

SPIRIT OF LIFE MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL
A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION
REVELATION 3 PART 2

PHILADELPHIA



The sixth church in the list of churches in Revelation 2--3 is the faithful church at Philadelphia in Asia Minor. This church, above all other churches, is the faithful and true missionary church that follows Jesus Christ. There is not one word of condemnation in the entire letter to the church at Philadelphia.

The church at Philadelphia was an historical church; it represents certain types of churches in every age: those that are faithful and Christ-honoring.

Today the city is called *Alasehir* meaning either "Red city" or "city of Allah". The original name comes from King Attalus of Pergamum (159-138 B.C.) whose surname meant *Philadelphus* meant "Loyal to his brother (Eumenes)."

The city was almost completely destroyed several times by earthquakes. The most recent rebuilding was in A.D. 17. Grapes were a principal crop of the city and Dionysus, the god of wine (Bacchus) was one the chief objects of worship.

A nominal Christian presence was maintained in this city until the start of World War I. It was established in 189 BC by King Eumenes II of Pergamon (197-160 BC). Eumenes II named the city for the love of his brother, who would be his successor, Attalus II (159-138 BC), whose loyalty earned him the nickname, "Philadelphos", literally meaning "one who loves his brother."

This city was the youngest of the seven churches. It was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia meet together. Strategically therefore important for the founders' main aim. It was founded especially as a mission city to expand the Greek culture and language to Lydia and Phrygia. The only ruins left are an ancient Byzantine Church.

REV 3: 7

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;”

He who is Holy...true... Jesus Christ identifies himself to Philadelphia as Holy and True. The word is translated from the Greek word *Hagios* meaning separated. Christ’s righteousness is separate and apart from the sin of this world. The church represents Christ in the world. Holy is the description of God. Isaiah in various places describes the Holiness of God as his own attribute. See **Isa 6:3, 40:25, 43:15**, Christ nature is perfect, He is God’s Messiah, the “Truth” manifest in the world. Jesus describes Himself as **“The Way”, “The Truth” and “The Life”** (John 14:6). Jesus is not one of many truths but **“The Truth.”**

Key of David... Christ holds the Title to the throne of King David. The Messiah, the son of David, is to rule over the Earth in the kingdom age. Christ assures the Church he is in charge. Christ will rule on David’s throne over the nations. (See **Isaiah 9:7, 11:1-7, 22: 22, Jeremiah 23:5**) Christ also identified himself as one **“who holds the key of David”** (3:7). He opens the door and no person can shut it. This metaphor tells us Christ has complete control over the royal household, his church.

The source of the metaphor is Isaiah, as he speaks of an individual, Shebna, who had charge of the palace of the Judean king. The Lord says he will replace him with his servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah (**Isaiah 22:21**). Then, says the Lord through Isaiah: **“I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open”** (**Isaiah 22:21-22**). Thus, Hilkiah will have power to control entry into the royal kingdom. As the king’s steward, he will decide who can or cannot have access to the king.

The local Jewish community of Philadelphia may claim that the kingdom belongs to their members. But they “are liars” (**3:9**). Christ has used the key of David to set an open door before the **church**, not the synagogue. The door to the synagogue may be closed to the Christian; the door to Christ’s heavenly kingdom is wide open. Not only does Christ open the door, he **is the door** to the kingdom (**John 10:7, 9**). Thus, it is Jesus who is presenting himself as the way to salvation (**John 14:6**).

A second interpretation of the **“open door”** is that the Philadelphia church was being given a wide-open opportunity for evangelistic activity. Paul apparently used the metaphor in this manner (**1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3**).

However, Revelation does not deal with missionary activity. The book presents the church as an organism fighting for its life in the world. More importantly, the Old Testament background of the "door" metaphor and the present context works against the "door to evangelism" interpretation.

This story in Isaiah serves as a prophecy of the Davidic Messiah. What is in view in Revelation is clear. Here Christ has the key of David and opens the door. "The imagery suggests that Christ is the only one who can grant access to God and no one can deprive them of it.

The "key in Revelation does much more than open the way to an audience with a national king. In Christ's hand, the key opens the door into the presence of God, his kingdom and eternal life. Christ's statement to the church in Philadelphia that he has **"the key of David"** would have been quite comforting. That is because the church was being intimidated by those who "claim to be Jews though they are not" (3:9).

The immediate background of the phrase was the claim of the Jews in Philadelphia that they were the true people of God who held the key to the Kingdom of God. John contradicts this claim by asserting that the key to the kingdom which had belonged to Israel really belongs to Jesus as the Davidic messiah (Rev. 5:5; 22:16) and had been forfeited by Israel because she had rejected her Messiah."

These Jews will ultimately have to acknowledge that Christ loves the church. They will recognize that the church is composed of the true people of God, rather than the Jews as a nation. The Christians at Philadelphia would have been greatly encouraged when Christ identified himself as the true Messiah, and as one who controls access to the eternal kingdom. When he opens the door "no one can shut" it – and no one can prevent entry to those for whom he opens it (3:7).

REV 3:8

"I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

I know thy works... This is one church that does not receive condemnation from God. They are faithful to the Lord and find being faithful does not always produce results that are beneficial to the members. Yet despite the opposition and persecution he has set before them an open door and no earthly power can shut it. They are on the winning side in the long term. All Christians should be prepared to stay long enough to read the last chapter in the book. **It is not about strength but faithfulness.**

They had kept God's word and that was delighting God's heart. He therefore gave power to the Church to minister before an open door. What other encouragement would a church need to continue the battle against the dark powers and forces of evil ever present?

They not only kept God's name, but they had not denied His name. It was so easy to do in Roman times. As long as people saw allegiance to the ruler of the Roman Empire, they could worship what other Gods they wished but these people would not bow the knee to anyone but the True God and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the great promise of the Risen Christ that he has set before the Christians of Philadelphia an open door which no man can ever shut.

REV 3:9

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

The Jews of Philadelphia who were persecuting and intimidating the Christians are called a "synagogue of Satan" (3:9), as they were identified in the letter to the church in Smyrna (2:9). They will experience a reversal of fortune – be forced to acknowledge that the church constitutes the true people of God(3:9).

The background for verse 9 is also to be found in the Old Testament, but with an unexpected twist. Isaiah had pictured the victory of Israel over its enemies (60:14). In one place Isaiah said gentile nations would do homage to Israel in the flesh at the start of the kingdom. ***"They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, 'Surely God is with you...'"*** wrote the prophet (Isaiah 45:14).

Revelation here underscores the notion that the Jews have rejected their Messiah (Matthew 21:33-43, especially verse 43) states that the kingdom was taken from Israel and given to a nation (the church) –to fulfill his promise of grace. In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. (Galatians 6:15). Also, and Having abolished in his flesh the enmity (hostility; hatred), [even] the law of commandments [contained] in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, [so] making peace; (Eph 2:15).

Revelation 3:9, however, looks to the time when the Jews will finally acknowledge (thus, "bow down" to) their Savior and the largely gentile church as the people of God. In that time, "All Israel [that is, the Israelite people as a whole] will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

The Jews at this time were more opponents of the Church than the Roman authorities. It is remarkable that when any organization ceases to go God's way as the Jews had done then judgment comes upon them. Instead of being the people of God those who attended the synagogue are now the synagogue of Satan. This may seem harsh, but people are either for righteousness or against it ***even if they are misguided***. If they are not motivated by the Spirit and willing to receive truth and walk in it, then they do the work of Satan by undermining the Church which is the Lord's delight. It is not known if the Jews coming to worship before the Church will, or did, happen in the years that followed but one thing is certain that in the last days ***"that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*** (Phil 2:11).

A beautiful promise is made to this struggling Church. People will know that He loves them. This must mean that He will so bless and guide them that the Jew in particular will discern that God is among them and showing them His favor.

REV 3:10

"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

Because the church in Philadelphia has kept faith with Jesus, he will keep them ***from "the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth"*** (3:10). This expression "hour of trial" refers in Revelation to the affliction on the world to come before God's kingdom is established on the earth. This period of worldwide ordeal is a main theme of Revelation. The book informs the reader that ***"the hour of his judgment has come"*** (14:7). The death of the world system, dubbed "Babylon the Great," which stands in opposition to God, is described in dramatic and symbolic language in Revelation chapters 15-19. The doom of this Babylon comes "in one hour" (18:10). "In one hour" the world's Babylonish "great wealth" is "brought to ruin" (18:17, 19).

When the world's anti-God system collapses, the church will face terrible persecution and martyrdom. That is because it will be called on as a faithful witness to the rule and authority of God in a godless world. But because the names of the faithful witnesses are written in the book of life, they will be delivered and saved for eternal life.

While the church will suffer persecution, it will not be destroyed by God's wrath. That is because the hour of trial comes ***"upon the whole world"*** to try ***"those who live on the earth"*** (3:10). This does not include the church. In Revelation, the phrase ***"whole world"*** or ***"those who live on the earth"*** is always used for the godless world or enemies of the church (6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:8).

We have seen that whatever the Spirit says to an individual church such as Philadelphia applies to all the churches (3:13). Thus, it can be understood that the promise of protection from God's wrath applies to the church universal. Various images or metaphors are used in Revelation to describe the protection the church receives during this worldwide trouble. The earth is not harmed until the saints are sealed (7:1-8). The worshipers are counted, a sign of God's caring protection on those he personally knows (11:1). The woman, a symbol for the church, is protected in the wilderness (12:14-16).

REV 3:11

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Here is a promise and warning combined. The Risen Christ tells them that he is coming quickly. It has been said that in the New Testament the Coming of Christ is continually used for two purposes.

- A. It is used as a **warning to the neglectful**. Jesus himself tells of the wicked servant, who took advantage of his master's absence to conduct himself evilly and to whom the master made a sudden return that brought judgment. (Matthew 24:48-51). Paul warns the Thessalonians of the terrible fate which awaits the disobedient and the unbelieving when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven and shall take swift and final vengeance on his enemies (2 Thessalonians 1: 7-9). Peter warns his people that they will give account for their deeds to him who comes to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4: 5).
- B. It is used as a **comfort to the oppressed**. James urges patient endurance on his people because the coming of the Lord is drawing near (James 5: 8); soon their distresses will be at an end. The writer to the Hebrews urges patience, for soon he that shall come will come (Hebrews 10: 37). **Holding fast** is seen in several texts of the Old and New Testament. Nine are in the OT including the following texts:

1. ***"You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him, and to him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in his name"***. (Deut. 10:20) (NKJV)
2. ***"For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do — to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to hold fast to him."*** (Deut. 11:22) (NKJV)
3. ***"You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice; you shall serve him and hold fast to him."*** (Deut.13:4) (NKJV)

4. “but you shall **hold fast** to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day.” (Josh. 23:8)

Paul has a similar word for the Corinthian Church

1. *“by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you —unless you believed in vain.”* (1 Cor 15:2)
2. In a letter to Timothy Paul says, *“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”* (2 Tim 1:13).
3. Out of several texts from Hebrews we read in **Hebrews 10:23** *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”*

...that no man take thy crown.

Remember, we are in a race. As we saw earlier, the church at Smyrna was told it would receive "the crown of life" (2:10). Philadelphia was also told not to let any person take its crown. In both cases, the word is *stephanos* – which refers to the wreath of victory awarded to winners of athletic contests. This would have been a meaningful word to the church in Philadelphia, as the city was famous for its athletic games.

REV 3:12

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”

Christ promised the faithful in Philadelphia that he would make them pillars in God’s temple (3:12). And, they would never again leave his presence. This is another symbol of assurance that the members would gain *eternal* admission into the kingdom of God. Christ also promised to write three names on the believer in **Rev 3:12**:

1. The name of God,
2. The name of the New Jerusalem,
3. Christ’s new name.

Ancient pillars had the names of people they honored inscribed on them. The metaphor means to say that God will honor and bless his people. But in what way?

1. First, the believer will have God's name. In the Old Testament, the Lord told the priests to pronounce specific blessings on Israel, which concluded with this thought: **"So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them"** (Numbers 6:27).
2. Second, to be named with the city of God – the New Jerusalem – is a symbolic way of saying that the believer has citizenship in God's spiritual commonwealth (Galatians 4:26; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 12:22).
3. Third, the believer is to have Christ's own *new* name. Perhaps this refers to a future full revelation of Christ's being, which cannot be grasped until the believer is glorified. (1 John 3:2).

REV 3:13

"He who can hear, let him listen to and heed what the Spirit says to the assemblies (churches)."

Stop! Look! Listen! Hear the Spirit. Think through these letters. Pay attention to them because they are spelling out your future destiny.