

Bible QuickNotes

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WORLDWIDE TESTING

“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 upon the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

OBEDIENCE AND ENDURANCE

1. This verse is addressed to the pastor, not, as is so often taught, to the members of the church at Philadelphia. The use of second person *singular* verbs and pronouns in the letter to Philadelphia makes this clear (3:7–13).
2. He has done good works (implied by “I know your deeds” 3:8), been obedient (“kept My word” 3:8), faithful (“not denied My name” 3:8), and endured persecution (“kept the word of My perseverance” 3:10). He has earned the crown of life (“that no one take your crown” 3:11; cf. 2:10), is an overcomer (compare 3:11 with 3:12), and will be a pillar in the millennial Temple (3:12).

WORLDWIDE TESTING

1. *Peirasmos* and *peirazo* mean to test, not to purify; to test in order to demonstrate the quality of a thing or the character of a person, not to purify quality or character: “to try to learn the nature or character of someone or something by submitting such to thorough and extensive testing — ‘to test, to examine, to put to the test, examination, testing’” (Louw & Nida).
2. This test will be administered by God to the whole world, not to a local area or to the Roman Empire. It will be administered in the lifetime of this pastor. The purpose of this test is twofold: (1) to demonstrate the quality of every person who is alive on the earth—in every tribe and nation—and (2) to establish the grounds for worldwide judgment. It’s not one test but an hour of testing—a number or series of tests in a predetermined, limited time period.
3. **PRINCIPLE: GOD TESTS THE WHOLE WORLD AT TIMES OF HIS OWN CHOOSING THROUGHOUT HISTORY TO DEMONSTRATE THE QUALITY OF THE EARTH’S POPULATION.** Two such worldwide tests are mentioned in Scripture. (1) Seven years of famine in the time of Joseph: “and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said, then there was famine in all the lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread... When the famine was *spread* over all the face of the earth, then Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians; and the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. And *the people* of all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth” (Gen 41:54–57). (2) Famine in the reign of Claudius (41–54 AD): “And one of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius” (Acts 11:28). History records four famines in the days of Claudius: one near the end of his rule in 51 AD was so severe that Tacitus thought it was a divine judgment (*Annals* XII. 43). Testing the world for quality can be seen in the following verse: “The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God” (Psa 14:2; 53:2). The sad result of this test is mentioned in the next verse: “They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one” (14:3; 53:3). Other possible worldwide tests in Scripture are the flood (Gen 6:1–17), the three and a half year famine in the days of Elijah (Luke 4:25–26), the cup of wrath for the nations of Jeremiah’s day (Jer 25:15–29), the judgments of the Tribulation (Rev 6:1–19:4), and the final revolt (Rev 20:7–9). Perhaps a global test such as the infiltration of the human race by fallen angels formed God’s assessment that in the days of Noah “the wickedness of man was great on the earth” (Gen 6:5)

- and “the earth was corrupt in the sight of God” (6:11–12). The seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments test the quality of men on the earth for seven years during the Tribulation (Luke 21:34–36; Rev 9:20–21; 16:8–11). Each judgment serves as a test for the next judgment. And the release of Satan tests the quality of men on earth after the millennial rule of Christ (Rev 20:7–9). In the Bible a worldwide test may consist of famine, pandemic, or a combination of drought, floods, fires, earthquakes, tsunamis (Rev 6:8; 8:7–12; 9:15–19), economic collapse (Rev 6:5–6), and world wars (of history, Jer 25:15–29, esp. verses 13, 26, 29; of the Tribulation, Jer 25:30–38; Matt 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9; Rev 6:4; of Armageddon, Rev 14:14–20; 16:14; 19:19).
4. This is the most attention-getting verse in the letters to the seven churches—the soon arrival of a worldwide test! Such a test will be given to every living person on earth, including the pastors and people of the seven churches. Perhaps only the pastor at Philadelphia is exempt. The question, then, is: Does this verse apply backward to the previous churches and forward to Laodicea? Is the test of 2:10 the same as the worldwide test of 3:10? Is this the way Jesus plans to resolve the problems in these churches and carry out his threats? That is, will worldwide persecution, pestilence, or famine remove the lampstand from Ephesus (2:5), remove the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans from Pergamum (2:16), remove Jezebel and her followers from Thyatira (2:22–23), discipline the pastor at Sardis (3:3), force the synagogue of Satan to bow down to the pastor at Philadelphia (3:9), and rebuke and discipline the pastor at Laodicea (3:19)? Looking further, can we gather any clues from the seven letters about the nature of this worldwide test? Maybe. It may include ten days of persecution (2:10) and a deadly pestilence (2:22–23). It’s initiated by Satan (2:10), allowed by God, and regulated by Jesus (3:10). So Jesus is coming quickly to monitor this persecution and pandemic (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11). To be exempt, pastors and people must repent (2:5, 16, 21–22; 3:3, 19).

RECENT WORLDWIDE TESTS

World wars: I and II. *Worldwide economic collapse:* Great Depression (1929–1939), Great Recession (2008–2009). *Worldwide pandemics:* bubonic plague (1346–1348), influenza (extremely severe outbreak in 1732–1733); influenza (extremely severe outbreak from 1857–1859); influenza (estimated 25 to 100 million dead from March 1918 to June 1920). The 1918 flu pandemic or Spanish flu spread around the world, even to the Arctic and remote Pacific islands, and was the greatest medical holocaust in history, infecting one third and killing 3% to 6% of the world’s 1.6 billion people—perhaps more than the Black Death. About 10%–20% of those infected died, compared to a mortality rate of 0.1% for most flu epidemics. About 28% of the US population was infected, and 500,000 to 675,000 died. “Scientists have used tissue samples from frozen victims to reproduce the virus for study. . . . Among the conclusions of this research is that the virus kills via a cytokine storm (overreaction of the body’s immune system) which explains its unusually severe nature and the concentrated age profile of its victims. The strong immune systems of young adults ravaged the body, whereas the weaker immune systems of children and middle-aged adults caused fewer deaths” (*Wikipedia*). “Another unusual feature of this pandemic was that it mostly killed young adults, with 99% of pandemic influenza deaths occurring in people under 65, and more than half in

young adults 20 to 40 years old. This is unusual since influenza is normally most deadly to the very young (under age 2) and the very old (over age 70)" (*Wikipedia*). The Spanish flu was caused "by an unusually virulent and deadly influenza A virus strain of subtype H1N1" (*Wikipedia*). This is the same virus responsible for the Swine flu outbreak in 2009.

LESSONS FROM THE SPANISH FLU

- 1. Selective target:** With the H1N1 virus God is able to excise a godless generation of 20 to 40 year olds without doing much damage to children, middle-aged, and senior adults.
- 2. Lower birth rate:** Since 20 to 40 year olds are of childbearing age, a significant reduction in their numbers reduces the number of children being born and raised by godless parents.
- 3. Reduction of evil:** Many children will be raised by grandparents who are more righteous. Children and teens are bypassed in this test because they are still impressionable.
- 4. Good management:** "The earth is the LORD's, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it" (Psa 24:1). From human viewpoint a pandemic is a tragedy, but from divine viewpoint it's a good thing—a purification of the earth.
- 5. Prayer, repentance, and revival:** To remove the cause (immorality) is to remove the effect (worldwide testing). Prayer, repentance, and revival can forestall pandemics, world wars, economic collapse, and natural catastrophes.
- 6. Swine flu:** The current generation of young adults is more immoral than the one before; viz., school shootings, gangs, crime, promiscuity, adultery, homosexuality, abortion, secularism, and church dropouts (nine out of ten high school students drop out of Southern Baptist churches when they go to college). Is God about to judge this generation?
- 7. God's protection:** "You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day; Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand; *But* it shall not approach you. You will only look on with your eyes, And see the recompense of the wicked" (Psa 91:6–8). "Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it, and cut off from it both man and beast, even *though* these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, by their *own* righteousness they could *only* deliver themselves," declares the Lord GOD" (Ezek 14:13–14). "When a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life" (Ezek 18:27). See the full context of Ezekiel 14:12–20 and 18:4–32.

EXEMPTION FROM WORLDWIDE TESTING

- The pastor at Philadelphia will be delivered from not just a test but "from the hour of testing." An hour is a fairly short period of testing compared to a day or week. The seventieth week of Daniel, for instance, is the seven year Tribulation. And "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years" (2 Peter 3:8b).
- The promised return of the resurrected Christ in verse 11 ("I will come soon") probably takes place shortly before this worldwide test begins (verse 10) in order to deliver our pastor "from the hour of testing." If the soon return of Jesus refers to the Rapture of the Church, then the worldwide hour of testing must be the Tribulation (cf. 1 Thess 1:10). But if his soon return took place in the lifetime of our pastor, then the worldwide testing is now history and not the Rapture.
- "I will come quickly" can't refer to the second coming of Christ because all the events of chapters 6–18 must occur first—all the plagues of the Tribulation.
- His crown and future rewards are not from passing this worldwide test: he is promised exemption from it.
- Note the beautiful reciprocity: he has been faithful to Jesus

in suffering caused by Satan and Jesus rewards him with exemption from further suffering caused by God. He has proven his faithfulness; he needs no further testing.

6. Jesus has the power to give exemptions and waive tests. This test is waived on the basis of merit—his obedience and faithfulness. He will be supernaturally protected throughout this worldwide test. By way of implication, though, believers who have not been obedient and faithful will suffer and perhaps even die in this global test. Some food for thought.

RAPTURE QUESTION

- This is the most debated verse on the time of the Rapture in the Bible. *Views:* kept out of the hour of testing (pretribulation); preserved through the hour of testing (posttribulation); removed during the hour of testing (midtribulation); only faithful Christians will be kept from the hour of testing (partial Rapture). I am pretribulation, premillennial, and believe in the Rapture of the Church, but I think the text has to be stretched too far to find the Rapture and Tribulation in Revelation 3:10–11. I believe there is a much simpler and more likely interpretation, one that is in keeping with the rewards for faithfulness motif in chapters 2 and 3.
- Support for a pretrib Rapture:* (1) The hour of worldwide testing sounds like the Tribulation of chapters 6–19. (2) "I am coming quickly" (3:11a) fits the Rapture. (3) The nearness of the last days was the belief of the early church. (4) Since Jesus does not know the day or hour of his second coming (Matt 24:36–39), he may not know the day or hour of the Rapture either. And he didn't know it would be postponed for two thousand years. (5) "I am coming quickly" is not a possible visit, a visit if necessary, as in 2:5, 16, 25, and 3:3 but a promised visit that may refer to the Rapture (3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). After he comes, rewards are given to every believer (*hekastos*), presumably at the Judgment Seat of Christ (3:12).
- Problems for the pretrib, midtrib, posttrib, and partial Rapture views:* (1) If the Rapture is in view, Jesus doesn't come quickly as he said (3:11). So we must postulate a delay unknown to him. (2) The pastor at Philadelphia dies instead of being Raptured and delivered from the Tribulation. (3) The cause and effect relationship in verse 10 supports a partial Rapture better than a Rapture of all saints (1 Thess 4:13–18). Rapture proponents suggest this is not a conditional statement but a statement after the fact as in Genesis 22:18 (Constable). But an implied condition is hard to avoid; viz., a conditional deliverance based on faithfulness and obedience. (5) This promise is made to a single person, a pastor, and not to a local church or to the Church Universal. (6) There are five references to the coming of Christ: (a) to remove the lampstand from Ephesus (2:5), (b) to fight against followers of the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans in Pergamum (2:16), (c) to discipline Jezebel and her followers at Thyatira (2:25), (d) to discipline the pastor in Sardis (3:3); and (e) to keep the pastor at Philadelphia from the hour of worldwide testing (3:11). The twice repeated "I am coming quickly" (2:16; 3:11) and "I will come like a thief" (3:3) refer to a possible visit in the near future to solve problems in these local churches, not to the Rapture. Jesus threatens to come to Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis *if necessary*; but he *promises* to come to help the pastor in Philadelphia. If the first four occasions clearly refer to visits to local churches in the late first century, why not the fifth also? Why posit the Rapture here—an event that occurs two thousand years in the future?

POSTSCRIPT

The popular view among dispensationalists that sees the Tribulation in this verse and the Rapture in the next has erased an important principle that governs the Church Age; namely, that God periodically uses worldwide persecution, pandemics, and famines to test the worthy, discipline carnality, and purge undesirables from the earth. Though tragic, it's necessary to remove sin, promote godliness, and preserve civilization for future generations.

