

"Earth Dwellers" In Revelation

Rev 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.**

- Throughout Revelation, there is a class/group of people called "earth dwellers"
- Term is used 12x in Rev in 10 verses (Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 [2x]; 12:12; 13:8,12,14 [2x]; 14:6; 17:8)
- They are adversaries, as we'll see later on; they are persistent, unrepentant unbelievers during the tribulation
- Describes the mass of humanity that endures the tribulation and ultimately dies or ends up in hell
- "...dwell" - not *oikeo*, but rather *katoideo*, identified with Phil 3:20; Heb 11:13
 - These are people who are identified with the earth, not with heaven
 - Gr. *epi teo oikoumenes holes*, in the Greek it is very clear: upon all mankind; geographically comprehensive

Earth Dwellers in the OT

Like most NT terminology, "earth dwellers" originates in the OT. A couple forms of the construct is used almost 50x in the Hebrew OT, not including a similar phrase "world dwellers" that occurs 5x.

In the OT, "earth dwellers" is translated "land dwellers" or "inhabitants of the land" since the context references a localized area of land or country like Israel. However, in a global context, the same Hebrew phrase is rendered "inhabitants of the earth" (Ps 33:14; Is 18:3; 24:6,17; 26:21; Jer 25:30; Joel 2:1; Zeph 1:18). All five uses of "inhabitants of the world" appear to be in a global context (Ps 33:8; Is 18:3; 26:9,18; Lam 4:12).

Every global use of "earth dwellers" in the OT appears in a judgment context and probably all phrases also will take place in the future, during the day of the Lord or tribulation period. It is of special significance that both "earth dwellers" and "world dwellers" are used multiple times in Is 24-27, often called "Isaiah's Apocalypse."

- Is 24 tells us that God's worldwide judgment will come upon all mankind because of specific sins of "the inhabitants of the earth" (24:5-6,17).
- Is 26:9b says, "For when the earth experiences Thy judgments the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness."

- Is 26:20 says that Israel will be hidden away and protected “until indignation runs its course.” Since the remnant of Israel will be protected during the tribulation, then what will be God’s purpose for the judgment of this period?
- Is 26:21 answers that question: “For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; and the earth will reveal her bloodshed, and will no longer cover her slain.”

Thus, we see that a purpose for the tribulation will be to “punish” the earth dwellers. This is very similar to the statement in Rev 3:10 that says the Lord will “test those who dwell upon the earth.” It seems clear that Is 24-27, and especially 26:21 provides the backdrop for understanding what is meant in Rev 3:10, as well as John’s use of “earth dwellers” throughout Revelation.

To Test the Earth Dwellers

Since one of the main purposes of the judgments of the tribulation are to “punish” (Is 26:21) or “test” (Rev 3:10) the earth dwellers, it is important to know what this means. The Greek word for “test” is *peirazo*, which means “to endeavor to discover the nature or character of something by testing, try, make trial of, put to the test.”

It is important to keep in mind that a major purpose for the judgments of the tribulation in Rev 6-19 are to test the earth dwellers under the most extreme circumstances in order to vindicate their rejection of the Lamb (Jesus) and His message (the gospel). No matter the severity of the judgments that are issued from heaven, not a single earth dwellers repents (see Rev 6:15-17; 9:20-21; 16:9,11,21).

The fact that not a single earth dweller repents in the detailed account of their testing in Revelation is likely the reason why the retributive term “punish” is used in Is 26:21. Isaiah’s prophecy pictures a finished evaluative conclusion, while John speaks of the purpose before it has produced a certain outcome. However, the subsequent events of Revelation make it clear that the testing of the earth dwellers vindicates God’s judgment upon them. This fact is also referenced in Dan 12:10, which describes [the Tribulation] as a testing period: “Many will be purged, purified and refined; but the wicked (earth dwellers) will act wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.”

The other purpose of the Tribulation is to lead to Israel’s conversion and acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah (Is 26:11-20; Jer 30:1-24; Ezek 20:33-44; 22:17-22; Dan 12:1-3; Zech 12:10-13:1).

Who are the Earth Dwellers in Revelation?

When we survey the 12 uses of "earth dwellers" in Revelation, we see an interesting composite that develops.

- They are to be tested in order show their true metal (3:10)
- They are clearly identified as those who are persecuting and killing believers during the tribulation (6:10)
- They are the target of many of the judgments (8:13)
- They send gifts to one another and celebrate when the two witnesses are killed in Jerusalem (11:10)
- They all worship the Antichrist (13:8,12); 100% of the earth dwellers receive the mark of the beast, which consigns them to spend eternity in hell.
- They will be deceived by false signs and wonders of the Antichrist, and will erect an image of him in the temple (13:14)
- They will be the target of the preaching of the gospel by an angelic messenger (14:6), not a single one will be saved; instead they will wonder after the Antichrist (17:8)

In analyzing the phrase "earth dwellers," emphasis should be put upon the Greek substantival participle *katoikeo*. This compound word is made up of the preposition *kata*, "down" and the verb *oikeo*, "to dwell." The preposition inserted as a prefix to the verb "to dwell" intensifies the verb and carries the idea of "to dwell down in something," in this case the earth. Thus, it carries the idea of those who settled down on the earth, in contrast to a heaven dweller.

Robert Govett describes the "earth dwellers" as follows: "They are men whose hearts are where their bodies are. Their home is here, here their treasures, their honor, their pleasures."

Tony Garland surmises that the term "earth dwellers" denotes the *unsaved at the time of the end who steadfastly continue in their rejection of God.*" Thus, "earth dwellers" are a moral rather than a geographical term, even though the phrase has a geographical connotation. "Earth dwellers" appear to be a figure of speech called a synecdoche, where the whole (earth dwellers) is put for one of its parts (unbelievers during the tribulation).

"Earth dwellers" are contrasted to the proper focus in Revelation upon the heavenly temple, from where God's orders go forth in order to establish the Kingdom of God upon earth. Instead, the focus and ambitions for the "earth dwellers" are limited to the earth and not God's will, which is issued from heaven and enacted upon the earth. "This fact explains," notes Garland, "why the events of Revelation include great judgments poured out upon the natural systems of the earth for the earth has become an idol of worship for the earth dwellers." "In contrast to the faithful who are *aliens* and *sojourners* upon the earth (Lev 25:23; Num 18:20,23; 1 Chr 29:15; Ps 39:12; 119:19; John 15:19; 17:14,16; Phil 3:20;

Heb 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11) and whose hope is heavenward (Heb 11:13-16; Rev 13:6), these that *dwell* upon the earth are trusting in man and his environment."

Renald Showers says: "All of these Revelation references to 'them that dwell upon the earth' clearly indicate that they will be unsaved people of the future period of testing who will never get saved.... In spite of the devastating horrors of the sixth trumpet, which will kill one-third of mankind, the earth-dwellers will not repent of their wicked deeds (Rev 9:20–21)."

Other References

- Luke 21:35 warns that "earth dwellers" will be the ones caught off guard by the judgment of the tribulation period.
- 1 Thess 5:1-11 – "sons of darkness" are unprepared, because they have not trusted in Christ as their Savior.
- 2 Thess 2:11-12 – those remaining (implied as "earth dwellers"), God will send a deluding influence so they "believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." This verse reinforces the notion that a purpose of the tribulation includes a testing and judgment of the "earth dwellers."