

Revelation of Jesus Christ Study 20

Rev 3:7-13

7 "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':

8 I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

9 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.

10 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.

11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And 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.

13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

This letter is to the faithful Church in Philadelphia

Occasionally the question is asked by young men seeking a church to pastor if anyone knows of a church without any problems?

One pastors response to this question is, **“if I did, I wouldn’t tell you; you’d go there and spoil it.”**

The point is that there are no perfect Churches. Churches struggle because all are made up of imperfect, sinning people.

The Church is not a place for people with no weaknesses; it is a fellowship of those who are aware of their weaknesses and long for the strength and grace of God to fill their lives.

It is a kind of hospital for those who know they are sick and needy.

Like all Churches, the one in Philadelphia had its imperfections. Yet the Lord commended its members for their faithfulness and loyalty.

They and the congregation at Smyrna were the only two of the seven that received no rebuke from the Lord of the church.

In spite of their fleshly struggles, the Christians at Philadelphia were faithful and obedient, serving and worshiping the Lord.

They provided a good model of a loyal church.

To aid in understanding the letter to the Philadelphia church, it may be divided into six headings;

The correspondent
The Church
The City
The Commendation
The Command
The Counsel

THE CORRESPONDENT

Rev 3:7c

"He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut and who shuts and no one opens, says this;"

The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine author of the seven letters, always introduces Himself with a description reflecting His character.

In the Previous five letters, those descriptions had come from the vision recorded in *Rev 1:12-17*.

But this description of Him is unique and not drawn from that earlier vision. It has distinctly Old Testament features.

He who is holy refers to God, who alone possesses absolute holiness.

The Old Testament repeatedly describes God as the Holy One:

2 Kings 19:22

22 'Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice, And lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel.

Psa 71:22

22 Also with the lute I will praise you-- And Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I will sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 43:15-21

15 I am the LORD, your Holy One, The Creator of Israel, your King."

16 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea And a path through the mighty waters,

17 Who brings forth the chariot and horse, The army and the power (They shall lie down together, they shall not rise; They are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick):

18 "Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old.

19 Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness And rivers in the desert.

20 The beast of the field will honor Me, The jackals and the ostriches, Because I give waters in the wilderness And rivers in the desert, To give drink to My people, My chosen.

21 This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.

And there are many more this is just a few.

Isaiah 6:3 declares

³ And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!"

To say that God is holy is to say that He is utterly separate from sin; therefore His character is absolutely unblemished and flawless.

The title "Holy One" is used in the New Testament as a messianic title for the Lord Jesus Christ.

In *Mark 1:24* a terrified demon screamed, "*What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God!*"

Announcing His birth to Mary, the angel described Jesus as "*the holy Child*" *Luke 1:35*.

In *John 6:69* Peter affirmed, "*We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.*" And so on throughout the New Testament.

Jesus identification of Himself as "*He who is holy*" can be no less than a direct claim to deity.

The Lord Jesus Christ possesses in undiminished, unaltered essence the holy and sinless nature of God.

Because Christ is Holy, His Church must be as well

Peter wrote:

1 Pet 1:15-16

¹⁵ but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

¹⁶ because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

That the omniscient Holy One gave no rebuke, warning, or condemnation to the Philadelphia Church, speaks very well of them indeed.

Not only is Jesus Christ the Holy One; He also describes Himself as He "*who is true.*"

Truth is used in combination with holiness to describe God in *Revelation 6:10; 15:3; 16:7; 19:2, 11.*

Alethinos (true) denotes that which is genuine, authentic, and real.

In the midst of the falsehood, perversion, and error that fills the world, the Lord Jesus Christ is the truth:

John 14:6

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Thirdly, Christ describes Himself as the One "*who has the key of David.*"

It is clear from *Revelation 5:5, and 22:6*

5 But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

David symbolizes the messianic office.

A **key** in Scripture represents authority; whoever holds the key has control.

Rev 1:18

18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

Rev 9:1

1 Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit.

Jesus said to Peter;

Matt 16:18-19

18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The Term "*the key of David*" also appears in;

Isaiah 22:22

22 The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open.

This refers to Eliakim, the steward or prime minister to Israel's king.

Because of his office, he controlled access to the monarch.

As the holder of "*the key of David*", Jesus alone has the sovereign authority to determine who enters His messianic kingdom;

John 10:7-9

7 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

8 All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

John 14:6

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Now as we have seen in Rev 1:18 we see Jesus having the keys to death and hell, here we see Him depicted as having the keys to salvation and blessing.

Finally, Jesus identifies Himself as He *"who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens."*

The description stresses Christ's omnipotence; what He does cannot be overturned by someone more powerful;

Isaiah 43:13-14a

13 Indeed before the day was, I am He; And there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?"

14 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,

No one can shut the doors to the kingdom or to blessing if He holds them open, and no one can force them open if He holds them shut.

In the light of the promise in *"verse 8"* Christ could also be referring to opening and shutting doors for service.

In either case, the emphasis is on His sovereign control over His church.

That Jesus Christ, the holy, true, sovereign, omnipotent Lord of the church, found nothing to condemn in the Philadelphia church must have been a joyous encouragement to them.

THE CHURCH

Rev 3:7a

"the church in Philadelphia"

Little is known about the Philadelphia church apart from this passage. Like most of the other seven churches, it was probably founded during Paul's ministry at Ephesus (*Acts 19:10*)

A few years after John wrote Revelation, the early church father, Ignatius, passed through Philadelphia on his way to martyrdom at Rome.

He wrote the church a letter of encouragement and instruction.

Some Christians from Philadelphia were martyred, with Pollycarp, at Smyrna.

The church lasted for centuries. The Christians in Philadelphia stood firm even after the region was overrun by the Muslims, finally succumbing in the mid-fourteenth century.

THE CITY

Rev 3:7b

“Philadelphia”

From the Hermus River valley, where Sardis and Smyrna were located, a smaller valley (that of the Cogamis River) branches off to the southeast.

A road through this valley provided the best means of ascending the 2,500 feet from the Hermus valley to the vast central plateau.

In this valley, about thirty miles from Sardis, was the city of Philadelphia.

Philadelphia was the youngest of the seven cities, founded sometime after 189 B.C. either by King Eumenes of Pergamum or his brother, Attalus II, who succeeded him as king.

In either case, the city derived its name from Attalus II's nickname *Philadelphus* (brother lover), which his loyalty to his brother Eumenes had earned him.

Though situated on an easily defensible site on an 800-foot-high hill overlooking an important road, Philadelphia was not founded primarily as a military outpost (as Thyatira had been). Its founders intended it to be a center of Greek culture and language, a missionary outpost for spreading Hellenism to the regions of Lydia and Phrygia.

Philadelphia succeeded in its mission so well that by A.D. 19 the Lydian language had been completely replaced by Greek.

Philadelphia benefited from its location at the junction of several important trade routes (as well as from being a stop on the Imperial Post Road), earning as its title **“gateway to the east”** (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book Of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 114-15).

The city was located on the edge of the *Katakekaumene* (the burned land), a volcanic region whose fertile soil was ideally suited for vineyards.

Being near such a seismically active region had its drawbacks, however, in A.D. 17 a powerful earthquake rocked Philadelphia along with Sardis and ten other nearby cities.

Though initial destruction was greater at Sardis, Philadelphia, being nearer the epicenter, experienced frequent after-shocks during the coming years.

That nerve-wracking experience left psychological scars on Philadelphia's inhabitants, as Sir William Ramsay notes.

Many of the inhabitants remained outside the city living in huts and booths over the vale, and those who were foolhardy enough (as the sober minded thought) to remain in the city, worked at providing various devices to support and strengthen the walls and houses against the recurring shocks.

The memory of this disaster lived long, and the people lived amid ever threatening danger, in dread always of a new disaster; and the habit of going out to the open country had probably not disappeared when the Seven Letters were written.

In gratitude for Caesar Tiberius's financial aid in rebuilding their city, the Philadelphians joined with several other cities in erecting a monument to him.

Going beyond the other cities Philadelphia actually changed its name to Neocaesarea for number of years.

Several decades later, the city again changed its name to Flavia, in honor of the ruling Roman Imperial family,

It would be known by both names, Philadelphia and Flavia, throughout the second and third centuries.

Next week we will look at the Commendation, the Command and the Counsel.