

The Church at Philadelphia

3: 7-13

DIG: What was different about this church from all the others? What does the key of David open? Why does Christ say some claim to be Jews though they are not? Who were they? What did they do? How was this church able to persevere? Describe their enemies. How did their reward fit in with their faithfulness?

REFLECT: Christ has placed an open door to the Kingdom of God before each and every person (John 3:16). What have you done with that open door? Have you walked through it to salvation? Or have you slammed it in the Lord's face? Such insurmountable opportunities turn our attention away from ourselves and force us to trust completely in ADONAI. So, as you look beyond your own current "limitations" and the doors that Jesus has closed in your life, what other opportunities could you be overlooking?

There are those who say, "I wouldn't step foot in that place. They are just a bunch of hypocrites. I know so and so, and she lives like the devil all week and goes there on the weekend." The plain truth is that there are no perfect places of worship. In fact, local church is merely a bunch of sinners getting together. Believers are simply imperfect, sinning people. The body of Christ made up of Jewish and Gentile believers (Ephesians 2:14), is not a place for people with no weaknesses; it is a fellowship of those who are aware of their weaknesses and long for the strength and grace of God to fill their lives. It is a kind of hospital for the sick and the needy.

To the angel of the church in Philadelphia (3:7a). Like all churches, the one in Philadelphia was not perfect. Yet Jesus commended its members for their faithfulness and loyalty. They, and the congregation at Smyrna, were the only two of the seven that received no rebuke from Yeshua. In spite of their fleshly struggles, the believers in Philadelphia were faithful and obedient, serving and worshiping the Lord. They provide a good model of a loyal church.¹⁰²

1. **The description of Christ:** For the first time, His description does not refer back to the vision of the glorified Son of Man in 1:12-16. This suggests a distinctively new message to that particular church. First He emphasized His own unique attributes of holiness and truthfulness by saying: Here is the message of HaKadosh, the True One (3:7b CJB). HaKadosh means the Holy One, and is translated Sovereign Ruler, or God the Father in

6:10. Furthermore, in the Talmud, the Prayerbook and other Jewish writings, it is common to refer to God as *Hakadosh, barukh hu* or *the Holy One, blessed be He*. But here, and **First John 2:20**, this title refers to **Yeshua** so there is no need for the *blessed be He* because here *the Holy One* is talking about Himself. Consequently, **Messiah** is to be identified with God, but **He** is not the Father. **Jesus is the True One**, the one who is faithful.

Furthermore, **Christ** describes **Himself** as the One **who holds the key of David (3:7c)**. It is clear from **5:5** and **22:16** that **David** is a symbol of the messianic office. To hold **the key** is to have the authority because the one holding it had total supervision of the royal chamber. **He** was the one who would decide who could, and who could not see the king. There is a reference to **the key of David** that is particularly important. The Bible tells us that **the LORD** placed on the shoulders of Eliakim, the king's chief steward, **the key to the house of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open (Isaiah 22:22)**. Oriental keys, being unusually large and heavy, were usually carried on the shoulders. This idea is expressed in **Isaiah 9:6**, where it is said of **the Messiah: For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders.**¹⁰³

Therefore, Eliakim was presented to the people in Hezekiah's day as a visible foreshadowing of the coming **Messiah**, upon whose **shoulders** the LORD would place the kingdoms of the world. Like Eliakim, **Jesus** presents Himself as **He** who **opens no one can shut, and what He shuts, no one can open (3:7d)**. This emphasizes His omnipotence. There is no one more powerful than **He**. During the days of **Isaiah**, **ADONAI** asked Israel: **When I act, who can reverse it (Isaiah 43:13)?** Obviously, no one. **No one can shut the door** to the Kingdom of **God** if **He** opens it, and **no one can** force the **door** to the Kingdom open if **He** shuts it.

Jesus gave his disciples the commission to **go and make disciples of all nations** on the basis of what **He** had said in **Matthew 28:18: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. He** alone controls the **door** of opportunity for the preaching of the Gospel. No world leader can **shut** that **door** unless **Messiah** **shuts** it. This is not only true of **the Great Missionary Movement**, but it is also true of the individual. The late Dr. Henrietta Mears was a great leader of young people and she often used **Revelation 3:7c** in challenging those called of **the Lord** to obey **His** word without fear or reservation. This message is much needed by **the Lord's** servants today.¹⁰⁴

2. The church: The message to this **church** is in some respects the most interesting of all the messages to the seven (**3:7a**). It was a small **church**, possessing only a **little strength**, but it remained faithful to **the Lord**. Some believers from **Philadelphia** were martyred with Polycarp at Smyrna. Its enemies came from outside, not inside the body of **Christ** for there

is no mention of heresy or division. It had a good deal in common with that at Smyrna. Both received no blame, only praise. Both suffered from those who claimed **to be Jews** but were **not**, both were persecuted it would seem by the Romans, both were assured their opposition was satanic and both were promised a crown.¹⁰⁵ **The church** there lasted for centuries, unyielding even after the region was overrun by the Muslims, finally giving way in the mid-fourteenth century.

3. The city: Philadelphia was about twenty-eight miles southeast of Sardis (**3:7b**). From the Hermus River Valley, where Sardis and Smyrna were located, a smaller valley of the Cogamis River branches off to the southeast. A road through this valley provides the best means of ascending the 2,500 feet from the Hermus Valley to the vast central plateau.

It was the youngest of the seven cities of Asia Minor, founded sometime after 189 BC by either King Eumenes of Pergamum or his brother, Attalus II. In either case, Attalus was so loyal and devoted to his brother that he was given the nickname *Philadelphus*, which is similar to the Greek word **Philadelphia**, meaning *brotherly love*. (**Romans 12:10; First Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1; First Peter 1:22; Second Peter 1:7** twice; and here in **Revelation 3:7**). *Brotherly love* occurs seven times in the New Covenant, but only here is it used of the city itself.¹⁰⁶ **Philadelphia** was intended to serve as a "missionary city" to bring the Greek culture to the newly annexed area of Lydia and Phrygia. This succeeded so well that by AD 19 the Lydian language had been completely replaced by the Greek, which had become the official language of the Roman Empire.

It is known as **the city** of earthquakes and was destroyed several times. The devastating earthquake of AD 17 leveled twelve cities in Asia Minor over night. Although the initial damage was greater in Sardis, **Philadelphia**, being closer to the fault line, experienced after-shocks for years. Many of the people remained outside **the city**, living in huts. They lived in constant fear of another disaster and the habit of going out to the open country had probably not disappeared by the time the seven letters was written in AD 95 or 96.¹⁰⁷ **The city** was also located near the edge of a volcanic region whose fertile soil was ideal for vineyards. Because of this, the people there worshiped Dionysus, the god of wine. **Philadelphia** was prosperous partly from the grape industry that flourished in the area, but also because of its location. It was on the normal trade route, and had a strategic location that sat on the border of three ancient Roman provinces, Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia. If you wanted to go somewhere in Asia Minor, you had to go through **Philadelphia**. It became known as the "gateway to the East."¹⁰⁸

4. The concern: Because of their faithfulness, this **church**, along with the one in Smyrna, received no rebuke in its letter from **the Lord**. The fact that **Yeshua**, the holy, true sovereign, omnipotent **Lord of the Church**, found nothing to condemn them for must have been extremely encouraging to them.

5. The commendation: Finding nothing in their **deeds** that **He** disapproved of, **Jesus** commended them on their faithfulness, saying: **See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut (3:8a)**. **Jesus** holds **the key** to that **door** of salvation. In fact, His name means *salvation*. **He** had placed before them **an open door** to the kingdom of **God** and **no one** could **shut** it.

I know that you have little worldly **strength**, but much spiritual power, since **you have kept My word and have not denied My name (3:8b)**. Evidently there had been persecution of some sort during the first century, but the believers there had stood firm. For such a **little** band of believers, they were very courageous. Along with Paul they could say: **For Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, and in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (Second Corinthians 12: 10)**. So despite their small size, there was an abundance of spiritual fruit.¹⁰⁹

Jesus then warned them about **those Gentiles who** claimed **to be** the people of **God** but were **not**. He said: They **are of the synagogue of Satan, the Adversary**. Apparently the false apostles and other false teachers who plagued the other churches had been unable to get any hearing in either **Philadelphia** or Smyrna.¹¹⁰ Apparently they organized themselves into a pseudo-messianic **synagogue**. As it usually does, their false doctrine probably led to sinful and immoral behavior. **Yeshua** declared to **the church in Philadelphia**, "**They claim to be Jews though they are not.**" As in 2:9, nowhere in the New Covenant are unbelieving **Jews** called non-**Jews**, therefore, they were **liars** pretending to be Jews. From the Messiah's point of view, because they were **turning to a different gospel, which was really no gospel at all (Galatians 1:6b-7a)**, they were actually not from a true messianic **synagogue of God**, but from a counterfeit Gentile **synagogue of Satan (3:9a)**.

But in the larger context of history, we must remember that it is still the period described by **Hosea** when Isra'el is on the sideline of **God's** prophetic program and considered to be **not His people (Hosea 1:8-9)**. But in the future they will again become **His people (Hosea 1:10-2:1, 2:23, 3:5)**. Here **John** looks forward to the messianic Kingdom, when **Yeshua will make** unbelievers **come and fall down at their feet and acknowledge that He** has **loved** them **(3:9b)**. It is interesting to note that during this time that Jewish missions came into its own. It first began in Germany, took root in England, and finally came

to fruition in the United States. It continues to be a time when many of the branches are being regrafted into their own Olive Tree. So there will come a day when the **kings and queens** of the earth will bow down before messianic **Jews** in the millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 49:23; 60:14).

Jesus promised that **since** they had **kept His command to endure patiently**, He would **also keep** them **from**, or out of, **the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those** unbelievers **who live on the earth** (6:10, 8:13, 11:10, 13:8, 13:12-14, 17:2 and 8). Because the believers **at Philadelphia** had passed so many trials, **Yeshua** promised to spare them from the ultimate **trial** (3:10). The sweeping nature of the promise extends far beyond the local **Philadelphia** congregation in the first century to encompass all the faithful **Church** throughout New Covenant history. **The hour of trial** is **Daniel's 70th Week** (Daniel 9:25-27), **the time of trouble for Jacob** (Jeremiah 30:7), or the seven-year period known as the Great Tribulation.¹¹¹ **Jesus Christ** promises to keep **His Body** of believers from this **hour of trial** that will come upon unbelievers. However, if the lost repent during that time, they will be martyred and saved .

Christ promised **the church in Philadelphia** that it would remain strong and secure (3:11-12). He said: **I am coming quickly** (3:11a). The **coming** of the Lord to Ephesus (2:5), Pergamum (2:16), and Sardis (3:3) posed a threat to each **church**. At Ephesus the lampstand was to be removed unless they repented; at Pergamum **Yeshua** would war against them with the sword of **His** mouth; at Sardis **He** would come **like a thief** in the night (3:3). The **coming** to **Philadelphia**, however, would end their time of persecution and establish them as permanent citizens of the Kingdom of **God**.¹¹² And because we are in the **Philadelphia Church** Age now, it will happen only after several specific things occur (see Bq - **The Sequence of Pretribulation Events**). Nevertheless, every believer's response should be: **Amen, come Lord Jesus** (22:20).

6. The command: Because of **Messiah's** impending return for **His Body**, believers are commanded to **hold on to what** they had. The believers at **the church in Philadelphia** had been faithful to **the Lord** in the midst of persecution. They were to continue in their faithfulness. Those who **hold on** to their faith demonstrate the genuineness of their salvation (**Matthew 10:22; 24:13**). In writing to the Colossian **church** about **Yeshua**, the Apostle Paul said: **He has now reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation - if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel** (**Colossians 1:22-23**). The Bible teaches that those who abandon their faith were never really believers to begin with: **They went out from us, but they did not really**

belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us (First John 2:19). Our salvation is secure in Christ, but these believers in Philadelphia were commanded to hold on.

Christ's promise to the one who faithfully persevered was that no one would take your crown (3:11b). The crown of life was also promised to the believers in Smyrna. God has promised this crown to all those who remain faithful to Him when under persecution. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him (James 1:12). The crown was the wreath awarded to the winner of an athletic contest (First Corinthians 9:25; Second Timothy 4:8). The metaphor would have been especially appropriate to this church because the city of Philadelphia was well known for its games and festivals.¹¹³

7. The counsel: In light of the historical background of Philadelphia's disastrous earthquake, it's significant that Yeshua promised that they would be made pillars in the Temple of God, never to go out from it again. The one who overcomes I will make a pillar in the Temple of My God (3:12a). An overcomer is one who overcomes the world (First John 2:15-16) by faith in the Messiah (John 16:33). A pillar represents stability, permanence, and immobility. Pillars can also represent honor. In pagan temples pillars were often carved to represent a specific deity. The marvelous promise Christ makes to believers is that they will have an eternal place of honor in the Temple of God.¹¹⁴ To people that were accustomed to fleeing their city because of earthquakes, the promise that they would never again have to leave their homes in the New Jerusalem (21:1-27), was understood by them as eternal security in the kingdom of God.

Then, to assure them that their citizenship was in heaven was guaranteed, Jesus Christ said: I will write on them the name of My God and the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from My God. (3:12b). People identify with the name given to them, and He said: And I will also write on them My new name. In the TaNaKh, God put His name (YHVH) on the people of Isra'el by having the Levites recite Aaron's blessing (Numbers 6:24-27). The faithful bear the name of God (22:4), and the name of the Messiah (14:1), including their own new name (2:17, 3:12b, 19:12). Therefore, as proof of ownership, believers will have three names written on them: the name of God, the New Jerusalem, and the new name of Yeshua the Messiah. Interestingly enough, the followers of the antichrist will have his name written on them also (see Dp - The Mark is the Name of the Beast or the Number of His Name).

The counsel: **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches**, closes all seven letters **(3:13)**. Believers must pay attention to the truths found in each letter because these **churches** describe seven different kinds of believers in every body of believers. This letter **to the church in Philadelphia** reveals how **the Lord** pours out His blessings on those who remain faithful to **Him**. That should motivate each one of us to follow their example.

*Thank you, **Lord**, that you have opened the **door** of heaven to me. May many pass through that **door** to enjoy eternal life with You.¹¹⁵*

The name **Philadelphia** literally means *brotherly love*. Our **Lord** selected that **church** to describe the kind of revival that **started around 1730 and will continue until the Rapture**. Just as Sardis came out of Thyatira, so the **Philadelphia** revival came out of Sardis. The congregations of the Reformation became dead as a state church. **Philadelphia**, however, was marked by vitality of life. In that age, **ADONAI** produced revivals in Europe and the British Isles, even spreading to America. Those revivals in turn, produced what is known today as **the Great Missionary Movement**.

It was this movement of **God the Holy Spirit** that caused an English shoe cobbler to become so burdened for the lost of India that in 1793 he became the first foreign missionary. Other young people whom the Spirit of **God** also touched followed William Carey, and the movement began. Our **Lord placed before** that generation **an open door**. And that **open door** found such men as Adoniram Judson, David Livingston, Jonathan Goforth, Hudson Taylor and literally thousands of other people going to Africa, China, Japan, Korea, India South America and the islands of the sea.

There were two factors that led to **the Great Missionary Movement**. The first was the printing of the Bible in the language of the people and the natural tendency of the common person to take the Word of **God** literally. Therefore, when a young man like William Carey read **Christ's** command to **go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19)**, he was inclined to obey it. The second was the increased interest of the study of the doctrine of the Second Coming. Around 1800 the doctrine of the premillennial return of **the Messiah**, which had been all but dead since the end of the third century, was revived. This teaching led to a holy and separated **Church**. In preparation for **His** return, **His** body of believers was willing to do whatever **He** commanded.¹¹⁶

This is the last mention of the true, universal Church until we get to the wedding supper of the Lamb in 19:7. The Church is absent during the Great Tribulation because, as the custom of the Jewish wedding ceremony, the groom, or Christ, takes His Bride, the Church, to His home in heaven.

When the Rapture comes, **the Church**, embodied by all the true believers in the **Messiah**, will be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (First Thessalonians 4:17). As a result, only a shadow of the true universal **Church** will be left behind. In reality, it will merely have the appearance of being religious. Therefore, as we continue southward, as if completing a circle, we come to the last leg of our journey. Just down the dark, dusty road we come to the apostate Gnostics of Laodicea.