

The Letter to the Church at Philadelphia – Revelation Ch. 3 vs. 7 – 13

Bible Study Notes on the Letter to the Church at Philadelphia

Philadelphia – History

The youngest of the seven cities – built in the area acquired by Pergamos in 189BC

- King Eumenes II, king of Pergamos, had a younger brother, Attalus II, who was his successor and won the nickname Philadelphus for his loyalty and affection for Eumenes
- Eumenes and Attalus were well known for their loyalty and close friendship – becoming known as the brothers and being depicted together on coins of the time

Name Changes:

- *Katakekaumene* ('The Burned Land'): a highly volcanic region, suffered repeatedly from earthquakes
- Philadelphia was almost completely destroyed in the disaster of AD17 which devastated Sardis and ten other cities (Tacitus: *Annals* 2:47) :
 - Tremors were reported for years afterwards (that made the people insecure - c.f.: the pillars of the church)
 - Civic and economic disruption lasted for more than 20 years
- Generous financial relief from Tiberius caused the citizens to rename the city in his honour as *Neo-Caesarea* meaning 'New City of Caesar'
 - Later, in the time of Vespasian, it was changed to *Flavia*, his family name
- The name changes were short-lived and the old name Philadelphia soon revived
- Today the town is called *Alaşehir* (*Allah-Shehu*) meaning 'City of God'
- In the letter we are going to see Jesus talk about renaming a city – the city which God will put His name on

Philadelphia - Geography

The area was well favoured for wine production (it still is today):

- Dionysius, the god of wine, was the principal deity

Philadelphia was well situated on the imperial post road from Rome and Troas to Pergamos, Sardis and to the interior of Phrygia:

- It was a virtual gateway to the high central plateau of Asia Minor
- As such, the Romans purposely set the city up to promote Greek culture
- Its locality made it a centre for Roman 'evangelism' of the Greek culture...so it was also well located to be an evangelism centre for Christianity

Because of its location on a major artery the city was prosperous





See Supplementary Note 22 'Philadelphia Maps'

The Letter to Philadelphia – Revelation 3: 7-13

The letter to Philadelphia, along with the letter to Laodicea, is probably the most provocative and impacting one for the church today

V 7 The Address and Sender

The Name of the Church

Most people say the name means ‘brotherly love’, which is an acceptable rendition

- Greek: *phile* means one that loves, likes, or is attracted to (e.g. anglophile). The root word (Greek: *philos*) means love and *philia* is usually translated as ‘brotherly love’ or ‘friendship’
- ‘*delphia*’ is the city
- The name can thus mean the friendly city; or in the case of the church the friendly fellowship

To Whom is the Letter Addressed?

‘To the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia’ - clearly the ultimate recipient is the Philadelphia church itself. However it will be read by all the seven churches – and by churches down the ages.

Who is the Letter From?

It is from: ‘He that is holy’
 ‘He that is true’
 ‘He that has the key of David’
 ‘He that opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens’

It is from Jesus Christ, from Yeshua.

Titles of Christ

The titles that Yeshua chooses describes His character and His authority

On this occasion these titles of Yeshua are not specifically mentioned in chapter 1 but they are alluded to in what is said about Him

What should we Understand from His Title ‘He that is Holy’?

Holy – God’s holiness is an attribute that should inspire in us a certain amount of terror or fear or reverence. *Revelation 6: 10; Leviticus 19: 2, 21: 8; Isaiah 57: 15*

God’s holiness is linked to the essential need for justice and judgement

- Song of the Seraphim *Isaiah 6: 3*
- Jesus is declared holy:
 - At His birth *Luke 1: 35*
 - At His death *Acts 2: 27*
 - In His present priestly office *Hebrews 7: 25-26*

What should we Understand from His Title ‘He that is True’?

True – Greek: *alethinous* means real or genuine - in Greek *alethes*, the other NT word used for truth means truth in contrast to falsehood. See *John 17: 3; 1 John 5: 20*

- Prophecy of Zacharias *Luke 1: 70 & 75*
- Jesus Christ's kingship rests upon the bedrock of His character: *Psalms 2 & 24*, etc
 - This is the opposite of Allah in the Koran, who is capricious
 - The God of the Bible delights in making and keeping promises

What should we Understand from His Title 'He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens'?

The key of David – to understand this, need to refer back *Isaiah 22: 15-25*

- Eliakim is replacing Shebna as Hezekiah's treasurer...and is given the key of David
- Full administrative authority: Eliakim carried a heavy key on a loop slung over his shoulder, indicating his power to grant or deny others an audience with the king. He alone provided access to the presence of the king
- The words of v22 are those Jesus chooses in the letter to Philadelphia - the story in Isaiah is a messianic allusion
- The key of David is a messianic term indicating authority -
see Isaiah 9: 6-7; Luke 1: 32-33; Matthew 28: 18; and Revelation 1: 18
- There is another messianic allusion in Isaiah vs. 23 and 25...Yeshua the nail
 - v23 All the glory of His father's house is hung upon Him (the nail)
 - v25 The nail that is fastened will be removed, and be cut down, and fall the burden upon it will be cut off...a prophesy of the death of the Messiah

Yeshua is pictured in *Revelation 1: 18* as holding the keys to death and hell – here He holds the keys to salvation and blessing.

The 'Keys to the Kingdom' is often misunderstood – at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asks the disciples "Who do men say that I am?" and then "Who do you say that I am?" – The passage is interpreted by some to say that Peter was given the 'keys' and Peter was the rock (see *Matthew 16: 15-19*)

- Regarding the 'keys': in response to Peter's answer Jesus says:
 - To Peter "I give to you..." *Matthew 16: 19*
 - To all apostles *Matthew 18: 18*
 - The door opened to Gentiles *Acts 10*
- In Matthew 16 Jesus makes a play on words...the word Petros, Peter's name, means a stone and *Petra* means a rock, a large stone
- Who is the 'rock' and to whom the 'keys of the kingdom' are given is clarified by Peter in his first epistle: 1 Peter 2: 4-10
- In 1 Peter 2, 'a royal priesthood' is an oxymoron...in Jewish heritage there is a separation of royalty (Judah) and priesthood (Levi)
 - There are only 3 king priests in the Bible...Melchizedek, Jesus...and the Church
- Peter's whole presentation of the rock is not himself...but rather Christ

Philadelphia, of all the seven churches, is the most loyal and faithful in ambassadorship, hence the titles which Jesus chooses are those which reflect His character.

He says ‘I know your works’ – as He did to Ephesus (2 v.2) and to Smyrna (2 v.9) and to Pergamos (2 v.13) and to Thyatira (2 v.19) and to Sardis (3 v.1).

Yeshua knows what is (really) going on in the church – he is fully aware.

Before He commends them, Yeshua encourages them to see what He has done

What does Yeshua encourage the church to see?

Yeshua Jesus has set before them an open door – and no man can shut it; this is a reward for such faithful ambassadorship, in spite of their weakness.

This can be understood in two ways – both of which would be true for a faithful church

- The open door of admission into the kingdom (the key of David in v7)
- The open door of opportunity for service and witness

Open Doors – how often we try to get through doors that are shut!

Many open doors in scripture (see *1 Corinthians 16: 9; 2 Corinthians 2: 12; Colossians 4: 3*)

There are Doors of Deliverance in Scripture:

- Noah’s Ark – Door closed by God (7 days before the flood) *Genesis 7: 16*
- Jesus said “I Am the Door” *John 10: 7 and 9*
- The Door at the Wedding *Matthew 25: 1-10*

Yeshua comments on the ‘strength of the church – ‘you have a little strength’

What should we Understand from Yeshua’s comment about their having ‘a little strength’?

It implies it was a small church – numbers are not important for spiritual effectiveness

It implies they were not well resourced, either in leadership or structure, or financially – neither a large team nor wealth are important for spiritual effectiveness

Little Strength – reliant on Yeshua, not trusting in their own resource

For What does Yeshua Commend the church?

Three Things:

You have Kept My Word

- In a day of denial...a challenge to us today
- Declaring Truth – the gospel and social issues – is as unwelcome today as it was then

Have Not Denied My Name

- Loyal Ambassadors...a challenge to us today when the deity of Christ is blatantly denied by seminary and pulpit

- All the cults have one thing in common...they all in some way deny the deity of Yeshua...in some cases also denying His humanity
- True ambassadorship honours the Lord's Name (*Exodus 20: 7*)

Have Kept My Command to Persevere

- Kept the word of my patience (KJV) – cheerful endurance
- Adherence to biblical doctrine exposed the church to so much trouble and persecution (the synagogue of Satan) – it required much patience and magnanimity to bear up under its attendant trials
- The Gospel itself is a proclamation of God's patience – their endurance testified to the patience of their Lord
- Waiting for the Lord's Return – the 'word of His patience': Yeshua is patiently waiting for the time of His return
 - We are to be faithful in watching and praying and waiting expectantly for His return

Because of their faithfulness to the Lord and their witness to Him, Yeshua makes two promises to this faithful church

What Two Things does Yeshua Promise to this church? (vs. 9 & 10)

Their Attackers will Worship before their feet

- Yeshua I will make them come and worship before their feet
 - This does not mean their detractors will worship them
 - The church will see their detractors bow the knee before their Lord – see *Philippians 2: 10-11, Romans 14: 11* (quoting *Isaiah 45: 23*)
- Yeshua will cause them to know that He has loved them (the church)
 - A unique commendation if these 7 letters – said to the faithful church

The synagogue of Satan – who say they are Jews and are not, but lie – an unusual phrase, mentioned also in the letter to Smyrna

- Some scholars view this as an allusion to Legalism – leaven of Galatians:
 - Demand for Gentile circumcision (*Acts 15: 1, 10*)
 - Peter rebuked by Paul (*Galatians 2: 11-13; 3: 1-3*)
 - Peter's agreement with Paul (*2 Peter 3: 15-16*)
- However Jesus is referring to those who are false Jews – Chuck Missler's view is this is referring to 'reconstructionists':
 - Most denominational churches teach a Replacement Theology view of the scripture – namely that, because the Jewish people rejected their Messiah, Yeshua, the promises that she was heir to now fall upon the Church
 - This 'replacement theology' is commonly taught in seminaries and the denominational churches – and it tends to accompany an amillennialist view (that Jesus is not really coming back to rule the earth)
 - It also is a view which sees no place for Israel in God's plan of redemption – a view which laid the foundations for the holocaust...a view which is in reality anti-Semitic
 - Christians who have such a view are saved (they are worshipping in v9 – compelled by Christ to do so), but they are doing so at the feet of those who have a biblical view of Israel – that they may know that Jesus loves them who love Israel
 - God declares his love for Israel many times; e.g. see *Isaiah 43: 1-5* etc

Yeshua will keep them from the 'hour of trial that will come upon the whole earth'

- The Reward of Perseverance (v.10) – the church has 'kept the word of My patience' so He will 'keep you from the hour of trial'
 - The word translated 'from' is (Greek: *ek*) meaning 'out of' – the faithful church will not endure the hour of trial
- This is a reference to the time of Tribulation
- Spoken of by Yeshua in *Matthew 24: 15-22* and detailed in the book of Revelation chapters 6 to 18
- The hour (Greek: *tes horas*): the hour, time, season
- Of temptation [KJV] (Greek: *ton peirasmon*): the trial, temptation, testing, adversity tribulation, etc
- Which shall come upon the whole world – clearly speaking not simply of a persecution affecting only the Jews or Christians...it is the time of 'the Tribulation'
- To try (test or prove) them that dwell on the earth – the purpose of this time of trial
- Earth dwellers – a distinctive group of people in scripture...people identified with the earth...worldlings
 - The word for 'dwell' is not (Greek: *oikeo*) = inhabit, but (Greek: *katoideo*) = identified with
- The Greek (*epi teo oikoumenes holes*) makes it very clear: upon all mankind, it is geographically comprehensive

A Day of Vengeance – clearly prophesied by Yeshua in v10 - see also Isaiah 61: 2

- Compare *Isaiah 61: 1-3* with *Luke 4: 18-20* where, in reading *Isaiah 61*, Yeshua reads *verse 1* and then stops at a comma after the first part of verse.
- Yeshua's first earthly ministry was one of salvation, but in His coming again he will come as King and Judge.
- See also *2 Thessalonians 1: 3-10*, especially vs.7-8

For many centuries in church history the truth of the Lord's return had been lost from sight.

The promise is for Removal not for Immunity from the hour of trial

Further evidence of a Pre-Tribulation rapture (Greek: *harpazo*) is the presence in heaven of the Twenty Four elders on seats, these are thrones (Greek: *thronos*) – see Revelation chapters 4 and 5

- The 24 Elders are a representation of the church (the key to this is the 24 divisions of the priestly service created by David)
- The song of the Twenty Four Elders in *Revelation 5: 9-10* clearly identifies them as raptured saints
- During the tribulation the Gentile believers are not 'protected', though there is a 'sealing' (protection) for 144,000 Jewish evangelists. The anti-Christ overcomes the Gentile saints during the tribulation.
- Thus this promise cannot be understood as a promise of immunity through the tribulation...rather it is a promise of pre-tribulation rapture

V 11 Exhortations from Yeshua

What is Missing?

There are NO Concerns expressed

Yeshua has no criticisms to level at this faithful church

It is the one letter where He speaks of His love for them (v.9)

What is the One Exhortation Yeshua gives to the Church at Philadelphia?

Hold fast to what you have – Christ’s primary exhortation

- ‘So that no one may take their crown - ‘Let no man rob you’
- Paul counsels the Colossian church in similar words (*Colossians 2: 18-19*)
- Many in scripture have lost what they had through ‘not holding fast’
 - Esau lost his place to Jacob *Genesis 25: 34; 27: 36*
 - Reuben lost his place to Judah *Genesis 49: 4 and 8*
 - Moses was superseded by Joshua (for his action at Meribah)
Numbers 20: 12; Deuteronomy 3: 26 and 28
 - Saul lost his place to David *1 Samuel 16: 1 and 13*
 - Shebna lost his place to Eliakim *Isaiah 22: 15-25*
 - Joab and Abiathar lost their places to Benaiah and Zadok *1 Kings 2: 25*
 - Even Elijah was superseded by Elisha *1 Kings 19: 1-18*

In the letters to both Smyrna and Philadelphia, where there are no criticisms, there is a reference to a crown...indicative of reward

- The clear implication here is that they already have the crown...‘hold fast’ ...‘let no man take’

See Supplementary Note 23 ‘Crowns’

Reference to the Second Coming

‘Behold I come quickly’ (v.11) – a specific reference to His 2nd coming

In the last four letters – Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea – the Promise to the Overcomer is in the body of the letter – the ‘common phrase’ finishes the letter

Also, there is specific reference to Christ’s second coming in these letters

The implication is that these four churches are in some way ‘present’ in the days when Christ comes again – at the end of ‘the Church Age’

Thyatira is warned it will go into the tribulation if they do not repent

Philadelphia is promised to be kept out of the tribulation

V 12 The Promise to the Overcomer

What is Promised to the Church at Philadelphia?

Two Things:

‘A Pillar in the temple of my God’

- This is Yeshua speaking – assuring the Philadelphia church of their presence in the kingdom of God...now and eternally
 - Believers will enjoy an unshakable, eternal, secure place in the presence of God
 - This is what John sees of the tribulation saints (*Revelation 7: 14-17*)
- Pillars were important to people who lived in a region of earthquakes – it speaks of solidity and permanence
- ‘He shall go out no more’ – permanence in God’s kingdom

It is interesting that what remains of the church of St John in Philadelphia are most notably its pillars



A New Name

- ‘I will write upon him the name of my God’
 - The name has to do with ‘My God’ (mentioned 4 times here) – the only other ‘My God’ spoken by Yeshua is from the cross (*Matthew 27: 46*)
- ‘and the name of the city of My God, which is the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God,’
 - The name of the eternal city of heaven (see *Revelation 21*)
 - The overcomer will enjoy eternal citizenship – and be identified with the city where he/she belongs – Our citizenship is in heaven (*Philippians 3: 20*)
- ‘and I will write upon him My new name’ – possibly the name in *Revelation 19: 12* and/or *Revelation 22: 4*)
 - Contrast with Sardis which had a name but was dead
 - A New Name is mentioned several times in Revelation
 - ❖ The Father’s name on the foreheads of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (*Revelation 14: 1*)
 - ❖ A Name written on, or of, the returning Yeshua which none knew except Himself (*Revelation 19: 12*)
 - ❖ Yeshua’s Name by which He is called – The Word of God – recalling the opening words of John’s gospel (*Revelation 19: 13*)
 - ❖ The Name written on His thigh – ‘KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS’ (*Revelation 19: 16*)
 - ❖ The Name on the foreheads of those in the New Jerusalem –the Name of the Lamb (*Revelation 22: 4*)
- In biblical times, one's name spoke of his character - Yeshua writing His name on us speaks of imprinting His character on us and identifying us as belonging to Him

V 13 **The Common Phrase**

For the third time this phrase is the closing phrase - not in the body of the letter

In each of the last four letters of the seven, this phrase finishes the letter and the promise to the overcomer is in the body of the letter

Why this difference between the first three letters and the last four?

The implication is that these last four churches are in some way 'present' in the days when Christ comes again – at the end of 'the Church Age'

There will be a Corrupt Church (Thyatira)

There will be a Dead Church, a church in name only (Sardis)

There will be a Faithful Church (Philadelphia)

Note: this church suffered persecutions – elements of Smyrna

There will be a Lukewarm Church (Laodicea)

The Common Phrase "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" should make us aware of the different aspects of Application of these Letters:

Local – to the church to whom it is addressed

Admonitory – to all churches... 'what the Spirit says to the churches' – plural!

Personal – to each individual who has an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying

Prophetic – these letters are in a specific order (there is nothing in scripture 'by chance') which indicates prophetically the history of the church

We live today in the age of the Laodicean church – though the Corrupt,

Dead and Faithful churches are still present today

Applications of this Letter

Local Application

Hold fast to what you have (have kept His word and not denied His name)

Continue in faithful ambassadorship

Let no man rob you of your crown (your reward)

See the open door

Holding Fast

- During the 14th century, the city of Philadelphia stood alone against the entire Turkish empire as a free, self-governing Christian city in the midst of a Turkish land
- Twice besieged by great Turkish armies, its people reduced to the verge of starvation, they had learned to defend themselves, and resisted to the end
- 1379-1390 Philadelphia finally succumbed to a combined Turkish and Byzantine army – until then it had held fast

Admonitory Application (to all churches)

Faithful ambassadorship

- Out of which flows witness and missionary outreach

- Paul in Ephesus saw a great door opened to him...but there were many adversaries – see 1 Corinthians 16: 8-9

An Open Door

- This does not mean there will not be opposition
- Need to discern the difference between a closed door and an open door with opposition
- Doors are opening all over the world for the gospel – a sign of the end times

Personal Application

Loyal Ambassadorship – being faithful

- Keeping His Word
- Not Denying His Name

Holding Fast – to what you have

- Don't let anyone rob you of your crown

Always Expectant – He comes quickly

- Eyes focussed on the Lord and His purposes not on all that is going on in the world

Prophetic Application

The Faithful Church – the church which remains true to her Lord to the end

- Keeping His Word
- Not Denying His Name
- True Discipleship – Philadelphia, the name means the friendly city or friendly fellowship – the root word (Greek: *philos*) means love – it is love for one another that is the mark of true discipleship (*John 13: 31-35*)

The Missionary Church – Philadelphia is often mistakenly labelled as the Missionary church because of the Open Door set before it (its real mark is as the Faithful church)

- The C20 & C21 have opened up great opportunities for the gospel in many new ways
- Yeshua promises that He will build His church (*Matthew 18: 18*)
- The faithful church will always be a witnessing missionary church...and will find the Lord opening doors for witness and mission

Yeshua's promise is to keep the faithful missionary church from the coming 'hour of trial' – it will be removed from the earth before the tribulation

Matthew 13

The Philadelphia Church is reflected in the parable of 'The Pearl of Great Price'.

The Faithful Church is a pearl of great price which the Father gave all He had (his only begotten Son) to purchase.

This Father is the Merchant seeking Beautiful Pearls – scripture speaks about redeemed Israel as being ‘jewels of a crown’ (Zechariah 9: 16) and so too are all believers to the Lord

- this parable sounds similar to that of the hidden treasure...but: oysters are not kosher – Jews do not prize pearls (though they may trade in them)
- the idiom is a gentile idiom
 - the pearl is a response to an irritation
 - it grows by accretion
 - it is removed from its place of growth to become an item of adornment
- the pearl is an idiom of the church

The Faithful Missionary Church is promised to be raptured.

Paul’s Epistles

Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians, both probably written from Corinth around AD51, are letters to a church which specifically addresses questions on Christ’s second coming and the rapture.

In them Paul gives many commendations and urges them to stand fast – a message similar to that in the letter to Philadelphia.

Yeshua’s 2nd Coming

There is an explicit reference to the Lord’s second coming in this letter (*v. 11*)

The implication is that this church, together with the Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea churches are in some way ‘present’ in the days when Christ comes again.

Certainly there is a faithful church present today – holding fast to sound doctrine and faithfully testifying of the Lord – His name, His character and His precepts.

The faithful church is also a missionary church – there has been a vast expansion of the Christian faith – particularly in Africa, the Middle East and the Far East (but decline in the West).