

# “The Place of Final Training” Revisited

***Peoples’ Understanding of Prophetic Events can often be Influenced by Factors without Substantial Basis. The Book of Revelation’s reference to God’s Church being Protected During the End-Time Illustrates One of These!***

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There is a particular doctrinal area we have called, in the recent past: “The Place of Final Training”. You may remember that. We used to talk about it a lot, in fact, QUITE a lot! It’s a place also known to many as ‘The Place of Safety’. I’m not aware if the Church of God has published any definitive position on this recently, beyond what we have traditionally presented on this subject. But, I want to pose something regarding it, that may help us, in the future, better **define** what this subject is about and what it may **involve** for many of us.

Try and recall what you understand about what was referred to as “The Place of Final Training”. First, do you understand where that name came from? Is it a Biblical term? Do you recall any particular verse from which we got that name? There is only one, really. Most people are unaware of which one it is. We’ll look into it a little further along.

What caused me to review this subject recently, was that a friend of mine came to town and stayed with us for a little over a week. He attends with another organization in the Church of God. We could perhaps call them a ‘brother’ organization, and this subject has a pointed focus with them. This is one of the MAIN things in their active doctrinal repertoire, and as a result, many are very focused about the matter of preparing themselves to go to the ‘Place of Final Training’. In discussing this with my friend, it drew my mind back to the matter, and refreshed some memories. At the same time, the reconsideration brought out some new questions that would be very appropriate for us to consider.

## What is Your Expectation?

Have our conceptions in this area always been totally correct and accurately represented?

I want to present some considerations to you here, that might help clarify and re-define the subject and give us some food for further thought. Now, what this article presents MAY NOT be what you have always understood, and, please notice that some things may be in the form of a question. I’m not necessarily proposing that this is the answer, but, at least give it thought, because you’ll see there’s some merit to what we ought to consider. There is actually MORE in the Scriptures, even in those Scriptures that we’ve recognized as dealing directly with this particular subject, than we have noticed before. We ought to review them again keeping within the bounds of a practical reality.

## A Time of Flight

First, some general Scriptures that set the tone for this subject are found in Matthew 24. For example, (this is from the Olivet Prophecy – and the other synoptic accounts cover the same basic information) Matthew 24:14. This we recognize as fitting into that time period towards “the end”. ***“And this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness, unto all nations, and THEN shall the end come. When you therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet stand in the Holy Place, then let them which are in Judea flee unto the mountains.”*** ...and we’ve understood this to be relevant to that period of time... ***“Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house, neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes, And woe to them that are with child and them which give suck in those days, But pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath Day, for then shall be great tribulation”***... So, we have the general time-frame here. This is the end-time, approaching the time of great tribulation. Over in verse 22, it says, ***“and except those days should be shortened,***

*there should no flesh be saved,” ...and here’s an interesting line... “but for the elect’s sake, those days shall be shortened.”*

Now, that tells us something. It tells us that there ARE going to be survivors among the Saints who live through to the end-time! If the ONLY Saints to survive on earth were those afforded a ‘place of safety’ then God’s intervention would NOT HAVE BEEN STATED FOR THIS REASON! There are to be Saints, still alive, still in harm’s way, right up to the moment of Christ’s intervention! Note that!

### God Spares His People

Malachi 3:16-17 is another general passage that has application to this particular subject. *“Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another, And the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name and they shall be mine, says the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him”.* Again, this is focusing on the time of the end, and He’s talking about sparing those who serve Him.

But, Revelation 12 is basically where we draw most of our information. Here again, we’re getting a little more specific. This is where we read about the ‘wings of an eagle’. Covering most of the chapter quickly, beginning in verse 1: *“and there appeared a great wonder in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”* I won’t take the time to define who these visions portray. I think most generally understand who these are referring to... *“And she, being with child cried, travailing in birth and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven, and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads, and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his head, and his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered for to devour her child as soon as it was born.”* Down to verse 6: *“And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place*

*prepared of God that they should feed her there 1260 days.”* Then with that, we have a few more verses which talk about what appears to be a subsequent time setting: *“And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought against His angels, and prevailed not.”* Then we find Satan being cast down to the earth, and his angels being cast down with him! That’s in verse 9.

Now, down to verse 14, we find something which repeats, or seems to repeat what is says up in verse 6. *“And to the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place where she is nourished for times, time and half a time, from the face of the serpent.”* We recognize times, time and half a time as being prophetic symbolism for 3½ years, which just happens to correspond to the 1260 days that we read about earlier. (3½ years times 360 days in a prophetic year, equals 1260 days!)

These are the Scriptures we turn to, to provide us with the most definitive information, and to build the strongest case for the things we have long understood and have long taught regarding this ‘Place of Safety’ for the Church.

### A Later Fulfillment?

It’s interesting to notice, though, there appears to be TWO times of flight. In Revelation 12:6, we have one, and in verse 14 we have another. I’m here suggesting the one in verse 6 is referring to the 1260 years that the Church was protected in the mountains of Europe during the Middle Ages, generally corresponding to the Thyatiran Era. Down in the verse 14 it seems to represent the End-Time. We can discern that from the context around it, which specifies a different period of time.

We have 1260 days, and a day-for-a-year in fulfillment would be 1260 years, up in verse 6. Then, down in verse 14, it’s talking about 3½ times, which we recognize as being 3½ actual years. I won’t present this consideration here, other than to mention the fact that we read of God’s Two Witnesses (Rev. 11:9), who were slain, and whose dead bodies lay in the street for basically the same

interval: 3½ days again. So, we have the same INTERVAL, but in a different INCREMENT each time! It's interesting that all of these contain a similarity. Three and a half prophetic years, represented by 'days', then three and a half actual years, then three and a half actual days.

But, it's the word "**nourished**" in Rev. 12:14 that has been used to provide the basis for the idea about this "Place of Safety" as being a "Place of Final Training"! They took that one unique word: "nourished", using it alone to substantiate the idea that people who are taken there are going to be intensively trained during their unique experience in that place and time.

That's generally the position of this other organization that my friend is a member of, AND what WE (the RCG and WCG) generally taught for decades! This other organization I refer to wouldn't consider teaching anything at variance with what the WCG of the early 1980's, and particularly Mr. Armstrong, taught twenty and more years ago.

Let me quote from sermons given by Mr. Waterhouse in the 1980s, which set out our long-held positions on these matters. (This writer can provide a major transcript of this sermon, typical of many.)

*"The present team being built is THE team to go through the 3½ years of final training. In final training, God really cultivates His Way of Life which will then be taught to the rest of the world. This cultivation will be without Satan's influence."*

*"Philadelphian's are the educators for the Family of God under Christ: all who qualify to go into the Place of Final Training."*

*"The program for re-education in the World Tomorrow is the outcome of the 3½ years of Final Training."*

*"The Laodicean Era [exists] between [Philadelphia's] flight to the Place of Safety and the Last Trump! (NO two Eras exist at the same time!) Laodiceans' will endorse with their blood the work of Philadelphia. Mass martyrdom, almost totally.*

*Most will die nearly at the outset, just after Philadelphia's flight."*

### **When Is There Time?**

Responding to the last quote, I suggest we remind ourselves of the adage: "*Death removes all trials. Imminent death removes all lukewarmness!*" In other words, when do these Laodiceans have the time to be 'lukewarm'? There is another concept that goes along with this, besides a period of intensive training, that is more subliminal. It is one we need to look at more closely. That concept is: That those who are accounted worthy to be taken to this Place of Safety are, basically, the 'superior' Christians! You have to be 'good-enough' to go there. And we've sort-of concluded in our minds that the ones who don't get to go, who are NOT taken there, are the 'inferior' Christians. We've sort of allowed that it's a "good Christian / bad Christian" dichotomy. We also combined with that idea, our understanding of the Philadelphia and Laodicean Eras, which warrants explanation in a different context. But, that's what we did, and many generally retain the identity of these 'good' Christians: The Philadelphians, as all being taken to a place of protection and safety, while those left 'outside', unprotected, are these 'bad' Christians.

That's what we need to reconsider. You don't have to agree with this, I just want to pose the idea to you for thought. Think about it. This is what we've really been saying, based on this view of it.

In Daniel 12: there's another piece of information that has relevance here. We've always understood this passage as pertaining to this subject, and it expands the question being posed here. Beginning in Daniel 12:1, "**And at that time**" ...and notice this phrase... "**And at that time, Michael shall stand up, the great prince which stands for the children of thy people. And there shall be a time of trouble for such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time.**" Now, when we read that, what era are we into? Obviously, the time of the end: the time of tribulation unparalleled. When it says, "**a time of trouble such as there never was**", we understand that it MUST be refer-

ring to this period of time we're talking about. What does his "standing up" indicate to us? Consider what Stephen saw in vision as he was being martyred!<sup>1</sup>

Continuing in vs. 1, "***And at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.***" Notice where it says, "***they shall be delivered***". What mental picture does that form when you read that? "***At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.***" So these are NOT people who MAY be in the book, or maybe are NOT in the book. The Scripture says, "they ARE in the book!" So, their conversion is not a question!

### **But, Is It From or Into?**

They will be delivered, but HOW? Are they to be delivered FROM something, or are they to be delivered TO something? I expect we can draw some of the answer to that if we look at Christ's own words in Matthew 24: (here again – back to the Olivet Prophecy) in verse 8, where He says, "***all these are the beginning of sorrows***" vs 9, "***Then shall they DELIVER you up to be afflicted and shall kill you and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.***" Is this deliverance being talked about in Daniel 12 this same KIND of deliverance?

Is it a deliverance FROM, or a deliverance TO? We've always regarded it as a deliverance from! In Matthew 24:9, it's delivered **into** affliction! If it's deliverance from, it certainly isn't all-inclusive!

We need to refer back to something in Daniel 12:1 (This time from the NKJ) "***At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time, And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book.***" Then, notice verse 2 where it breaks immediately into the subject of the resurrection! "***And many of them that sleep dust***

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 7:56 Stephen said, "*Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*"

***of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever.***" (Thus describing the first resurrection)

Here's the thing. We've always considered being delivered FROM, but could it be a case of being delivered TO? And, if so, for what purpose?

### **An End-Time Martyrdom!**

In Revelation 6:9-11, is a section we've considered to be discussing the subject of the end-time martyrdom of Saints. Verse 9, "***And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the Altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God and for the Testimony which they held. And, they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, Holy and True, shall thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwelt on the earth?' And white robes were given unto every one of them, and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season until their fellow servants also, and their brethren, who should be killed as they were should be fulfilled.***"

Now, here again, we can see the two periods of time. Perhaps they correspond to the Middle Ages and the End-Time. There is an earlier time of martyrdom, and there's to be another end-time martyrdom of Saints for sure. Notice that these end-time martyrs aren't presented in any negative light!

These martyrs: Are they the 'inferior' Christians? That's basically the question. Are these martyrs the 'inferior' or underdeveloped Christians? That was our conclusion. The answer to this question has relevance to this subject of the 'Place of Safety'.

This other group: Those NOT afforded protection: The concept to this point has been that these represent those 'inferior' Christians. I want to pose to you another possibility, and you can agree or you can disagree, but, just think about it, because it may make some sense, if not now, then perhaps it will some day.

WHAT IF it were, that these taken to a Place of Safety (and I'm not suggesting there ISN'T such a place), but what if they, instead of being the 'good' Christians, they were the WEAKER ones? The 'under-developed'? The *under-nourished*?

It might be timely here to interject what raised the question in the first place. That word '*nourished*', by itself, accounts for the idea developed from it, of 'Final Training'. Just this one word, and what it was taken to mean, became the sole basis for an entire concept that will remain with us thru this generation. We determined this word 'nourished' meant an intensive educational program. If it is okay to interpret this one word to the degree it was, then couldn't we reasonably allow this one word to also generate a related question?

This word '*nourished*' in Revelation 12:14 and '*fed*' in verse 6, is the same Greek word. It is *threpho* (Strong's #5142), which means to feed or nourish. It comes from a root (5157) *trope*, which means "to turn". In other words, the sense of this word is to feed in such a way as to nourish back to health: to nurse and turn-around the health of the one being fed. (Rev. 7:17 uses the word, 'feed', which the NKJ translates as 'shepherd them'.) It's not a word used often in the NT. The sense is of nourishing someone back to health from a weakened condition. (Matt. 25:37 uses #5142 of those under-nourished (hungry) needing to be fed. <sup>2</sup>) This in mind, can we now better understand the basis for the question? Is the 'Place of Safety' dealing with weakened individuals needing to receive strengthening 'nourishment'?

Think about this. Christ is calling His Bride right now. And how would Christ deal with His Bride? Would He shelter the stronger ones and leave His 'weak' ones to be devastated under Satan's wrath? Or, would He take measures to PROTECT the weaker ones especially, the ones most needing it?

Let's remember, people are being called at all times, and all having different growth rates. We're not always all the same in our developmental rate,

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<sup>2</sup> Matt. 25:37 "Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee?..."

or our development level. When called, we don't all have the same amount of time to grow. We each find ourselves in different growth climates. As a result, some people are strong. Some people are not. Some people have a very low pain-tolerance. Let's face it! We have some people among us, (and it may not be apparent to anyone but God), who would not be able to stand an intensive trial. We have some people who, if put to the sword, or if put under fire, might cave-in and blaspheme. It's not always a matter of will. Don't you think God knows that? Do you think He might PROTECT the ones He wants to keep who aren't as strong: Taking them aside, and leaving the strong to face Satan's wrath, and to become even more PERFECTED, (strengthened) by this 'final testing'? Notice in Revelation 11:7, where Satan makes war against these two witnesses, who are ultimately "killed for their testimony." Is it on account of their inferiority, or their obvious strength?

Luke 21:16 mentions, "***And SOME of you shall they put to death...***" In Revelation 12:17, again we see Satan .."***making war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have His testimony!***" (Not those who DON'T keep and DON'T have, even though they know better.) These are on the front lines, not put there as punishment, but, as Daniel 12:10 puts it, "***at the time of the end, Many shall be purified and made white, and refined...***" (NKJ) Is this the means of that achievement? (Like gold is refined?)

These are the basis for further thought, and is the question being posed in this article. That's why we need to re-think our, perhaps, oversimplified first presumption, that the strong are protected, while the weak ones are left to be ravaged by Satan.

There's reason to wonder about this, considering what God's Plan is! This IS THEIR TIME! This is these people's time: their day of salvation. These are the Saints of God! Is He looking to save as many as possible of those He has called, or is He looking to trash-can a part of His Bride just because they happen to be weak at the end-time? I wonder about that, and maybe we ought to look at the Place of Safety idea with a little broader perspective: That maybe, God in His love, is going to

PROTECT those who NEED it and PERFECT those of us who can bear up under the process!

### **A Weak Philadelphia?**

Perhaps we ought to also consider what Jesus said to the Philadelphians, in Rev. 3:8. “...*you have a little strength*”... Is that indicating that Philadelphia, as a congregation, are NOT particularly strong? Is this alluding to many among them being somewhat weaker than they ought to be?

The above question enhances the relevance of the assurance in verse 10: “*Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*” (NKJ) Testing what? Testing where people truly stand on important spiritual issues?

To conclude: Luke 21:36. Another Scripture that has general relevance to this subject. This is not in the other synoptics, but it is here. It’s something we need to remember more than we do: “*Watch ye therefore and pray always, that you might be accounted worthy to escape all these things, which shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*” Daniel 12: again, verse 10, and think about this verse in context of the question posed above, that, perhaps, it’s the weakened ones who are being protected and the stronger ones who are left to face further refinement! “*Many shall be purified, and made white and tried, but the wicked shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand. But, the wise shall understand.*”

Can our elementary concepts gain any new clarity from understanding that, perhaps, “some of us” will face end-time trials, not because of our inferiority, (and maybe we shouldn’t regard people in an ‘unprotected’ category that way),... NOT because of inferiority, but simply because God intends to perfect His own EVEN MORE! It could be that those who truly are ‘superior’ will be put in a position to prove it thru real life situations, not by self-promotion and posturing.

### **SEEKING to Save One’s Self**

Another general consideration should be that:

“Those who seek to save their own lives are the ones who will likely lose it. It’s those who give their lives for others who will save it!” (A loose paraphrase of Luke 17:33.) What this passage illustrates is that not all things are attained directly. Some things are attained not by our direct effort, but by a readiness in other ways. How do we minister to Christ? (See Mat. 25:35-40). This is a prime example of attainment through an indirect approach. “*In as much as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.*” (NKJ)

So, an obsession with attaining the Place of Safety, though a reasonable and understandable quest, does not necessarily, by itself, indicate assurance of an attainment, nor does it indicate that those not taken to such a place are ‘inferior’ Christians, as it might rather be that God has something else, a higher level of perfection, in His Plans for some of His.

He is replicating His own Righteous Character in those He has called, and is re-forming them into His own image! “*My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,*” (Gal. 4:19) “*Til we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature (age or maturity) of the fullness of Christ.*” (Eph. 4:13&15) “*Even the mystery which has been hid from ages...is now made manifest to His saints;... Christ in you, the hope of glory; ... striving according to His working, which works in me mightily.*” (Col. 1:26-29) At His last earthly Passover, Jesus used an illustration like in the ancient art of glassblowing, in which the molten bubble is formed within an outer mold, giving the bottle a pre-set outer shape. In this case, the character image of Christ: “*...because I live, you shall live also. At that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me and I in you.*” (John 14:19-20) He determines the outer form of our character, and His Spirit works in us internally expanding us up to fully conform to that mold.

Who He will protect thru the great tribulation and who He will refine further is His prerogative.

“*We are His workmanship*” after all. (Eph. 2:10) Ω