

The Seven Churches of Revelation

Lesson 6
Rev. 3:7-13

The city of Philadelphia was located about 40 km southeast of Sardis and the city name means “brotherly love” and commemorates the loyalty and devotion that Attalus II showed to his brother Eumenes II, king of Pergamum.

Philadelphia was an important agricultural area; with excellent vineyards, located in a strategic location where Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia met. Philadelphia was built in this place in order to assist the spread of Greek culture and language to surrounding regions. This worked so well that many of the nearby cities spoken only Greek by the first century A.D.

The city was subject to frequent earthquakes and was destroyed in A.D. 17 only to be rebuilt in the same spot. Because of the earthquakes many of the residents lived outside the city walls. Numerous pagan religions; especially the worship of Dionysius and the Imperial cult were popular in Philadelphia. In fact there were so many temples that the city was sometimes referred to as “little Athens.” A significant Jewish population was also present in Philadelphia.

This church, along with Smyrna, are the two churches of the seven in Revelation, which receive only commendation. This is a church that Jesus says was “weak, but strong.”

The Church at Philadelphia *“The Faithful Church”*

The letters to the previous churches contained descriptions of Christ found in chapter 1, but now we find new attributes described. First, he is **“the holy one.”** We know that he is completely set apart from sin. He is without any spot or blemish. (See Isaiah 40:25)

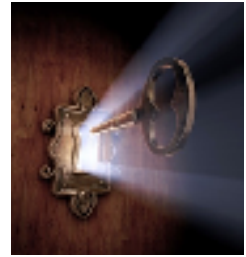
Description Christ gives himself to the church at Philadelphia

“the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.” (Rev. 3:7)

Second, he is **“the true one.”** Every word that he speaks is exactly what he means to say. He never speaks falsehood. He is the originator of truth. (See John 14:6) Jesus is not **“a”** holy and true one, he is **“the”** holy and true one. Christ is equating himself with God the Father.

Third, he is the one ***“who has the key of David.”*** A key is a symbol of authority and opens locks and doors that are closed to one without the key.

In a prophecy concerning Jesus, God says in **Isaiah 22:22**, ***“And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”*** The key figuratively refers to the ability to open and close the entrance into the heavenly kingdom. Entrance into God’s kingdom comes only through Jesus Christ.



- 1. What keys does Jesus claim to hold in Revelation 1:18?**
- 2. What keys were given to the Apostle Peter given in Matt 16:18-19 and how did he use these keys?**

Jesus holds **the** key to the kingdom and no one can shut this open door. This surely encouraged the Christians in Philadelphia since they were oppressed and persecuted by the Jews who even shut them out from synagogue. No man can shut the door of their access to the heavenly kingdom which has been granted unto them by Christ. “Christians, not Jews, are the citizens of the Davidic kingdom anticipated by the Old Testament prophets.”¹

Commendation to the Church at Philadelphia

Jesus knows the works of the Philadelphian church. They used the open door that Jesus set before them to gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Some believe that the open door in Rev. 3:8 refers to the door of opportunity. Philadelphia may have been a city founded to spread the Greek language and culture, but now the church in Philadelphia could use the open door to spread the gospel.² Their reward for faithful service was more opportunities to serve.

- 3. What doors does God place before us today and how can He open and close doors of opportunity?**
- 4. What might bring more (or less) open doors to the church today?**

The church was described as having **“little power,”** but they were faithful and obedient. They lacked power because of their small numbers and absence of status and significance in the eyes of the community.

¹ Smith, James E. *Behold! The Revelation of Jesus*. Lulu, 2008, p. 68.

² The term “open door” is used elsewhere to speak of opportunities for evangelism (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col 4:3).

The church may have been **“weak,”** but Jesus commends them because they **kept his word³** and did not **deny his name**. These saints obeyed the commands of Christ (his word). Most in Philadelphia worshipped the emperor and proclaimed that Caesar is Lord while the church boldly proclaimed that Jesus is Lord (did not deny his name.)

5. How can God use a church with “little power?”

The church in Philadelphia stood strong in the face of Jewish opposition. Jesus condemns these Jews saying they were of **the synagogue of Satan**; furthermore they were not even true Jews as they claimed. They were Jews ethnically, and outwardly religious, but their denial of Christ and their persecution of the church demonstrated that they were not followers of God (Romans 6:6-8).

Jesus says that in the future these Jews would bow down before the feet of the Philippian saints; not to worship them, but to acknowledge that Christians are the ones who are loved by the Messiah. At the end of time every knee will bow before the Lord⁴ and Christians will reign with Christ eternally.⁵

The Lord promised to provide strength to the church because they had kept his instruction to endure patiently. They had been faithful through the trials they had faced. Now a more intense period is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

6. What does it mean to keep the word with “endurance?”

To be kept from the hour of trial does not mean they would be removed from the earth, but that Christ would protect them through the trial and provide them the strength they needed to endure (1 Cor. 10:13). An “hour” symbolically refers to a short, but intense period of persecution. The Christians had “kept” the word of Christ. Now they will be “kept” from harm in or through the trial.

Two Similar Phrases with Different Meanings:

The phrase, **“the whole world”** refers to the entire inhabited world (or sometimes the Roman Empire as in Lk 2:1; Rom 1:8).

The phrase, **“those who dwell on the earth”** is found seven times in Revelation (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 [2 times]; 13:14; 14:6). Throughout the book this phrase refers to unbelievers who are enemies of the church and who face divine retribution. The key word is “dwell.” The unrepentant sinner makes his home happily in this world, while the faithful sees this earth as a temporary abode.

³ “Kept is the Greek word τηρέω (têreō) meaning “to watch over, guard, keep, preserve” and “give heed to, pay attention to, observe.” G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, 3rd edition, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1937, p. 445.

⁴ Philippians 2:10.

⁵ 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Rev. 3:21.

The first century Christians faced difficult persecutions and these were about to intensify. It is important for us to remember that this promise of Jesus is made to a specific congregation, in a specific place, at a specific time.

Admonition to the Church at Philadelphia

Jesus tells the church that he is coming soon. As discussed in our previous lessons, this coming most likely does not refer to the Second Coming, but rather his coming in judgment against the enemies of the church. Still, the warning and challenge is the same whichever coming he has in mind.

The admonition of Jesus to ***“hold fast to what you have”*** tells us the church will face pressure from the world around them. Failing to hold fast means they could lose their ***“crown.”*** The crown is a symbol of victory and the victory is eternal life in heaven.

7. How does one hold fast and what pressures can make that difficult?

It's Time to Hear

Jesus makes three glorious promises to the church at Philadelphia. First, he says, ***“The one who conquers I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.”*** A pillar is a strong and permanent structure and this building is the temple of God or heaven itself. In Galatians 2:9 James, Cephas (Peter), and John are called pillars. Imagine the overwhelming joy of dwelling permanently and prominently in the heaven of God.



Second, the one who conquers ***“will never go out of the temple of God.”*** The habitation the Christian finds in heaven is safe and eternal. The Philadelphians faced terrible earthquakes and their homes were often destroyed. In this life illness, persecution, death, and a myriad of tragedies can change our lives in an instant. In the temple of God the Christian has no fear of anything happening that can steal the joy he finds the presence of Jesus.

Third, there are three inscriptions of ownership that are written on the Christian.

This symbolism pictures the ***“name of my God,”*** written by Jesus on the believer, giving proof that this person belongs to the Father.

The second inscription is ***“the name of the city of my God,”*** showing that this person belongs eternally in the heavenly habitation which is called ***“the new Jerusalem.”***

Third, Jesus says, the Christian is inscribed with ***“my own new name.”*** No one knows the new name except Christ himself. It will be a name that will properly identify the faithful as citizens of the eternal kingdom.”⁶ (Rev. 19:12; 22:3-4).

The final words are these: ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”***

Promise #10 to the Churches

"The one who conquers I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God."

Promise #11 to the Churches

"The one who conquers will never go out of the temple of God"

Promise #12 to the Churches

"The one who conquers 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name."

Questions for the Upcoming Week

1. How can I use my "little power" to serve Christ more effectively? What steps will I take to make this a reality?
2. Am I holding fast? Are there any areas I need to strengthen? If so, what are these areas?
3. Describe the joy found in the inscriptions the faithful will one day receive from Jesus.

⁶ Ibid, Smith, p. 73.