



**REV. 3:7-13 THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA – OPEN DOORS & PROTECTION**

We now come to a church especially important to all of us, for we identify ourselves as being part of *the Philadelphia Era*, which means we are living many of the prophecies mentioned here. We will go over the reasons for this belief in this study and you can judge for yourself how accurate they are.

Jesus Christ addresses this church and says, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, 'He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens'" (Rev. 3:7).

About 28 miles southeast of Sardis lay the city of Philadelphia. An imperial road passed through it from Rome and then eastward, so it was known as "the gateway to the East." It was a rich commercial and agricultural center, but also earthquake prone.

So Christ first emphasizes His unwavering faithfulness—the One "who is true." As *Expositor's* brings out, "He is the 'True One' in that he is wholly trustworthy and reliable in his words and actions." He also expects, as our Elder Brother, for His true followers to be equally faithful and loyal to Him. There is a definite play on words here between "Philadelphia" and "brotherly love" which the Philadelphian brethren would readily identify.

In fact, the term "Philadelphia" in Gk. actually means "brotherly love" and the city was named after the loyal devotion Attalus II showed his older brother, King Eumenes II (197-159 B.C.), who founded Philadelphia in 189 B.C. During his elder brother's lifetime, Attalus II was his most faithful assistant. He successfully led his brother's forces in several wars and later became his trusted ambassador to their great ally, Rome. There he won respect and admiration of the Romans, especially when Attalus rejected a power play by Rome in 167 B.C. to have his brother removed, whom they now distrusted, and instead place him on the throne.

Then, in 172 B.C., King Eumenes suffered an assassination attempt while returning from Rome. Attalus, thinking his brother had died, married his brother's widow Stratonice and became king of the Pergamese Empire. Yet, when his brother suddenly appeared, he promptly divorced Stratonice and ceded the power to his elder brother without a fight. So Attalus II was named "Philadelphus" or "brother-lover" in honor of his many loyal acts toward his older

brother. After his brother's death, Attalus II ruled the Pergamese Empire from 159 to 138 B.C.

*The New Bible Dictionary* states: "As Philadelphus was renowned for his loyalty to his brother, so *the church, the true Philadelphia, inherits and fulfills his character by its steadfast loyalty to Christ*" (1982, p. 926). Thus, the Church in Philadelphia was reminded to have "brotherly love" toward Christ, and also, to each other, for that is what true brotherly fidelity is all about--yet it is quite rare.

Next, Christ tells this Church He would open doors to get the gospel out in such a powerful way that no one could shut them. He stresses He has the "key of David" and would open and close doors as needed.

What does this "key of David" mean? A key indicates control or authority, and in the OT, it refers to unfaithful Shebna being replaced by Eliakim, a loyal treasurer of King Hezekiah, of Davidic lineage.

The passage is in Isaiah 22:15-24 (NLT), "This is what the Lord, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, said to me: 'Confront Shebna, the palace administrator, and give him this message: 'Who do you think you are, and what are you doing here, building a beautiful tomb for yourself—a monument high up in the rock? For the Lord is about to hurl you away, mighty man. He is going to grab you, crumple you into a ball, and toss you away into a distant, barren land. There you will die, and your glorious chariots will be broken and useless. You are a disgrace to your master! 'Yes, I will drive you out of office,' says the LORD. 'I will pull you down from your high position. And then I will call My servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah to replace you. I will dress him in your royal robes and will give him your title and your authority. And he will be a father to the people of Jerusalem and Judah. I will give him *the key to the house of David*—the highest position in the royal court. *When he opens doors, no one will be able to close them; when he closes doors, no one will be able to open them.* He will bring honor to his family name, for I will drive him firmly in place like a nail in the wall. They will give him great responsibility, and he will bring honor to even the lowliest members of his family."

First, Jesus Christ is God's loyal administrator of the "key of David" described in Revelation--and not any man. But in a prophetic sense, there will be a time in this Church era when Christ would dramatically open

powerful doors to get the gospel of the kingdom out to the world as not done before.

An “open door” means an opportunity to spread the gospel. Paul used it several times, as when he said “Furthermore, when I came to Troas *to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord*” (2 Cor. 2:12, see also Acts 14:27, 1 Cor. 16:9).

This is such an important revelation Jesus stressed it again in the next verse, “I know your works. Behold, I have given a door being opened before you, and no one is able to shut it, for you have a little power and have *kept My Word*, and have not denied My name” (Rev. 3:8, LITV). It is *an obedient Church*.

Most Bible commentators admit some of what is mentioned here about the Philadelphia Church refers to the end times and not just to a local church setting around the turn of the first century. As Leon Morris notes, “The church [at Philadelphia] was evidently small (verse 8), but of good quality” (*Tyndale NT Commentary--Revelation*, 1973, p. 78). G. E. Ladd states about Rev. 3:10, “Here is a distinct eschatological [end time] reference to the ‘messianic woes’ which are *to precede the return of the Lord*” (*A Commentary on the Revelation*, 1972, p. 62).

So the great doors Christ would open before and during the end times refer to getting the gospel of the kingdom out in a massive way to the world as an invitation to turn from their sinful ways and as a warning message if they don't heed. Hence, there would come a time when the gospel of the kingdom of God would have to be preached *in all the world*, and “then the end will come” (Mt. 24:14).

Those open doors likely refer to the electronic revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, when mass media such as radio, rapid and cheap printing, television and now the Internet, have made it possible to go to every nation with the gospel of the kingdom without physically being there. Mr. Herbert Armstrong constantly mentioned of the “great doors” that God had opened during his lifetime and of a powerful work being done. Now, we continue to go through those great doors and some new ones, as Christ continually opens them as the means to go to the whole world with His vital truths before He intervenes powerfully in world affairs.

Indeed, Christ recognizes we are a church which has “a little strength” to get the gospel out on our own, and so is constantly providing the open doors for us to go

through. We also appear to have “a little strength” in a spiritual sense, since we are in a corrupt world with many distractions and temptations that adversely affect our spiritual lives. Dedication and loyal devotion are mostly in the past. As Jesus predicted about the end time conditions, “Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end [in the faith] will be saved. And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come” (Mt. 24:12-14, NLT).

Next, Christ tells the Church, “Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you” (Rev. 3:9).

Here He prophesies the church at Philadelphia will have to face the great false church, just as the other Church eras did also. It is described in different ways as consisting of “those who say they are apostles and are not” (Rev. 2:2); or, “the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (Rev. 2:6, 15); or “those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9); or “those who hold the doctrine of Balaam” (Rev. 2:14); or “that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess” (Rev. 2:20).

Here, the phrases “synagogue of Satan” and “those that say they are Jews and are not” are used for a second time. They refer to the great fallen woman of Rev. 17, which pretends to be the true church but has deceived the whole world. One day, when Christ returns, this fallen church will have to admit we (in the Church of God community throughout the ages) are the ones who actually “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17). We have been loyal to God's Word and Law.

It is this Church that observes *all* the commandments of God, including the Sabbath and God's Feasts. When they see the glorified saints reigning under Jesus Christ over the whole world, and keeping “the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zec. 14:16), they will have to humbly “come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.” Yes, this “small flock” (Luke 12:32) or the “persecuted woman” (Rev. 12:13) with so little resources and insignificant to the world, will then be recognized as having been God's true Church throughout the ages.

Christ goes on to say, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10).

Commentators generally agree this is a reference to an end-time event where the faithful are protected for 3 ½ years from the Great Tribulation and the wrath of God as described in Rev. 12:12-17.

As Robert Mounce notes, "The hour of trial is that period of testing and tribulation which *precedes* the establishment of the eternal kingdom. It is mentioned in such passages as Dan. 12:2, Mark 13:19, and 2 Thes. 2:1-12. *It is the three and one half years of rule by Antichrist in Rev. 13:5-10.* In fact, *all the judgments from Rev. 6:1 on relate to this final hour of trial.* It is during this period that *Christ will reward the faithfulness of the Philadelphian church* [confirming here it is a Church era] by standing by to ward off all the demonic assaults of Satan. The text indicates that the hour of trial comes upon the 'whole world' to test 'those who live on the earth.' In the other places in Revelation where this latter phrase occurs (Rev. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 [twice]; 13:8, 14; 17:8) *the enemies of the church* are always in mind. The hour of trial is directed toward the entire non-Christian world, but the believer will be kept from it..." (*The Book of Revelation*, p. 102)

G. E. Ladd adds, "Before these terrifying judgments, the people of God are sealed upon their foreheads that they should not be hurt by these plagues. These fearful divine judgments are directed upon those who follow the beast; those who have the seal of God will be divinely sheltered" (p. 62).

Christ then says, "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Rev. 3:11). In other words, don't let down!

This is also an end-time reference. As Robert Mounce brings out, "The 'coming' [of Christ] to Philadelphia...is eschatological [relating to the end-times]. It will end their time of trial and establish them as permanent citizens of the eternal kingdom. Verse 11 presupposes the continuance of the church until the Second Advent. The promise is not that Christ's coming will take place quickly whenever it happens, but that it will take place without delay. *Since the end is not far off*, they are to hold on to what they have (faith in Christ and obedience to His Word so no one will take their crown). The crown was the wreath awarded to the winner of an athletic contest. The metaphor would be

especially appropriate in this letter in that Philadelphia was known for its games and festivals" (op. cit., p. 104).

Christ continues, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3:12-13).

So overcoming shows Christ's rewards are *conditional*. It is necessary to gain the victory in this spiritual warfare with oneself, the world, and Satan.

What does it mean to be made a pillar in God's temple? A pillar is a very sturdy and stable fixture of a building. This term is figuratively used for Church leaders such as James, Peter and John (Gal. 2:9).

As *Expositor's* brings out, "First, Christ will make the overcomer a 'pillar in the temple of my God.' As has already been noted, the city was constantly threatened with earthquakes. Often the only parts of a city left standing after a severe quake were the huge stone temple columns. Christ promises to set believers in His temple (the future kingdom...) in such a secure fashion that no disturbance can ever force them out. Moreover, a faithful municipal servant or a distinguished priest was sometimes honored by having a special pillar added to one of the temples and inscribed with his name (Barclay, *Seven Churches*, p. 89). This may well be the sense of the second promise, 'I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem...and...my new name.' The inscribed name signifies identification and ownership. To those who have 'little strength' because of being ostracized, Christ promises recognition in his kingdom worthy of the most noble hero of any society."

Morris adds, "The triple name, which follows is not that of the Trinity as we might expect, but that of the Father, the Son and the new Jerusalem" (p. 81). If the Holy Spirit was a Person, this would be *an insult*.

G. E. Ladd then mentions, "The name of their God was put on the people of Israel (Num. 6:27)...The followers of Christ receive his mark on their foreheads to show that they belong to Him" (p. 63).