Revelation. (1961, pp.87-89)

Lehman Strauss

The open door is not merely that of salvation and service. It is a door of safe deliverance from the Great Tribulation. Dr. Morgan wrote: “While that promise may have had its partial fulfillment in the escape of the church at Philadelphia from some wave of persecution that swept over the district, its final fulfillment will undoubtedly be realized by those who, loyal to His Word, and not denying His Name, shall be gathered out of the world at the Second Coming before the judgment that must usher in the setting up of His kingdom upon the earth.” I believe that the tribulation is the time of God’s wrath upon the earth (Revelation 6:17), but that the Church will be saved, not merely from the tribulation, but from the very “hour” of it (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9). Those who will be in this time of testing are referred to as “*them that dwell upon the earth*,” that is, earth dwellers, those who have had no interest in Heaven but who have settled down in the earth. But Christ promises to deliver His own in safety out of the tribulation. He holds the key to door of deliverance. (1964, pp.84f)

Ford C. Ottman

If there be a true return of heart to the Person of the Lord Jesus, and to the simplicity of His word, such as was manifest in the apostolic times, it is no wonder if Satan return to his old method of attack upon the Church. Man is essentially the same in all ages, and Satan knows that the snare set before the apostolic church will operate with equal effect against any return to apostolic simplicity. Nevertheless to those that so return Christ says: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee out of the hour of temptation which is about to come upon the whole habitable world to try those that dwell upon the earth. I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown." The hour of Christ's patience, here spoken of, is the time of His present rejection. This age, characterized by rebellion against God, and the outbreak of the lusts of men, is patiently endured by Him. The disorders on every side cannot pass beyond the limit of divine restraint. Out of all the misery and mystery and darkness of unbelief God will bring His eternal purpose to a triumphant issue. This is the time of His patience, and if Christ can endure what is going on and still be patient with it; surely we too, can also be patient even as He is. The time of trial of which he speaks is yet to come; it is the "great tribulation" mentioned by the prophet Daniel, and referred to by Jesus in His prophecy on the Mount of Olives. Christ has pledged his word to keep the true believer out of this hour. The removal of the Church prior to the Tribulation will come before us in its proper place. (1967, pp.84-86)

John F. Walvoord

One of the most outstanding compliments given to the Philadelphian church is contained in verse 10. Because of their faithfulness the Christians in Philadelphia are promised that they will be kept from the hour of trial which will come upon the earth as a divine judgment. It should be noted that this deliverance is not only from trial but a period of time in which the trial exists, "the hour of temptation." If the expression had been simply deliverance from trial, conceivably it could have meant partial deliverance. The expression seems to have been made as strong as possible that the Philadelphian church would be delivered from this period.

Many have observed also that the preposition "from" (Gr. *ek*) is best understood as "out of" rather than simply "from." Other instances of the use of the same verb and preposition together, such as John 17:15 and James 1:27, would indicate that it is perhaps too much to press it to mean an absolute deliverance. In view of the context of the book of Revelation, however, as it subsequently unfolds the horrors of this very tribulation period, it is evident that the promise here to the church at Philadelphia is one of deliverance from this time of trouble.

This conclusion has, of course, been resisted by all posttribulationists as an unwarranted interpretation of this passage. If this promise has any bearing on the question of pretribulationism, however, what is said emphasizes deliverance *from* rather than deliverance *through*. As far as the Philadelphian church was concerned, the rapture of the church was presented to them as an imminent hope. If the rapture had occurred in the first century preceding the tribulation

which the book of Revelation describes, they were assured of deliverance. By contrast, those sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel in 7:4 clearly go through the time of trouble. This implies the rapture of the church before the time of trouble referred to as the great tribulation. Such a promise of deliverance to them would seemingly have been impossible if the rapture of the church were delayed until the end of the tribulation prior to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom.

This passage therefore provides some support for the hope that Christ will come for His church before the time of trial and trouble described in Revelation 6 to 19. This time of tribulation will overtake the entire world, as God inflicts His wrath upon unbelieving Gentiles as well as upon Christ-rejecting Jews. The Philadelphian church is therefore promised deliverance from the time of trouble which will overtake the world but will not overtake them. By so much they are encouraged to bear their present suffering and to continue their faithfulness and patience as they bear witness for the Lord Jesus.

The Lord's coming for them is compared to an imminent event, one which will come suddenly without announcement. In view of this expectation they are to hold fast to their testimony for Christ in order to receive their reward at His coming. The expression "quickly" is to be understood as something which is sudden and unexpected, not necessarily immediate.

In this passage the rapture of the church is in view. The coming of the Lord to establish a kingdom on earth is a later event following the predicted time of tribulation which is unfolded in the book of Revelation... (1966, pp.86f)

Gary G. Cohen

Cohen has a different flavour of the Philadelphian church in combination with both the rapture theory, with both a "representative" and a "historical" view of the seven epistles in Revelation. His application of the seven epistles historically are as follows:

The seven periods are generally given approximately as follows:

- Ephesus – Apostolic Church (AD 30-100)
- Smyrna – Persecuted Church (AD 100-313)
- Pergamos – State Church (AD 313-590)
- Thyatira – Papal Church (AD 590-1517)
- Sardis – Reformed Church (AD 1517-1790)
- Philadelphia – Missionary Church (AD 1730-1900)
- Laodicean – Apostate Church (AD 1900-)

The dates given are not to be overly pressed, but are to serve as guides that point to the approximate time one era concludes and the next begins. It must be kept in mind that this theory does not claim that the entire earthly church would homogeneously pass from stage to stage. Rather it is acknowledged that during this entire interadvent era, somewhere on earth there would be persecuted churches like that of Smyrna, faithful witnessing churches like that of Philadelphia, dead churches like that of Sardis, and lukewarm churches such as

Laodicea. What is contended is that the dominant characteristics of the seven churches of the Revelation would rise in church history successively within the professing church in the order divinely given and that these seven periods would consume the entire interadvent age. (1968, p.54)

When it comes to commenting about Rev 3:10, Cohen says:

The promise of Revelation 3:10 to keep the Philadelphian church “from the hour of trial, the hour which is coming upon the whole earth” need not, according to the prophetic theory, be applied to the faithful living in 1730-1900. Rather it is to be applied to those living in the “Philadelphia category,” true believers, who are alive during the final Laodicean period that will end with the rapture. For, remember, the prophetic theory rightly enunciated maintains that Christendom will until Christ comes always contain Christians and congregations of all seven of the representative types – however, a different type will dominate each of the seven eras. Thus it is quite within the pale of the theory to understand Revelation 3:10 to call for Philadelphian Christians to be raptured at the close of the Laodicean age.

In examining the Greek of Revelation 3:10, several items are discovered favorable to this interpretation. The words “out of this hour” (*ek tēs hōras*) show that Christ will keep those to whom the promise is directed outside of (*ek*) a specific (“the” -- *tēs*) time period (“hour” – *hōras*; cf. John 2:4). This period, “the hour of trial” is one of “trial” or “temptation,” both of which senses are conveyed by the word *peirasmos*. [Cohen inserts footnote: “William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 646.”] It is further noted that this same word for “trial,” used here in Revelation 3:10, is used in Luke 8:13. However, when the passages exactly parallel to Luke 8:13 are consulted, Matthew 13:21, Mark 4:17, it is seen that the “trial” of Luke 8:13 (*peirasmos*) is described in Matthew 13:21 and Mark 4:17 as “tribulation or persecution” (*thlipsēōs ē diōgmou*). Thus the understanding of the “hour of trial” as a definite time period of tribulation is seen to have warrant when the text is studied. This period is to affect the “entire inhabited world.”

When all the above factors are put together in light of: (1) the fact that a specific future Tribulation period of seven years yet awaits the earth; and (2) the absence of evidence for the promise ever having been fulfilled in the history of the historical Philadelphian congregation; [Cohen footnotes: “See Albert Barnes, *Revelation*, p.95”] a notable case is made for this verse promising a pretribulational rapture according to the claim of the prophetic school advocates. [Cohen footnotes: “So Walvoord, pp. 86-90. Anyone, however, who espouses the view that the seven churches are representative, can believe that Revelation 3:10 promises a pretribulational rapture without necessarily endorsing the prophetic view.”] (*Ibid*, pp.68f)

W. A. Criswell

Look briefly now at the reward God has promised: “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial [*peirasmos*, translated here “temptation,” but a better translation is “trial”] that is coming upon all the world, and on them that dwell upon it.” In Luke 21 the Lord

admonishes us to pray that we might be delivered from that great hour of trial that is coming upon the earth. Through the sweep of all time, there are three great ages: the present one, the one that is to come, and in-between the day of the Lord, the day of trial and tribulation. This is the day that is described in the book of the Revelation. As we come to the end of chapter three and begin chapter four, we come to that great hour of the judgment and fury and wrath of Almighty God. “Because thou hast kept my word, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial and tribulation.” God will take his people out and away. “Behold I come quickly,” the Lord says of the approaching time of the denouement and the consummation of all history. But not one of God’s little ones will perish or will have to go through the flame and the fire of those days of judgment. “Because thou hast kept my word, I also will keep thee from [take thee out of] the great hour of trial.” (1962, pp.163f.)

Walter Scott

The wording of the promise is as precise as it is gracious, and effectually disposes of the theory advanced by some, and that to the fear and dread of believers, that the Church or a part thereof shall have to pass through the coming Tribulation to purge itself from its unfaithfulness. No, the guarantee is, “I also will keep thee *out* of the hour of trial,” not brought *through* it, or kept *in* it, but entire exemption *from* it. No portion of the Church shall be in the Tribulation. Jews especially will be the most awful sufferers, for it is pre-eminently the day of Jacob’s trouble (Jer.30:7). Gentiles, too, are embraced in it (Rev.7. 9-17). Lot and Noah were preserved *through* the respective tribulations of their days; on the other hand, Abraham and Enoch were divinely kept *from* these same seasons of trial. It is these latter which figure the Church. The hour of trial is “about to come.” (197?, p.105)

William R. Newell

This is a beautiful, reciprocal promise of their Lord to them: Ye kept my patience, I will keep you out of the coming hour of trial. This “hour,” coming as it will, upon the whole earth, is seen in Revelation 13:7,8, in the permitted frightful career of the Beast. Two things identify this hour: first, its extent; second, its object. It is to come upon all “the inhabited earth” (Greek, *oikoumenee*). It is to try “earth-dwellers,” whether they will follow Satan’s Christ or not – since they have chosen earth where Satan is the prince and the god, as their “good things” (Luke 16:25). Fearful trial! Read Revelation 14:9-12, where the issue is finally pressed home – an issue involving eternity!

Now, our Lord promises to *keep* Philadelphian believers *out of* this coming hour. [Newell inserts footnote: “ ‘The Greek preposition *ek,*’ says Winer, ‘denotes procession out of the interior, the compass, the limits, of anything; and is the antithesis of *eis* (which means *into*, or into the midst of).’”] Inasmuch as this verse (10) holds forth the great promise of being kept from the Great Tribulation, it behooves us to inquire most diligently about it.

1. What *is* the hour of *trial*, or *temptation*, of which our Lord speaks? There is no reasonable doubt that it *must* refer to the Great Tribulation of which Daniel wrote (12:1), and to which our Lord referred to in Matthew 24:15-21. This “hour” extends to the *whole* inhabited earth, --so does that. See

Revelation 13:7,8. And this is an hour of *trial* – the earth-dwellers, having rejected, or neglected, the Lord of heaven, and heavenly things, are now to be given Satan’s Christ. A “strong delusion” will be sent by God; and all not God’s elect will believe “*the lie*” (II Thessalonians 2:7-11).

2. What is meant by being *kept from* that terrible “hour”?

(a) It cannot mean merely, preserved *in* and *through* it: for the remnant of Israel, God’s *earthly* people, will have *that* preservation (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1), whereas this is a promise given by the *heavenly* Christ to His *heavenly* saints.

(b) It is from a peculiar *hour*, or *season*, not merely from *trial*, but *from the hour and scene of the trial*, Christ’s faithful are to be kept.

(c) It is a direct reward to His saints for their “keeping the word of His patience,” as was Christ’s own exaltation because of His patiently doing His Father’s will (Phillipians 2:6-11). The word “keep” used in this promise is the same word our Lord applies to “keeping the word of his patience,” which His faithful saints had done. It is, as we have said, beautifully reciprocal; but notice that Christ’s “keeping” in His action toward them, was to protect them *from* something.

(d) He says, “I will keep thee out of” or “*away from*” that dread hour. [Newell inserts footnote: “We would add still further that it cannot have the sense of *dia* – *through*. Note the Septuagint of Jeremiah 30:7 has *apo* – “out of it,” in describing Jacob’s preservation in *his* time of trouble. This seems to be in the sense of removed from it, as the remnant will have a “place in the wilderness” to flee unto! The preposition *ek* is used in Revelation 3:10, describes those who are not in the trouble, but kept away from it. It is well to note that Noah’s family was preserved through (*dia*) water; whereas Enoch was translated that he should not *see* death!”] (1935, pp.71-72)

Commentators who say the “keeping” in Rev 3:10 means *being protected while experiencing the time of trouble*.

Robert W. Wall

The difficult situation facing the Philadelphian church is constitutive of the global **hour of trial**, described in in 12:1-19:10, which will **test those who live on the earth**. The hardship and heartache that bespeak a fallen creation, cursed by God, purpose to **test** those who have already failed God in order to justify God’s judgment of them at Christ’s return. While believers are surely not exempt from suffering (2:10), their testing will come at the hands of evil powers rather than from God (cf. James 1:13-18) and will prove their faithfulness to Christ, resulting in a “crown” (3:11; cf. 2:10)

The messages to the other congregations indicate that the whole church is under attack inside and out. Whether John expected an empirewide persecution of Christians or an intensification of Jewish opposition and proselytism in this part of Asia cannot be decided by this particular text. In any case, John’s pastoral intention is to encourage the congregation: while the world outside the church will come under the judgment of God, the faithful church will not (cf. Rom. 1:17-18). The final, future execution of God’s punishment against secular

and religious powers that have marginalized this congregation of “little strength” intends to vindicate their faithfulness to **my command to endure patiently**. Revelation is read by Philadelphian believers, then, as a word of hope that Christ **will keep them from the hour of trial**. (1984, p.84, emphasis his.)

R. H. Charles

10. This verse is a redactional addition on the part of our Seer when he was editing his visions. Its meaning is only explicable from a right understanding of vii where the 144,000 are sealed. There the faithful are sealed with a view to their preservation from the assaults of demons, but are not thereby secured against physical death. This persecution is not to be a merely local one (cf. ii.10): it is to embrace the entire world. Elsewhere throughout the original Letters to the Seven Churches there is not even an apprehension of a world-wide persecution....The continued existence of two of the Churches is presupposed till the Second Advent: cf. ii.25, iii.3(?), 11. It will be observed that the demonic trial spoken of, while world-wide, was to affect only “those who dwell upon the earth,” *i.e.*, the non-Christians....

τηρήσω ἐκ. Only found elsewhere in the N. T. in John xvii. 15 (cf. Jas i. 27, *τηρεῖν ἀπό*) where the thought is quite in keeping with that of our Seer: *οὐκ ἐρωτῶ ἵνα ἀρήξῃ αὐτούς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἀλλ’ ἵνα τηρήσῃς αὐτούς ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ*. Here *τοῦ πονηροῦ* is the Evil One or Satan. Hence our Lord’s prayer is that His disciples may be delivered from the evil sway of Satan, not that they may be saved from the physical evils (including death) which are inevitably incident to this life. This gives exactly the object of the sealing in vii. The sealing provides the spiritual help needed against the coming manifestation of Satanic wickedness linked with seemingly supreme power....Unreserved loyalty to Christ carries with it immunity from spiritual anguish and mental trouble.

τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ. This tribulation is to affect only the faithless and the heathen; for, as the not on xi.10 shows, the phrase “those that dwell upon the earth” denotes the world of unbelievers as distinguished from that of the faithful. Hence whilst the word *πειρασμος* (cf. *πειράζειν* later) may in some degree retain the sense of “trial,” since some of the faithless might be brought to repent, yet its prevailing sense in this passage is affliction and temptation – the fitting functions of the demons (ix. 1-21). *Πειράζειν* in ii.10 means “to afflict,” but the affliction is limited to “ten days.” On *πειράζειν* as meaning to inflict evils upon one in order to test his character, cf. I Cor x.13; Heb ii.18, iv.5. (1975, Vol. 1, p.)

Colin J. Hemer

Hemer’s comments on this verse are excellent and are worth thoughtful consideration, as is the article he refers to by Schuyler Brown:

The problems of v.10 have been listed and discussed in a valuable article by Shuyler Brown: [Hemer inserts footnote: “”] (1) What precisely does Christ promise the church in Philadelphia? (2) Is this promise exclusively for the Philadelphians, or is it a general application to all Christians? (3) Is the ‘hour of trial’ a local, particular persecution or an eschatological event? (4) Is it to be identified with any of the other future happenings described in the Revelation? (5) What is the meaning of *πειράσαι*? (6) Who are ‘the inhabitants of the earth’?

The most easiest answered question is (6). The phrase occurs elsewhere at Rev.6:10; 8.13; 11.10 *bis*; 13.8, 14 *bis*; 17.8, and always alludes to the enemies of the church. Brown then argues that *πειρασμός* cannot here be local or allude to any persecution of Christians, but that here alone in the New Testament it must denote eschatological tribulation for all men, a usage explained from Dan. 12.10a, where the *θλιψις* which sanctifies the elect drives the sinner into deeper sin. The words *τηρήσω* *ἐκ* are to be understood from John 17.15: God's people shall receive special protection in the trial rather than exemption from it (*ἀπό*; cf. also 2 Peter 2:9). This nature of the trial also precludes its identification with any of those in the later visions of the book. He accordingly rejects Charles's view (p.89) that this verse must be understood from the sealing of the faithful in Rev.7. The 'hour of trial' must be used generally of universal tribulations preceding the Lord's return.

Brown's general case seems soundly based, and sufficiently disposes of Charles's idea that 3.10 was a redactional addition in the light of Rev.7. This is the only hint of a world-wide tribulation in the seven letters, and it is too generalized to permit of this kind of identification. We may however comment: (1) Rev. 7 itself contains certain features which suggest a relevance to the circumstances of Philadelphia. (2) Much depends on the strict rendering of *τηρήσω* *ἐκ* (as opposed to *ἀπό*, Prov. 7.5 LXX). The Johannine parallel may not be decisive here. (3) It does not necessarily follow that the promises of victory, here or elsewhere, are only generic in content (Brown, p.311). We shall argue the some phrases of the letter were locally applied and were influential on the subsequent history of the Philadelphian church. If the church then believed it was living in the last times it made no distinction between immediate and eschatological fulfillment.

Several verbal points in v.10 deserve mention, though they are incidental to its main problems. (1) *ἐτήρησας*, here as in v.8, and like *οὐκ ἠρνήσω* there, emphasizes the actual steadfastness of the church under past difficulty. The tense is best rendered by a perfect (so AV, RSV and NEB against RV), for the difficulty and the faithfulness alike continue into the present. *Ἐτήρησας* also anticipates the promise beginning *τηρήσω*. (2) The compressed expression *τόν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου* is difficult. The word-order requires us to take *μου* with *ὑπομονῆς*. There is then the question whether *μου* should be taken subjectively (Charles, p.89; Swete, p. 56; Hort, p.35) or objectively, as referring to the endurance of Christ as their example or to that which which he requires of them. There is a similar ambiguity in 2 Thess. 3.5, but Rev. 13.10 and 14.12 are clear parallels for the former view. (3) It is not certain whether *μελλούσης* should be pressed to imply imminence or whether it is here merely an auxiliary of future time, as probably in 3.16. As the periphrasis was increasingly replacing the future participle and infinitive it seems better not to make too much of *μελλω* here. The imminence of the trial is not in question, but the emphasis is upon the swiftness of Christ to the rescue. (1986, pp.164f.)

T. F. Glasson

10. *the ordeal that is to fall upon the whole world* is probably to be identified with 'the great ordeal' of 7:14 and the 'distress such as never has been

until now' of Mark 13:19-20 (from Dan. 12:1). It means a definite period of time coinciding with the 3½ years of Antichrist's rule, as in Rev. 13:5-10. To be kept from this ordeal does not mean that they will escape but by the power of Christ they will be kept spiritually secure, i.e., free from sin. (1965, p.34)

G. B. Caird

The follows the only explicit reference in the letters to the approaching worldwide **ordeal** which is the main theme of the rest of the book. Charles, convinced that the letters were written in the reign of Vespasian, when John was not yet expecting general persecution, treats verse 10 as a later editorial addition. There are far too many (1984, pp.53f)

Adela Yarbro Collins

The members of the church in Philadelphia are said to be weak – they *have little power*. This probably means that they have little political influence and social standing. Nevertheless, they have remained firm under persecution. Because of this faithfulness they receive a special promise, *I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth*. The translation here is misleading. A better one would be *I will preserve you through the hour of trial....* The next verse shows that the Philadelphians will continue to be tested just like all other dwellers upon the earth – they are told *hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown*. Therefore, the promise is not that they will escape the time of trouble which is coming, but that they can face it confident of Christ's sustaining power. (1979, p.28)

G. R. Beasley-Murray

The faithful community of Smyrna was warned of an impending trial which they would have to endure 'for ten days' (2:10). The Philadelphians, on the contrary, are promised preservation **from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world**. This is the first mention made by John of the messianic judgments, which take up a large part of the book. It is improbable, though admittedly possible, that an identical period of trial is referred to in both 2:10 and 3:10. The *hour of trial* is not a period of time but a designation of the trial itself (cf. Mk 14:35). The 'tribulation' of which the Smyrnaeans are warned is to test the church. The hour of trial is **to try** (= test, the same word is used) **those who dwell upon the earth**, i.e., the non-Christian world (for the phrase cf. 11:10). Whereas the Devil prompts the opponents of the church to persecute the Smyrnaeans (2:10), it is God who 'tests' the inhabitants of the world during the hour of trial by his judgments. The preservation of the Church from the effects of these judgments is set forth under a variety of images in John's book (e.g., the sealing of the saints, 7:1ff., the measuring of the altar and its worshippers, 11:1, the hiding of the woman in the wilderness, 12:6). Undoubtedly the Church as a whole is depicted as destined to suffer at the hands of its opponents, above all through the hostility of the Antichrist, but that is not in question here. Assurance is at this point given that the Lord will preserve his own from judgments to come for the kingdom he has prepared (cf. Jn 17:15, which expresses a closely related idea).(1974, emphasis his.)

Eugene Boring

The life of Christians is lived in the midst of the pressures from a hostile world, which John calls “tribulation.” This tribulation is not some spectacular future event but has already begun in John’s own time. For John and all the churches, tribulation is the constant context within which the Christian is called to be a faithful witness, but it is particularly evident in some situations (1:9; 2:9, 13). In John’s view tribulation is about to intensify into a terrible persecution, which will engulf all Christians and is the prelude to the End (2:10; 3:10; cf. 7:14). (1989, p.91)

David Barr

HOUR OF TRIAL Hour is here used metaphorically for an indefinite, but relatively short, period of time. It was widely thought that those who were righteous would face a time of testing as the end drew near. Compare a similar idea at 2:9-10. (1998, p.59)

Venand Eller

And “because you have kept the word of my endurance, I will also keep you.” The message is plain: we do not (*can* not) endure out of the strength of our own endurance; we keep close within *his* endurance and so are kept *by him*. What we are to be kept *through* are the end-time trials which John will describe shortly. (1974, p.68)

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes

Struggling with adversity for their Lord’s sake, the Philadelphian Christians have **kept his word of patient endurance**, that is, his exhortation to endure hardship with patience (or, as the Greek may be rendered, ‘the word of my patient endurance’, that is, the exhortation to endure patiently as he did, as in Hebrews 12:1f: ‘Let us run with patient endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame’). They are given the assurance that he *will keep* them *from the hour of trial which is coming upon the whole world*, by which the universal ordeal of final judgment is intended. Those who have persisted in impenitence and unbelief will be *the dwellers on earth* who are overwhelmed by the terrors of this hour of trial (*cf.*, 6:14ff). Those, however, who thankfully receive the grace of God that flows to them from the cross, where Christ bore the punishment of their sins, are safe in him from this final ordeal, and are secure in the knowledge that their present trials are but for the time being. The final judgment of their sins has already taken place on the cross. Just as the incarnate Son was nailed to a cross which was prepared for someone else, so his ‘hour of trial’ at Calvary was in their place. By it they are delivered from the judgment impending over the unregenerate world...There is no suggestion here [v.11] that God’s work of grace may fail in the end and come to nothing; far from it! The emphasis is on the need for us to be sincere and unhypocritical in our profession of faith and to be undaunted as we persevere in the midst of trials and afflictions; and to be this there is the unceasing need for the strengthening and edifying grace of God. Grace does not begin and end with our justification in Christ; for all from beginning to end is of grace. (1990, p.61, emphasis his.)

Herbert Wernecke

...the church will be kept safe through the hour of trial (v.10). Compare Isa. 43:2; Mark 13:20; I Peter 4:12. Either it will safely emerge from the trial or it will escape it entirely. Very likely the former meaning is correct. Compare Rev. 6:9-11, where the martyrs underneath the altar are told “that they should rest a little until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed even as they themselves had been.” (1954, p.63)

Ben Witherington III

Vs. 10 sounds congenial to dispensationalism at first. Christ will keep the faithful from the hour of trial to come upon the whole earth. This is followed by “I will come quickly.” Notice, however, that the author says nothing about taking the Christians out of the world, rather he speaks of Christ coming and protecting Christians [Witherington footnotes: “See M. G. Reddish, *Revelation* (2001), p. 76: “To keep them from the coming trials does not mean the church will be exempt from the difficulties. Rather, this is a promise of Christ’s abiding presence with the church that will strengthen and sustain it regardless of the trials ahead.”]. In this message it seems clear the author has begun to speak of the final eschatological events and not just what now is. (2003, pp.106f)

Henry Barclay Swete

Ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἐρχεσθαι : ‘from that season (cf. Sir. xviii.20 ἡ Ἐπισκοπῆς, Dan xi.40 συντελείας, Αποκ xiv.7 ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως) of trial which is coming upon the whole habitable earth’; i.e., the troublous times which precede the Parousia. In the foreshortened view of the future which was taken by the Apostolic age this final sifting of mankind was near at hand, not being as yet clearly distinguishable from the imperial persecution which had already begun...To the Philadelphian Church the promise was an assurance of safekeeping in any trial that might supervene – an appropriate promise, see Ramsay, *Letters*, p.408ff. (1977, p.56)

John Sweet

I will keep you from the hour of trial; cf. John 17^{6, 15}, Matt. 6¹³ (the Lord’s Prayer) –safekeeping rather than exemption. Christians had taken over the Jewish expectation of a final time of world-wide *trial* or testing (*peirasmos*)—see on 2^{9f} – conventionally set out as a series of earthly and heavenly disasters, as in the Lord’s Apocalypse (there are echoes of Luke 21^{26, 34-36} here) which is one of John’s chief models. It would have a double effect, [Sweet inserts footnote here: “See S. Brown, ‘Deliverance from the Crucible’, *NTS* 14, 1968, particularly pp.254ff.”] sifting and purifying the elect, who needed special protection (cf. 7^{2ff}) and alertness (see on 3^{ff}, 16¹⁵) if they were to come through, and showing up God’s enemies (cf. 6¹⁶, 9^{20f}, 16^{9, 11, 21} –the disasters bring out men’s opposition to God). *Those who dwell upon the earth* is in Rev. the regular designation of those who follow the beast (6^{10, 8¹³}, 11¹⁰, 13^{6, 12, 14}, 17^{2, 8}). Here as in Luke 21³⁵ the phrase is neutral, but like ‘world’ (*kosmos*) in the Fourth Gospel it suggests men set apart from God, in ignorance or opposition...(1979, p.104)

William Barclay

It is the promise of the Risen Christ that he who keeps will be kept. “You have kept my commandment,” he says, “therefore, I will keep you.” Loyalty has its sure reward. In verse 10 in the Greek the phrase “my command to endure” is highly concentrated. Literally, it is *the word of my endurance*. The real meaning is that the promise is to those who have practiced the same kind of endurance as Jesus displayed in his earthly life.

When we are called upon to show endurance, the endurance of Jesus Christ supplies us with three things. First, it supplies us with an example. Second, it supplies us with an inspiration. We must walk looking to him, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame (*Hebrews 12:1, 2*). Third, the endurance of Jesus Christ is the guarantee of his sympathy with us when we are called upon to endure. “Because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted” (*Hebrews 2:18*).

In verse 10 we are back again amidst beliefs which are characteristically Jewish. As we have so often seen, the Jews divided time into two ages, the present age which is wholly bad, and the age to come, which is wholly good with in between the terrible time of destruction when judgment will fall upon the world. It is to this terrible time that John refers. Even when time comes to an end, and the world as we know it ceases to exist, he who is faithful to Christ will still be safe in his keeping. (1976, pp.131f)

Robert Mounce

Because the believers at Philadelphia had kept “Christ’s command to endure patiently for His sake” (Bruce, p.640), he will keep them from the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole world. [Mounce inserts footnote: “μέλλω with the present infinitive in the eschatological context of this letter (and especially the ἐρχομαι ταχύ which follows) points to what is about to happen rather than what is destined to be.”] The major question is whether Christ is promising deliverance from the period of trial or safekeeping through the trial. The preposition “from” (Gk. ἐκ) is inconclusive. Walvoord holds that “if this promise has any bearing on the question of pretribulationism, however, what is said emphasizes deliverance *from* rather than deliverance *through*” and “implies the rapture of the church before the time of trouble referred to as the great tribulation” (p. 87). The thrust of the verse is against this interpretation. It is precisely because the church was faithful to Christ in time of trial that he in turn will be faithful to them in the time of their great trial. The promise is consistent with the high-priestly prayer of Jesus, “I do not pray that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one” (Jn 17.15). It is their preservation in trial that is taught. That the martyrs of 6:9-11 are told to wait for vindication until their full number would be killed indicates that the issue is not physical protection. The spiritual protection of the church is presented elsewhere in Revelation under such figures as sealing (7:1ff) and flight to the wilderness (12:6).

The hour of trial is that period of testing and tribulation that precedes the establishment of the eternal kingdom. It is mentioned in such passages as Daniel 12:2, Mark 13:19, and II Thessalonians 2:1-12. It is the three and a half years rule of Antichrist in Revelation 13:5-10. In fact, all the judgments from 6:1

onward relate to this final hour of trial. It is during this period that Christ will reward the faithfulness of the Philadelphian church by standing by to ward off all the demonic assaults of Satan. The text indicates that the hour of trial comes upon the “whole world” to try ‘them that dwell upon the earth.’ In other places in Revelation where the latter phrase occurs...the enemies of the church are always in mind. The hour of trial is directed toward the entire non-Christian world, but the believer will be kept from it, not by some previous appearance of Christ to remove the church bodily from the world, but by the spiritual protection he provides against the forces of evil. Ladd writes, “Although the church will be on earth in these final terrible days and will suffer fierce persecution and martyrdom at the hands of the beast, she will be kept from the hour of trial which is coming upon the pagan world. God’s wrath, poured out on the kingdom of Antichrist, will not afflict his people.” (p.62) (1977, pp.119-120)

A time of great testing will come to **those who live on the earth**. The reference here and elsewhere in Revelation (6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8; 17:8) is to the enemies of the church. This **hour of trial** is three-and-a-half-year rule of Antichrist (13:5-10), which precedes the triumphal return of Christ to establish. Since the church had endured patiently the hardships of life in Philadelphia, Christ promises to keep them from the final testing that is to fall upon the enemies of God. Some take this as a promise that Christ will come in some preliminary way to remove the church prior to the difficulties of the last days. Such a “rapture,” however, is not specifically mentioned in Revelation. It is better to understand the phrase as a promise that in the final period of demonic assault upon the earth, believers will receive spiritual protection against the forces of evil. This is consistent with Jesus’ words in John 17:15, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.” ((1992, pp.15f, emphasis his.)

Martin Kiddle

The Philadelphians (and we must remember that John was speaking through them to the faithful everywhere, whom they exemplified) had already shown their true quality in their obedience to the demands of the faith – Christ’s call to unwavering and confident fortitude. They had proved their worth, and therefore they would be kept **safe through the hour of trial which is coming upon the whole world to test the dwellers on earth**.

What is this **hour of trial**? The Christians of Smyrna had already been told that some of them were to be imprisoned, in order that they might be ‘tested’: a prophecy which, except for this more specific information in the Philadelphian letter, might wrongly be taken to forebode sporadic persecution, affecting only Smyrna and perhaps other individual communities here and there. But plainly John expects a universal intensification and expansion of the present distress. The prophecies to the faithful at Smyrna of prison (cf. ‘captivity,’ xiii.10) and testing (cf. xiv.12 and preceding verses), carry us forward to the events described in chaps xi and xiii ---the great Distress. This is the **hour of trial**. The simple grandeur of John’s word becomes very clear when it is understood that the shadow of universal persecution hangs over them. Past loyalty shall have its reward in future protection; the faithful are to be kept **safe**. Were they then to understand that they would be preserved from death? By

no means: but whether they were to die, or whether they were to be preserved, the one supremely reassuring fact remained, that the Devil and his agents would have no power to seduce them from their loyalty and its reward. The parallel promise to the church at Smyrna anticipates John's later description (vii.4, xi.1, xii.6 and 14-17;...) of what he means by this protection. 'Be faithful, *though you have to die for it*, and I will give you the crown of Life.' Clearly, some must die, and it is implicitly expected that others shall be allowed to survive. But *all* who are faithful shall be given immortality.

Finally, John adds a note of warning to his anthem of praise. This **hour of trial** is to be no light ordeal. There must be no relaxation of vigilance, with consequent loss of power to choose death rather than disloyalty. The loyal must firmly hold to the faith which has nerved them to their present patient endurance, in order that their reward may not after all be lost. (1940, pp.51-52, emphasis his.)

Craig S. Keener

Revelation 3:10 first introduces Revelation's typical contrast between "those who live in heaven" and "those who live on the earth." The earth-dwellers are normally the wicked who invite judgment (6:1; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17: 2, 8), whereas the heaven-dwellers refer to the righteous (12:12; 13:6) That the terms *earth-dweller* does not normally include the suffering saints on earth (though cf. 2:13) may suggest that though these people suffer temporarily on earth, their long-term home is heaven. The hour of testing is designed to test unbelievers, believers will be protected during it.

Despite Jesus' praise for the Philadelphian Christians' perseverance to this point, however "it's not over till it's over." They must continue to hold fast what they have (3:11), that is, to continue to keep the message that demands their perseverance (3:10), lest their persecutors seize from them their crown (3:11; cf. 2:25). (p.151)

Jesus will preserve his people through their trial, which they share with the world (3:10), and will vindicate (3:9), presumably at his coming (3:11). Even in the worst situations, hope provides believers strength to endure. But perseverance is mandatory for participating in that hope (3:11...) (2000, p.151, 155)

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The reward for fidelity to Christ is his promise to keep them from the hour of trial or testing which is to come upon the entire world of men (*tēs oikoumenēs holēs*) (3:10; 12:9). This time of testing and distress is that of the "messianic woes" which are to precede the *parousia*. Will the Philadelphians also pass through these woes? Christ, by urging them to "hold fast" (3:11), seems to imply they shall pass through it. John 17:15 is perhaps the best commentary on 3:10. Christ prays not that the believer be taken out of the world, but that they be kept from the Evil One. (1967, p.46)

Spangler was not the first to assert that Jesus' Second Coming could not occur before 1798. This view has been around since the inception of the SDA Church. James White also expresses the same views in Bible Adventism, 1970, pp. 75-76, and in 1870b, p.258; Andrews, 1970, pp.17-18)

“A document prepared more recently for consideration by the Sanctuary Committee (1980) demonstrates a thoroughgoing application of the conditionality idea to all Bible prophecy [this statement refers to the Ford manuscript]. Although the study involves several hermeneutical foci, conditionality plays a major role. It builds on the *SDA Bible Commentary* article on the role of Israel in OT prophecy but it does not back off – as the *Commentary* article does – from the book of Daniel. Old Testament and NT, general prophecy and apocalyptic, 2,300 days and the Second Coming – all predictions are treated consistently under the rubric of conditionality.”

See the quote for 5T:297 in [Note 1](#) in the Appendix.

Following White’s reasoning, since the Philadelphian message applies to the first century church, then by his own reasoning, White acknowledges that Christ’s ministry in the most Holy place was in place during the times of the first century Philadelphian church!!

I understand this term to refer to those people who were Seventh-day Adventists *before* the official beginning of the church in 1863. They rightly could not be called SDAs until the formation of that body of believers. For all intents and purposes, they are Seventh-day Adventists; it is just that they were such before that name became official.

This comment is interesting for the fact it sees all *three* states of the church co-existing; thus undermining the view that a historical view of the church is being viewed by these writers, but more a “spiritual condition” view, which can apply the spiritual condition of any or every of the seven messages of Revelation to an individual, local group or church, to churches as a denomination, to groups of churches either nationally or internationally, depending on the spiritual condition of that entity at the time.

It is interesting at this juncture to note that the use of the seven messages to the churches in Revelation is being applied here to the self-understanding of the Sabbatarian Adventists, not to the church globally. It related to their own ecclesiological understanding, not that of the whole world. The missionary endeavours characterised by the Philadelphian period can easily be found for much later than that in many other congregations, and in many cases, this is still continuing, highlighting the futility of using these messages as a sociological tool to measure the state of the churches globally and historically.

Note here that those who did not support the interpretation of 1844, or who then did not hold to their initial belief – those like William Miller – were those in Haskell’s words who never had “real love for the Saviour.” That the incorrect method of interpreting it was the issue for many of these is not even addressed. They are all painted with the same brush in Haskell’s mind.

Doukhan, in his treatment of the letters to the seven churches, *entirely avoids* looking at that part of the promise to the overcomer addressed in this paper. (see his discussion on part of the text on p.42) The question naturally begs asking, why would a scholar such as himself, who specializes in apocalyptic prophecy, avoid a promise, pregnant with apocalyptic inference? Has he opted out and taken the easy escape by not discussing it?

Australian SDA historicist, Garth Bainbridge, published a commentary on Revelation with exactly the same tack—he avoids this text in the Philadelphians, with any mention of the universal time of tribulation. (2007, pp.337-38) A. W. Anderson does likewise. (1932, p. 40)

This refers to two publications of Ellen White: (EW) is *Early Writings*, and GC refers to *The Great Controversy*.

In doing that they would have to acknowledge E. G. White to be incorrect when she says: “The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian Era. The number 7 indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world. (1911, p. 585)

See summary of the SDA Church History at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Seventh-day_Adventist_Church

More could be said on the lack of any independent controls for defining these ‘historical’ periods, or even that church history has seven distinct periods, but the commonsense reader can see these as apparent from the outset. Cohen answers this objection by stating, “there are too many sound expositors who hold this position and too many remarkable correspondences between the letters and history to call the grounds for this opinion ‘fanciful and speculative.’” (p.69) As though there is ‘safety [of believing it is correct] in numbers,’ and it is quite easy to find ‘remarkable correspondences’ when looking for a specific theme, rather than letting history dictate its own story! Cohen is more correct when he uses the ‘representative’ approach, and I doubt there would be anyone who would object to the truth of this view.

Why not? Cohen does not offer any explanation. He sees the incongruity of the ‘prophetical’ theory with this statement in verse 10, and rather than admitting the ‘prophetical’ view has a problem with this, he just dismisses it and carries on. Hardly a scholarly approach!

The author makes too much of this text. This is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, out of which the smart ones would flee before it would be to escape, not a global event. Newell fails to give due weight to the truth that Jacob actually went through and survived his awful time of trouble when he wrestled with the angel. He was not spared the pain; but received a blessing from it due to his desperate persistence and intense desire to secure this blessing. This is the basis of the imagery used in this text of Jer 30.

This is a good point made by Collins. If they had been raptured, they would have already received their crowns, so this admonition is superfluous.

The most obvious motif omitted by Beasley-Murray is the comparison between the last plagues and the type they are lifted from—the plagues of Egypt. In that series of plagues, the children of God were protected in amongst the holocaust, though they still lived in the land of Goshen in Egypt. They were not “raptured” out of Egypt until after the end of the last plague.