



#### 6 – PHILADELPHIA: “The Faithful Church” ... (Revelation 3:7-13)

As we continue in our examination and exegesis of the letters to the Seven Churches ... observe our Lord's salutation to this the sixth church locationally known as the church in Philadelphia. Jesus Christ presented Himself to the church at Philadelphia as **“He who is holy, He who is true”** This is tantamount to declaring that He is God ... which, of course, He is!

**Jesus Christ is holy** in His character, His words, His actions, and His purposes. As the Holy One ... **He is uniquely set apart from everything else, and nothing can be compared to Him.** Which gives us insight into the need and/or status of this particular church.

A Little Bit of Background. **Philadelphia** was founded by one of the rulers in 150 BC or so, his name was Attalus II. *And you'd never guess how he felt about his brother. He loved his brother ... In fact, he had a nickname, brother lover.* The city became known as Philadelphia, because of love of Attalus for his brother. And so, it's **“the city of brotherly love”**, not much unlike Philadelphia in the United States ... which is supposed to be “the city of brotherly love”, as well. Philadelphia still exists today in modern Turkey being known as “Alasehir”.

God's inspired words to the congregation at Philadelphia are an uplifting message of hope and encouragement. Unlike the other letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, correction here is not to be found. But there is an admonition ... “to continue what they were already doing.” Christ promised them great rewards for their faithful perseverance.

- **“*To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open.*”**

**But He is also the One who is true - that is, genuine.** He is the original ... not a copy, the authentic God and not a manufactured one. There were hundreds of false gods and goddesses in those days (cp. 1 Cor 8:5-6), but only Jesus Christ could rightfully claim to be the true God. *Not only is He holy and true ... but He has, the authority to open and close doors!*

#### PHILADELPHIA

The church in Philadelphia as the faithful church and the church that stood at the gateway of a great opportunity (Rev 3:7-13). Christ said to this church, "See, I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it" (v. 8). The **"open door"** means primarily access to God ... but it also refers to opportunity for spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, an **"open door"** speaks of **"opportunity for ministry"** (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). Christ is the Lord of the harvest and the Head of the church, and it is He who determines where and when His people shall serve (see Acts 16:6-10). **He gave the church at Philadelphia a great opportunity for ministry!**

But could they take advantage of it? There were at least two obstacles to overcome, **the first** being their own lack of strength (Rev. 3:8). Apparently, this was not a large or a strong church; however, it was a faithful one. They were true to God's Word and unafraid to bear His name. Rev. 3:10 suggests that they had endured some special testing and had proved faithful.

- It's not the size or strength of a church that determines its ministry, but faith in the call and command of the Lord. **"God's commandments are God's enablements."** In other words ... *If Jesus Christ gave them an open door ... then He would also see to it, that they were able to walk through it!*

**The second** obstacle was the opposition of the Jews in the city (Rev. 3:9). This was really the opposition of Satan, **for we do not battle against flesh and blood** (Eph. 6:12). These people may have been Jews in the flesh, but they were not "true Israel" in the New Testament sense (Romans 2:17-29).

Another weapon was probably false accusation, for this is the way the unbelieving Jews often attacked Paul. **Satan is the accuser ... and he uses even religious people to assist him** (Rev. 12:10). **It is not easy to witness for Christ when the leading people in the community are spreading lies about you!** The church at Smyrna faced the same kind of opposition (Rev. 2:9).

- The believers in Philadelphia were in a similar situation to that of Paul when he wrote 1 Corinthians 16:9 ... *there were both opportunities and obstacles!*

**Unbelief sees the obstacles ... But faith sees the opportunities!** And since the Lord holds the keys, He is in control of the outcome! So what do we have to fear? **Nobody can close the doors ... as long as He keeps them open!** Fear, unbelief, and delay have caused the church as a whole to miss many God-given opportunities.

## Jesus Gives (3) Wonderful and Encouraging Promises To This Church.

**First** ... He would take care of their enemies (Rev. 3:9). One day, these people would have to acknowledge that the Christians were right! (see Isa. 60:14; Phil. 2:10-11) *If we take care of God's work, He will take care of our battles!*

**Second** ... He would keep them from Tribulation (Rev. 3:10). This is certainly a reference to the time of Tribulation that John described in Rev. 6-19, ***“the time of Jacob's trouble.”*** This is not speaking about some local trial, because it involves ***“them that dwell on the earth”*** (cp. Rev. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8,12,14; 14:6; 17:2,8).

The immediate reference would be to the official Roman persecutions that would come, but the ultimate reference is to ... the coming Tribulation that will encompass the earth before Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom. ***This is clearly a reference to the “rapture.”***

**Third** ... the promise to the Philadelphians *is that God would honor them* (Rev. 3:12). The symbolism in this verse would be especially meaningful to people who lived in constant danger of earthquakes: the stability of the pillar, no need to go out or to flee, a heavenly city that nothing could destroy.

- **NOTE:** Ancient cities often honored great leaders by erecting pillars with their names inscribed on them. God's pillars are not made of stone ... because there is no temple in the heavenly city (Rev. 21:22). ***His pillars are faithful people who bear His name for His glory (Gal. 2:9).***

In a very real sense, the church today is like the Philadelphian church ... for God has set before us many open doors of opportunity. If He opens the doors, we must work; if He shuts the doors, we must wait. Above all, we must be faithful to Him ... and see the opportunities, not the obstacles. If we miss our opportunities ... we lose our rewards (crowns), and this means being ashamed before Him when He comes. It has been said that ... ***“Nothing is more expensive in life than a missed opportunity.” Amen!***

As with all the letters sent to the Seven Churches, this one too closes ... ***13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”***

***“ Hey, Philadelphia ... You’ve Got Mail!”***