

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).

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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 reign 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). *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 greatest medical holocaust in history,” infecting one third of and killing 3% to 6% of the world’s 1.6 billion people—perhaps more than the Black Death). 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).

EXEMPTION FROM THIS WORLDWIDE TESTING

1. 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; e.g., the seventieth week of Daniel (the seven year Tribulation).
2. The promised return of the resurrected Christ in verse 11 (“I will come soon”) probably takes place before verse 10 in order to deliver our pastor “from the hour of testing” (3:10a). If the soon return of Jesus refers to the Rapture of the Church, then the worldwide hour of testing must be the Tribulation. But if his soon return took place in the lifetime of our pastor, then the worldwide testing is now history and not the Rapture.
3. “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.
4. His crown and future rewards are not from passing this worldwide test: he is promised exemption from it.
5. Note the beautiful reciprocation: 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 in this worldwide test. Some food for thought.

RAPTURE QUESTION

1. 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 pretribulationist, premillennial, and believe in the Rapture of the Church, but 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.
2. *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. (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).
3. *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?