

Revelation 3:9-11

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The only letter without a section of rebuke, Jesus praises the church in Philadelphia for their perseverance and promises that He will make His love to them known.

In the other letters, there is a pattern of Jesus first praising the *church* for the things they are doing right, and then rebuking them and correcting the things they are doing wrong. But, for the church in Philadelphia, there is no rebuking section; Jesus only praises them.

Here, Jesus speaks not of those who are part of the church in Philadelphia, but of *those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not*. It is clear that these people are separate from the believers in Philadelphia, because *those of the synagogue of Satan* will be made to *come and bow down at your feet*, meaning the feet of the believers. The open door spoken of in verse 8 will lead to those who *have kept the word of My perseverance* to be rewarded by experiencing in heaven the complete submission of those who persecuted them.

Just as a parent requires their children to apologize to an abused sibling, Jesus will cause these *who say they are Jews and are not, but lie, to bow down* at the feet of the faithful Philadelphians. Today, these believers only have a “little power” (v. 8). It is inferred that these false Jews are persecuting the believers in Philadelphia. But in heaven these false Jews will *bow down* in submission to the faithful Philadelphians. This picture of the false Jews bowing down likely indicates that these faithful witnesses will be rewarded as overcomers, and as such be granted the great authority of reigning with Christ in the new earth (Revelation 3:21).

The letters to the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira spoke about Balaam and Jezebel and how the churches needed to escape their teaching. This letter tells us that in heaven justice will be served. All will be resolved. In this case, the false religious leaders will have to kneel in submission at the feet of God’s faithful witnesses.

There may not be justice on our current earth, but there is in heaven, and there will be on the new earth (2 Peter 3:13).

Later in Revelation, those who were martyrs, killed for their witness on earth, are shown crying out for justice:

“I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God...and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging out blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ And there was given to each of them a white robe, and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer.”

(Revelation 6:9-11)

These martyrs are in heaven, but desire justice to fill the earth and be brought to those who wronged them.

Similarly, we who are still bound to earth long for justice, but it is not ours to give. Justice belongs to God alone. Part of being a faithful witness is waiting for and trusting in God's timing to bring all things to completion. Revelation exhorts all of Jesus's servants to persevere through trials, to *hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown*. Just as the first generation of Israel to leave Egypt failed to gain their full reward, so can Jesus's servants lose their rewards, their *crown*.

Those of the synagogue of Satan will be brought low when they are made to *come and bow down* at the *feet* of the faithful witnesses, but Jesus will also *make them know that I have loved you*. By having *those of the synagogue of Satan bow down*, Jesus emphasizes that those who now have a "little power" will be given great honor for being faithful witnesses to Jesus. Jesus will always be the supreme authority.

To those who have overcome as He overcame, Jesus will reward with sharing His authority to rule over the earth as servant-kings (Revelation 3:21). This could be what Jesus refers to here—raising the faithful witnesses to a position of authority over their oppressors. By raising these faithful witnesses to positions of authority, Jesus says He will *make them know that I have loved you*. God loves the entire world (John 3:16). But He has a deep, relational love for those who walk in His ways and keep His word.

It is noteworthy that Jesus labels those *who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie* to also be *those of the synagogue of Satan*. A *synagogue* was a local gathering place for Jews. We can see synagogues mentioned throughout the New Testament. Jesus taught in synagogues (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:16), and the Apostle Paul's custom was to go first to synagogues when he entered a new region (Acts 13:15, 14:1, 17:1-2). It seems clear from this description of these false Jews being a *synagogue of Satan* that this gathering of Jews was pursuing the things of the world instead of the things of God.

Jesus made this distinction plain when He rebuked the Apostle Peter for being an instrument of Satan when Peter exhorted Jesus to avoid following His Father's will to go to the cross (Matthew 16:23). Jesus spoke this shortly after telling Peter he was blessed because it had been revealed to him by God that Jesus was the Messiah promised to the Jewish people (Matthew 16:17). Even though Peter believed, he became an instrument of Satan because he was "...not setting [his] mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:23b). Perhaps this *synagogue of Satan* was like the observant Jews, similar to Paul prior to his conversion, who saw it to be righteous to persecute those who followed Jesus (Acts 22:1-8).

As was previously mentioned, there is no section of corrective exhortation in this letter, which means that it now jumps to an extended blessing portion:

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

The church in Philadelphia endured trials on earth by having *kept the word of My perseverance*. Therefore Jesus will *keep* them from the *hour of testing*, which consists of trials which will *come upon the whole world*. As is typical for biblical prophecy, we would expect this to have multiple meanings. We would expect this promise to keep the faithful believers from the *hour of testing* to have an immediate, local fulfillment for this specific church. We would also expect this promise to apply to the church age. Neither are explained here.

The global fulfillment of the promise to keep those who are faithful to Him from *the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world* could apply to the period scripture calls the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 7:14). This three-and-a-half-year period Jesus calls the Great Tribulation is likely the second half of the seventieth week (of years, or seven years) spoken of in Daniel. This is from Daniel's vision in [Daniel 9:24-27](#). A time period of sixty nine weeks of years (483 years) began when a proclamation was made to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, which was destroyed by the Babylonian invasion in 586 BC ([Daniel 9:25](#)).

The 483 year "clock" stopped when Jesus was rejected ([Daniel 9:26](#)). So the seventy week "clock" was stopped at sixty nine weeks (of years). It will start again upon the signing of a treaty between Israel and the beast (the antichrist), possibly a treaty that allows Israel to rebuild its temple. At the end of the seven year period, The Jewish people will be fully restored. During the middle of that seven year time, the Great Tribulation will commence. It will be a period of three and a half years. It could be that this is a promise that Jesus will return to meet His church in the air some time prior to the start of this Great Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:17). An application of this verse could indicate that this gathering applies to those who are overcomers.

The principle of God delivering the righteous from judgement is found throughout scripture. For example, Noah was delivered from the flood due to his faithfulness (Hebrews 11:7). Lot was delivered out of Sodom prior to it being destroyed (Genesis 19:12-13). In Ezekiel, God indicates that normally He will preserve a nation for the remnant of righteous, however Israel had become so corrupt that even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were alive at that time, He would only deliver them (Ezekiel 14:14).

The Greek word for *perseverance* in the phrase *Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing* is "hyponome." Examining other verses which use this same word will help to shed light on what the church in Philadelphia did to have *kept the word of My perseverance* and the implication it has for *the hour of testing*.

First, Romans 2 uses "hyponome" also in the context of reaping in heaven what you sow on earth:

"But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance ["hyponome"] in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath, and indignation." (Romans 2:5-8)

This passage from Romans again emphasizes that those who are self-seeking will face judgement in the next life, but those who persevere in seeking good will have honor and reward. Sometimes it is hard to do good, and there may be negative earthly consequences for doing good to others. But Jesus asks His followers to seek good, not to gain earthly glory, but to gain glory from God. We gain the greatest fulfillment for our lives when we lay down our lives for Christ (Mark 8:35).

So, when we persevere on earth in doing good, we then reap a great reward in heaven. Hebrews 12 also uses “hyponome” (*perseverance*) and shows that we follow Jesus’ example in doing so.

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance [“hyponome”] the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
(Hebrews 12:1-2)

Jesus sought the favor of God the Father by following in obedience. He “endured the cross, despising the shame” and rejection heaped upon Him. That was not an easy thing to do, and Jesus even asked God to take that burden away from Him (Matthew 26:39). However, because He brought glory to God through His obedience, He is now seated “at the right hand of the throne of God.” We should follow the example of Jesus. Just as He had *perseverance* in enduring the cross, we should also have *perseverance* in our trials.

It is worth noting that Jesus’ reward for His *perseverance* was that He “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”: He was given authority over all (Matthew 28:18). Similarly, those who are Jesus’s faithful witnesses will gain a great reward for having *perseverance* in keeping God’s word.

We see another example of *perseverance* (“hyponome”) in the Book of James:

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance [“hyponome”]. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”
(James 1:2-4).

Having *perseverance* implies that there was some kind of trial that had to be persevered through. It is easy to feel discouraged when faced with trials, but James says to “consider it all joy” because of the personal benefit of *perseverance*. The result James says will occur if we persevere through trials is that our faith will be made complete, and we will receive the crown of righteousness as a reward (James 1:2, 12).

Through these verses, we can infer that, by having *kept the word of My perseverance*, the believers in the church in Philadelphia endured a trial, but they kept their sight on their future hope in Christ. Jesus here encourages them that their perseverance will result in begin delivered from even greater difficulty, the *hour of testing*.

Finally, Jesus has instructions for the Philadelphian believers:

I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Jesus says He is *coming quickly*. Jesus's return was imminent two thousand years ago, and it is still imminent. As Peter states, a day and a thousand years are the same to God. He further asserts:

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”
(2 Peter 3:9)

Jesus says to *hold fast what you have*. Based on the prior verses, what the Philadelphian believers have is a) a “little power” b) they are keeping His word c) and they are persevering in holding fast to His word with the strength they have. *Hold fast* here means to “clutch or grip onto.” Jesus urges the faithful witnesses not to just loosely hold onto their crown. Like a running back carrying a football, He wants them to hold it tightly, or else someone will take it.

The believers in Philadelphia have been promised authority as a reward for their faithfulness, but now Jesus is warning them that this reward can be taken away.

2 John speaks to the idea that rewards waiting for us in heaven can be partially lost:

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.”
(1 John 1:7-8)

The crowns were rewarded because of their perseverance. But if the believers in Philadelphia who have been faithful witnesses so far do not continue to persevere, they run the risk of receiving a partial reward, or perhaps even losing their rewards altogether. In the following verses, Jesus will highlight some specific rewards He offers to these believers for continuing in striving to remain faithful witnesses in spite of difficulties.

Biblical Text

⁹ Behold, I will cause *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.