

BOOK OF REVELATION

Message to Philadelphia: Chapter 3:7-13

INTRODUCTION: We are now going to talk about the address that Jesus made to the sixth church in Asia. The church at Philadelphia.

Philadelphia's origin seems to be closely tied in to that of Pergamos and Sardis. First established in 189 B.C. By Eumenes II of Pergamos, who was a member of the Attalid dynasty. The Attalid dynasty also was the dynasty that ruled Pergamos. When the Attalid dynasty died out in 133 B.C., the town along with the rest of the kingdom of Pergamos, went to the Roman Empire. The same earthquake that nearly destroyed Sardis in A.D. 17, also nearly destroyed Philadelphia as well.

Tradition teaches that this church had a pastor named Demetrius, who was installed as pastor by the Apostle John, but this is not confirmed. Also tradition teaches that twelve Philadelphia believers were martyred at the same Polycarp was martyred for his faith. The Jews also persecuted these believers just like they did the believers at Smyrna.

You will notice as we study that the condition of each church is worse than the next. Ephesus: A church that holds fast but “leaves it first love”. Smyrna: A persecuted church, but holding fast. Pergamos: A church going into apostasy. Thyratira: A church consumed in apostasy. Sardis: A church who has died and only has a name that is alive. Now we are at Philadelphia: A church with an open door set before it.

However you notice something different about this church. The Lord Jesus has no condemnation for this church, just like the church at Smyrna. He only has encouragement and a directive, no chastisement.

VERSES 7: COMMENCING THE ADDRESS TO SARDIS.

VERSE 7A: “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write;”

As standard in the other letters that the Lord Jesus Christ wrote to the previous churches, the letter is addressed to the pastor of the church. The word “angel” means “messenger” in the Greek language. The context of the entire passage here indicates that the “angel” here is a reference to the pastor of the church and not an angelic being.

“...These things saith he that is holy,”

Only God is referred to as being holy in Scripture. Therefore since the Lord Jesus is giving this address, this is another proof of the Lord Jesus being deity, as if anymore proof is needed.

Luke 1:35 *And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (Context: Gabriel giving the announcement to Mary about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.)*

Acts 2:27 *Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. (Context: The Apostle Peter addressing the crowd after healing the lame man at the temple. Reference here to the Lord Jesus Christ.)*

This is a quote from Psalm 16:10. One of many Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament.

Acts 3:14 *But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; (Context: The Apostle Peter giving the “first” sermon in the church age. The address to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost, in which 5000 were saved.)*

“...he that is true,”

Only God can also be true as well as holy. The origin and source of truth is God himself.

John 8:44 *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

John 14:6 *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

I John 5:20 *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.*

Contrast this with what the Lord Jesus said about Satan in John 8:44.

John 8:44 *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

VERSE 7 (Continued): “he that hath the key of David,”

This phrase “he that hath the key of David” is an expression that denotes authority or control over a kingdom or nation. The key here carries the meaning of one who has total and complete access and control and no one else. David here is a reference to the monarchy of Israel. Tradition teaches that some rulers carried a key, that was made crooked, around their shoulder to denote that they held the authority of the kingdom.

“...he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;”

This is an extension of the previous phrase. This phrase would mean only the one in authority or control could open or close doors. In other words, only they had the authority or control to start or end things. We see this exact phrase used in the book of Isaiah 22:22, and is a prophecy given through Isaiah concerning Eliakim.

Isaiah 22:22 *And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.*

So it is appropriate and fitting that the Lord Jesus would apply the wording of this prophecy given concerning Eliakim, to himself. The Lord Jesus is the ultimate authority or controller of all of creation. Only He can start or stop events or actions.

Notice the phrase from Isaiah 22:22, “will I lay upon his shoulder”. To carry upon his shoulder is to also imply authority or control. We see the same expression applied in Isaiah 9:6, which is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 9:6 *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*

VERSES 8-10: COMMENDATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF PHILADELPHIA

VERSE 8: “I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it:”

The Lord Jesus is exercising his authority of opening and closing doors. He is “opening the door” meaning having access or entrance. This “door” is a great opening of the spreading of the gospel to this area of people. Notice that the Lord Jesus, not this church, is opening this “door” before them. And no one, not even these believers can close this door.

APPLICATION: Only God can open the doors of evangelism for you. Only the Holy Spirit can make the “fields” before you “good soil”. It is your responsibility to go through that “door” has been opened. The Holy Spirit will put a burden in your heart when the “door is open”.

“...for thou hast a little strength,”

This is the reason that the Lord Jesus “opens the door” for them. They are not capable of doing it themselves anyway. They needed God's strength to “open that door”, to make the people in his area ready to receive the gospel.

APPLICATION: We are not strong at all in our natural strength. We need God's strength.

“... and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”

The Lord Jesus is commending them for their faithfulness to obey his commandments that he gave them through his word. Also they did not deny the name of Christ through the persecution that they have no doubt suffered. They held true to the name of Christ despite these difficult circumstances.

APPLICATION: We are to obey and not deny Christ through difficult times.

VERSE 9: “Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie;”

The “synagogue of Satan” here is an expression that the Lord Jesus had used in Revelation 2:9 when he was addressing the church at Smyrna. It carries the same meaning here. It is probable that the church of Philadelphia was being persecuted, but perhaps not the same extent as the church at Smyrna. It may be how they handled this persecution that caused the Lord Jesus to make the area fertile for evangelism.

Revelation 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

”...behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.”

The Lord Jesus here is saying that he will make their enemies, the one's persecuting them come and pay homage or bow down to them. The word “worship” here carries the meaning of paying homage or showing reverence. The Lord Jesus is the only one that can receive spiritual worship. The Lord Jesus is just saying they will be made to come and pay reverence to these believers when they wish to or not. They would also know of the love of Christ for these believers.

VERSE 10: “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience,”

The same word for “patience” is used in the original language here that is used in Revelation 2 verses 2, 3, and 19. These are the addresses that the Lord Jesus made to the churches of Ephesus and Thyatira. The word carries the meaning of “cheerful or hopeful endurance”. The Lord Jesus exemplified this same “cheerful endurance” Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us this clearly:

Hebrews 12:1-2 (1) Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, (2) Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

He can then rightfully say that he has “patience”, cheerful endurance, and that he has commanded them in the scripture to have patience. They had kept this commandment to have cheerful endurance through difficult circumstances.

Trials will often bring patience, or cheerful endurance, and that will make the Christian “perfect”. This word “perfect” carries the meaning in the original language of “completeness or fullness in age and maturity”. Trials will grow the Christian into a state of maturity.

James 1:2-4 (2) My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; (3) Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. (4) But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

APPLICATION: Do we exemplify patience? Are we cheerfully enduring through the trials of life? We are also to be like these believers to keep his word of 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.”

The phrase here “hour of temptation” is a reference to a time of testing or proving. The word “hour” carries the meaning of a period of time or a season, and the word “temptation” carries the meaning of “proving or testing”. The context of this passage, which is given by the following phrase “to try them that dwell upon the earth” is a reference to the coming Tribulation period following the end of this chapter. This does not refer to all the persecutions that would take place in the Roman Empire, because Jesus addressed that in Revelation as a brief period of persecution by being “ten days” or ten periods of persecution. He did not refer it to as being worldwide or all earth dwellers.

The passage is not saying either that they must keep the word of his patience to avoid the time of tribulation either. They had already kept it and Jesus knew they would not break it either. All those who know Jesus Christ as Saviour will be kept from that “hour of temptation”.

VERSE 11: CHARGE TO THE BELIEVERS AT PHILADELPHIA.

VERSE 11: “Behold, I come quickly:”

This is the same word in the original language that the Lord Jesus used in the address to the churches in Ephesus and Pergamos. However this time He uses the word quickly to give a charge to keep instead of chastisement to correct. The word “quickly” carries the meaning of the manner, not the timing. When it is time for Him to come again, it will happen rapidly. However His coming may be delayed from our perspective but not from His. He will come when He deems it is time to come again.

“...hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

The expression “hold fast” uses one word in the original language. In the address to Thyatira in Revelation 2:25 and in this verse the Lord Jesus used the same word (krateo), which carries the meaning of maintaining with strength. In the address to Sardis in Revelation 3:3, the Lord Jesus used a word (tereo) which carries the meaning of keeping an eye on it, like a guard or watchman, but more passively holding. The church at Thyatira still had some strength but was consumed in apostasy. The church at Philadelphia was alive but persecuted much like Smyrna. So this word here is appropriate just like the word used in the address to Thyatira.

APPLICATION: We are to keep on laboring for the Lord Jesus, so we do not lose our reward. Our salvation is secure in him, but we can get reward or lose reward for what he do or not do for Christ after salvation.

VERSES 12-13: CLOSING OF THE ADDRESS

VERSE 12: “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out:

To “overcome” carries the same meaning it has in the previous addresses the Lord Jesus gave to the other churches. To “overcome” is to have a victorious Christian walk. This word is not talking about salvation but sanctification. All believers have the potential to be victorious, and upon going to heaven, will be victorious or have finally overcome. Only believers can “overcome”.

This phrase, “will I make a pillar in the temple of God” is a reference to being a permanent fixture. A pillar does not move in or out but is a permanent and is a foundation. It an expression or colloquialism meaning that the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only ones who can overcome, will have a permanent place in the New Heaven and the New Earth, yet to come, in addition to being with Christ during the Tribulation, and to rule with him in the Millennial Kingdom.

(It was distressing to see many good commentators try to not understand this literally, when the context gives you no reason, not to take this as anything but literally.)

“...and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God:”

It is hard for this lay preacher to imagine. This prophecy will be fulfilled after the Tribulation and the Millennial Kingdom have come. This is a description of the New Jerusalem as described in Revelation 21:1-3.

Revelation 21:1-3 (1) And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. (2) And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

“...and I will write upon him my new name.”

This is a reference to the name of God in their foreheads as described in Revelation 22:3-4. What this new name is we do not know. We will know when we get to heaven.

Revelation 22:3-4 (3) And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: (4) And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

VERSE 13: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

We see again that the Lord Jesus gives the same admonition to this church He has given to all the other churches. Only the believer has “ears to hear” and is willing to apply to his life the conviction and/or comfort that only the Holy Spirit can bring.

PROPHECTIC SIGNIFICANCE: PHILADELPHIA (BROTHERLY LOVE):

Represents the church of the age of the Reformation and the Renaissance from approximately 1750 through 1900. This church, now revived, was faithful to the Word of God and was sending out missionaries to all corners of the earth that they were able to reach at the time. They truly had “an open door” before them, not only in access but fertility. This kind of evangelism had not existed on this scale since the apostolic and persecution periods. Notice the parallels between Philadelphia and the Evangelistic church.

PHILADELPHIA:	EVANGELISTIC CHURCH:
Jesus set before them an open door of evangelism. No man could close it.	The door to most of the world was open for evangelism. Only God could close this door.
They kept His word and did not deny His name.	More believers in this period held to true doctrine than had done so in many years.
They were charged to hold fast so they did not lose their reward.	The believers of this period held fast for the most part so they would not lose their reward.

The following major events happen during this period:

- **The Great Awakening:** Began in the 1750's. A great time of revival and soul winning.
- **Result of the Great Awakening – The American Revolution and the founding of the United States of America.** The framer of the U.S. Constitution, James Madison, was a born again Christian and Bible believer.
- **Missions to places in the world that had not been reached before or in a very long time:** Asia (China, Burma, Africa, and America). Most of these missionaries were sent from England and the United States.
- **Advances in all areas of science much more rapidly than in all other periods of time before this period.** The foundation of modern technology, the physical principles governing them, was discovered during this period: electromagnetic induction, electromagnetic waves, radioactivity, motorized combustion, to name a few.

APPLICATIONS:

- (1) God sets opens doors before us many times and no man can close them
- (2) Have we kept His word and not denied His name?
- (3) If we are faithful to Him and His Word, even the wicked will acknowledge our service to God even if they do not agree with it and even make fun of it.
- (4) We are to hold fast, so we do not lose any reward. Our salvation He assures.
- (5) The believers, the only one who overcomes, will have a permanent place in the New Heaven and the New Earth that will not change.