

PHILADELPHIA: WEAK BUT FAITHFUL AND VINDICATED

Revelation 3:7-13

I. BIBLICAL TEXT

7 *“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 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: 8 ‘I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; 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 My new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’*

II. BACKGROUND

A. LOCATION

1. BORDER TOWN

- On edge of Lydia
- Phrygia to East/Southeast
- Mysia to North/Northwest

2. SIXTH CITY CLOCKWISE FROM EPHESUS

- Inland—100 miles due east of Smyrna
- Between Sardis (25 miles NE) and Laodicea (in Phrygia)

3. ON COGAMIS RIVER—LEFT BANK

- Tributary to Hermus River
- Hermus formed valley where Sardis sat

4. GUARDED KEY MOUNTAIN PASS

- Between two most important valleys in Asia Minor—Hermus and Meander Rivers

5. ON EDGE OF BOZDAG MOUNTAINS

- 650 feet in elevation (above sea level)

- Behind it—volcanic cliffs called ‘inkwells’ by Turks
- Bozdag Mountains—backdrop for Sardis too

6. NEAR MODERN TURKISH TOWN OF ALASEHIR

- Meaning of modern name—‘Red City’
- Possibly Turkish corruption of ‘City of God’

B. FOUNDATION

1. OLD TOWN IN LYDIA—NAMED CALLETEBUS

2. RELATIVELY YOUNG—FOUNDED 189 BC

- Compared to Sardis—12th century BC
- Compared to Ephesus—1000-1500
- Compared to Smyrna—about 1000

3. FOUNDED BY KING EUMENES II

- a. King of Pergamum—middle king of Attalid dynasty
- b. Founded by King Eumenes II of Pergamum
 - o Eumenes II—middle king (197-159) of Attalid dynasty (282-129 BC)
 - o Allied with Rome after collapse of Alexandrian Empire
 - o 189 BC—soldiers founded it as a military outpost on edge of Pergamene Kingdom

4. Named for love between Eumenes and his brother/successor Attalus II (159-138 BC)

- Coins of the era depict two brothers

5. Roman Control

- Attalus III died without heir (133)—bequeathed Philadelphia to Rome
- After brief resistance of pretender king—came under control of Rome (129)

C. ECONOMY

1. KEY TRADE CENTER

- a. Intersection of two key western roads
 - o From Smyrna eastward
 - o Roman road from Troas through Pergamum, Sardis, Philadelphia eastward
- b. On Persian Royal Road
 - o 1500 mile guarded mail/communication route
 - o Ran from Susa (Persian capital) to Aegean
- c. Famous for wines
 - o Soil—of disintegrated lava—was conducive to growing grapes

- o Coinage bore picture of Bacchus
- d. Mineral springs nearby
- e. Fertile farmlands outside city—on lava soil
- f. Earthquake in 17 AD
 - o Destroyed Philadelphia and Sardis—and 10 other cities
 - o Continued to experience serious tremors for 20 years
 - o Citizens in constant fear—kept citizens in state of fear
 - o But citizens still returned—rebuilt—while living in huts in countryside
 - o Faithful—never left the city completely
 - o Tiberius—gave city relief from taxation—to enable them to rebuild
- g. Edict by Domitian—92 AD
 - o To encourage grain crops to feed Roman armies—due to famine conditions
 - o Possible to protect vine-growers of Italy
 - o Edict required half the vines to be cut down—and not be replaced
 - o Hampered economy in Philadelphia—soil was not conducive to growing grain

D. RELIGION

1. PAGANISM

- a. Emphasis on local gods—and Olympian pantheon
- b. Later—some cult worship of emperor
- c. But main focus on god of wine
 - o Cult of Dionysius [Greek]
 - o Later coinage showed image of Bacchus [Roman]

2. JUDAISM

- a. Apparently a Jewish community there—though no archaeological evidence
- b. Inscription about Jewish synagogue found 10 miles away

E. ATTITUDES/TRENDS

- 1. Hellenism—built as a center to promote Greek way of life—in Lydia and Phrygia
- 2. Faithfulness—never left city completely—came back to rebuild
- 3. Unsettled—constant fear of ruination by earthquakes
- 4. New Names
 - Renamed Neo-caesarea—in thanks for help from Tiberius to rebuild city
 - Philadelphia Flavia—in honor of Vespasian (his family name)—69-79 AD

- Part of ‘Decapolis’—Ten Cities on Lydian plane

F. EARLY CHRISTIANITY

1. First bishop = Demetrius—appointed by Apostle John [*Apostolic Constitutions*]
2. Bishop commended (Revelation 3)—and Christian pastors praised for resisting Jewish attacks
3. Ignatius’s letter—warned them against the Jews
4. Miltiades (4th century apologist)—mentioned prophetess Ammia—a member there
5. Remained Christian throughout Islamic invasion—until conquered by Turks in 14th century
6. 17th century—still ¼ population was Christian

III. EXPOSITION

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 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:

**JESUS IS THE DIVINE AND FAITHFUL WITNESS
WHO CONTROLS EVERYONE’S DESTINY—verse 7**

A. HE WHO IS HOLY AND TRUE

1. CONTEXT OF REVELATION 1-3
 - a. ‘True’—refers to Christ’s trustworthiness in Chapter 1
 - b. 1:5—Jesus is the faithful witness
 - c. Implications
 - He is the ‘true’ Jewish witness—unlike those Jews who ‘lie’—in verse 9
 - Jesus is ‘true’ Messiah—who had been rejected by Jews as false messianic pretender
 - He will empower Philadelphians to continue being faithful
2. ‘HOLY AND TRUE’—HIGHLIGHT DEITY OF CHRIST
 - a. In Revelation—elsewhere—these are divine attributes of ‘the Lord’—e.g. Rev 6:10
 - b. In Isaiah—‘Holy’—is a key description of Yahweh
 - Isaiah refers to Yahweh as ‘the Holy One of Israel’—20 times
 - Isaiah background is critical to understanding Letter to Philadelphia
 - c. In Gospels—the ‘Holy One of God’—described Jesus as Messiah—[Mk 1; Lk 4; Jn 6]

B. WHO HAS THE KEY OF DAVID—WHO OPENS AND SHUTS

1. CONTEXT OF REVELATION 1-3

- Refers to 1:18b—Jesus has the keys to Hades
- Jesus holds power over death and judgment

2. CONTEXT OF ISAIAH 22:15-25

a. Background

- Prophecy during reign of King Hezekiah of Judah
- Predicts fall of royal steward Shebna—who favored Egyptian alliance [against Assyria]
- Predicts rise and prosperity of Eliakim son of Hilkiah—as royal steward

b. Text

Is 22:20-24—*Then it will come about in that day, that I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him with your tunic and tie your sash securely about him. I will entrust him with your authority, and he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, when he opens no one will shut, when he shuts no one will open. I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, and he will become a throne of glory to his father's house. So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue.*

c. Symbolism

1. House of David—in Gospels—refers to Messianic role of Christ
2. Eliakim as 'servant'—parallels prophetic passages of Christ as coming Servant—Is 40-53
 - Servant will bring light to Gentiles—fulfilled by Christ—Lk 2:32
 - Servant's 'light' role—fulfilled by Apostles and Church—Acts 13:47; 26:23
3. References to 'father' and 'throne of glory' allude to—Is 9:6-7
 - Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace
 - There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace
 - On the throne of David and over his kingdom

d. Implications

1. Eliakim held supreme *political/financial* power over the royal household
 - But his power was *temporary*—Eliakim also fell—predicted in Is 22:25
2. Christ fulfills this prophecy completely
 - As the *permanent* Steward of the Royal House of God
 - Whose power is *absolute*—over all aspects of His kingdom—including *spiritual* power

3. CONTEXT OF MATTHEW

- a. Jesus promised to Peter [and the Apostles] the ‘keys of the kingdom’—Mt16:19
 - b. In Revelation 1 and 3—He reinforces—that He retains authority over these keys
4. APPLICATION

- a. Christ holds power over death and judgment—Rev 1:17
- b. He also controls salvation—who will enter the King’s household—Rev 3:7
- c. He is the true guardian of the true synagogue
 - The One who was rejected by false Jews in His own life and ministry
 - Who now opposes false Jews in verse 9—who rejected true believers in Philadelphia

8 ‘I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

A WEAK CHURCH DOING WHAT IS STRONG—verse 8

A. I KNOW YOUR DEEDS

1. OMINOUS WORDS

- ❖ In other letters—it always precedes a negative report
 - Ephesus—2:2—mixed review → hard-working but lost first love
 - Thyatira—2:19—mixed review → loving and faithful but tolerant of immorality
 - Sardis—3:1—negative review → good reputation but dead
 - Laodicea—3:15—negative review → lukewarm

2. AFFIRMING WORDS

- a. But Philadelphia’s report is completely positive
- b. Philadelphia—despite being weak—has done two good things
 - 1. You have kept my word
 - 2. You have not denied my name

B. THE OPEN DOOR NO ONE CAN SHUT

1. TWO UNLIKELY INTERPRETATIONS

- a. Open door—for salvation
 - 1. Based on Christ being the Door of the sheep—Jn 10:7-9
 - 2. Problem
 - The causative clause at the end of the verse

- Yes Jesus does open the door of salvation—because we are *weak*—and cannot save ourselves
- But He does not offer salvation—*because* we keep His word and don't deny His name
- Plus—'keeping His word' and 'not denying His name'—suggest they are already saved

b. Open door—of martyrdom

1. Upcoming persecution/tribulation—opportunity to suffer for Christ
2. This might fit
 - Because a 'weak' church needs encouragement when facing tribulation
 - Promise—since you have been faithful—you will have more opportunity to suffer
3. Problem
 - Yes—most of Revelation deals with upcoming tribulation and persecution
 - All the churches will face it—so why is Philadelphia unique?

2. TWO BETTER INTERPRETATIONS

a. Open door—of missionary opportunity

1. Paul spoke of a 'wide door' to the Gentiles—I Cor 16:9; II Cor 2:12
2. Philadelphia's position as frontier city—on edge of Phrygia and the East
 - Building on original purpose of city to be an outpost of Hellenism
3. Possibly—even to reach persecuting Jews in their own city

b. Open door—of the Kingdom

1. Deals with identity of church as true kingdom people
2. The church had been excluded from Jewish synagogue in Philadelphia
3. But here Jesus affirms identity of Philadelphia church
 - a. Old legalistic Judaism—is not the true kingdom
 - b. Christ has the true 'keys' to the kingdom of God—[of David]
 - c. The Christians of Philadelphia are part of this true kingdom
 - d. They cannot lose that identity
 - o Even though they are weak—in comparison to the Jewish community
 - o Even though they have been excluded from the Jewish synagogue

C. THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH

1. YOU HAVE LITTLE POWER

- a. Lacked power in their own city—possible reasons:
 - 1. Rejected by Jewish community
 - 2. Persecuted as a new sect
 - 3. Had little standing in the mercantile community—probably poorer citizens
- b. Possibly small in size
 - 1. Especially when compared to other churches
 - 2. Population base on frontier town was not as large

2. [YOU] HAVE KEPT MY WORD

- a. Jesus told His disciples—if you keep my word, you abide in Me—Jn 15:10
- b. Two meanings of ‘keep’
 - 1. To protect—guard it—as a part of your very being
 - 2. To observe—obey it—in everyday actions
- c. Previous letters needed to exhort churches to ‘keep’ faithful
 - 1. Thyatira—2:26—‘keep my deeds until the end’
 - 2. Sardis—3:3—‘keep what you have received and heart—and repent!’
- d. Philadelphia needs no such exhortation—it has kept the Word faithfully
- e. Evidence—Philadelphians have obeyed—been faithful to Christ’s name

3. [YOU] HAVE NOT DENIED MY NAME

- a. Jesus told His disciples—Jan 10:32-33
 - If you confess me before men—I will confess you before My Father
 - If you deny me before men—I will deny you before My Father
- b. In order to ‘overcome’—Sardis needed exhortation—to confess Christ—3:5
- c. Philadelphia needs no such exhortation
 - 1. They have faced persecution and exclusion by Jewish community
 - 2. But they have been faithful—to Jesus as the True Messiah

9 Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

VINDICATION OF THE PHILADELPHIANS—verse 9

A. PROBLEM

1. JEWS IN PHILADELPHIA CLAIMED TO BE GOD’S TRUE PEOPLE
2. JEWS ACCUSED CHRISTIANS OF BEING FALSE JEWS—EXCLUDED THEM
3. JEWS PROBABLY USED INFLUENCE TO PERSECUTE CHRISTIANS

B. PARALLEL SITUATION

1. EXACTLY THE SAME PROBLEM IN SMYRNA
2. SEE LETTER TO SMYRNA—2:9
 - As a result—Smyrna Christians suffered poverty and accusations of blasphemy
 - There also—opponents claim to be true Jews—but are not
 - There also—Jews are described as ‘synagogue of Satan’

C. VINDICATION

1. UNLIKELY INTERPRETATION
 - a. Some commentators say—Philadelphian Jews will be converted through the ‘open door’
 - b. Yes—conversion of Jews *will* occur—[Rom 11:26](#)
 - c. But Romans is not the right context for *this* passage
 - Because—Philadelphian Jews will bow at the *Christians*’ feet
 - If this were about conversion—they would bow at *Jesus*’ feet
 - d. This is not about conversion and worship—but submission
 - e. This is not about narrow submission—of just one small group to a local church
2. LIKELY INTERPRETATION
 - a. Properly applies Isaiah’s prophecy 60:14

Is 60:14—*The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet.*
 - b. Jews had misapplied this passage—as political submission to them as a nation
 - c. Instead—this is spiritual submission of *all* nations to the Kingdom of God

- d. Promised to Thyatira—if they overcome

2:26-27—He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father. . .

- e. Implied promise

1. Not just—to Thyatira and Philadelphia
2. This applies to the entire Kingdom of God—all true churches will be vindicated

FOUR PROMISES AND AN EXHORTATION—verses 10-12

- | | | |
|-------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. First Promise | = | I will protect you |
| 2. Second Promise | = | No one will take your crown |
| 3. Third Promise | = | Security: I will make you a pillar |
| 4. Fourth Promise | = | I will give you a new name |

10 *Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*

FIRST PROMISE—I WILL PROTECT YOU—verse 10

A. THE BASIS OF THE PROMISE

1. YOU HAVE KEPT THE WORD OF MY ENDURANCE
 - a. NOT—“You have kept my word of (about) endurance”—not just what Jesus *taught* them
 - b. BUT—“You have kept *the* word of *my* endurance—you also have observed my example
2. THE WORD OF/ABOUT JESUS’ OWN ENDURANCE
 - a. The Gospel accounts of Jesus’ own endurance—facing suffering
 - b. Later teachings of the Apostles—telling of Jesus’ suffering—II Th :5 and Heb 12:2-3
3. NOT BASED ON THEORETICAL TEACHING—BUT ASSURANCE IN CHRIST
 - He suffered—so He could come to our aid when we suffer—Heb 2:18
4. EVIDENCE OF PHILADELPHIANS’ FAITHFULNES
 - Refers back to **verse 8**—*you have kept My word*
 - Not just kept His teaching—but followed His example—of suffering

B. THE PROMISE

1. PLAY ON THE WORD ‘KEEP’

- Because you have *kept* my word—i.e. observed/obeyed it
- Now I will *keep* you—i.e. protect you

2. I WILL PROTECT YOU FROM

- Intense scholarly debate—what does this mean?
 - Option 1 = Protect you from (effects)—i.e. enable you to go through it unscathed?
 - Option 2 = Keep you (away) from—i.e. remove you from tribulation?
- Option 1—protection in tribulation—scholars rely on these passages
 - **Jn 17:15**—*I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.*
 - **II Pe 2:9**—*The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.*
- Option 2—removal from tribulation—scholars say:
 - **John 17** is not eschatological—but about immediate situation of Jesus’ disciples
 - **Rev 3:10** is not about local situation—but about a whole period—global end times
- Many passages in Revelation suggest believers will *endure* tribulation and martyrdom

3. THE HOUR OF TESTING

- NOT—a limited and definitive time—as ‘tribulation for ten days’—in Smyrna
- BUT—probably the end-times—near the *Parousia*
 - ‘Whole world’—suggests global conflagration—also used in 12:9 and 16:14
 - ‘Those who dwell on the earth’
 - Used elsewhere in Revelation to describe unbelievers in general
 - Enemies of God who worship the beast and persecute Christians
 - Context suggests—those in the end times that rebel against God
- Set in the context of Christ’s second coming—see **verse 11**
- The promise to Philadelphia
 - Believers will be protected against God’s wrath against unbelievers
 - But believers will undergo but endure the wrath of Satan

11 I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

SECOND PROMISE—NO ONE WILL TAKE YOUR CROWN—verse 11

A. CHRIST’S RETURN PROMISED

1. THREE PREVIOUS PREDICTIONS GAVE WARNINGS

- Ephesus—removal of lampstand—2:5
- Pergamum—judgment by sword of His mouth—2:16
- Sardis—sudden/unexpected judgment—3:3

2. CHRIST’S ARRIVAL ACCOMPANIES ALL PROMISES

- Two previous ones—vindication and protection
- The future ones—becoming a pillar and having a new name
- Immediate focus here—no one will take your crown

B. THE PROMISE—NO ONE WILL TAKE YOUR CROWN

1. HOLD FAST—EXHORTATION ACCOMPANIES THE PROMISE

❖ Hold fast to all everything mentioned

- Entering the open door—being kingdom people
- Keeping My word
- Confessing (not denying) my name
- Following the example of My perseverance

2. CONDITIONAL PROMISE

a. Wording of promise

- Hold fast—*so that*—no one will take your crown
- Suggests *possibility*—that crown *could* be forfeited

b. Possibility of not getting the crown—Paul warns about being disqualified

I Cor 9:24-27—*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*

c. This does not mean we can ‘lose our salvation’

d. But the proof of being saved is finishing the race!

e. When the Lord returns—we must be found ‘ready’—He said so in **Mark 13**

f. The next promise—builds on this one—the security of those who are faithful.

12 *He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; 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 My new name.*

THIRD AND FOURTH PROMISES---verse 12

SECURITY—AND—A NEW NAME

A. PROMISE OF SECURITY—I WILL MAKE YOU A PILLAR

1. GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND' CONSTANT EARTHQUAKES IN REGION
2. OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND
 - a. Solomon placed two pillars in the Temple—I Kings 7:21 and II Chron 3:15-17
 - b. He also wrote two names on them
 - *Jachin* = 'He establishes'
 - *Boaz* = 'In Him is strength'
 - c. Application—the interconnection between 'pillar'—and given 'name'
 - There is strength in the pillars themselves—i.e. faithful believers
 - But also in the name associated with them—i.e. the Name of the Lord
3. NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUND
 - a. The leading Apostles—were known as 'pillars' of the church—Gal 2:9
 - b. The church itself is—a 'pillar and foundation of the truth'—I Tim 3:15
4. AND YOU WILL NEVER GO OUT
 - a. Geographical and contextual background
 - Philadelphian citizens—had to live outside the city in huts while they rebuilt it
 - b. Biblical background
 - Ps 23—I will dwell in the house of the Lord *forever*
5. APPLICATION
 - Philadelphian Christians were 'weak'—but would become strong pillars of the Kingdom

B. PROMISE OF A NEW NAME

1. HAVING THE NAME OF GOD
 - a. To have the name of God—is to belong to God—to be *His* people—*His* possession
 - b. Israelites—had God's name put upon them—Nu 6:26; Dt 28:10, Is 43:7; Dan 9:18-19
 - c. Christians—are adopted into God's family—[and go by His name]—Rom 8:14-17
 - d. Promised Name in Revelation
 - Saints are sealed on their foreheads—Rev 7:3
 - They are given the name of God—14:1; 22:4
 - Distinguished from unbelievers—who have the name of the Beast—13:17; 14:11
2. HAVING THE NAME OF THE CITY OF GOD
 - a. Historical background

- Roman citizenship attached to particular cities
- Example—Paul of Tarsus
- Philadelphia—changed names several times—to identify with patrons

b. Biblical reminders

1. By Jesus—His kingdom was not of this world—**Jn 18:36**
2. By Paul—our citizenship is in heaven—**Ph 3:20**

c. Biblical descriptions—the New Jerusalem

- Ez 48:35—the name of the city is ‘the Lord is there’
- Gal 4:26—*the Jerusalem that is above*
- Heb 12:22—*the heavenly Jerusalem* [also Heb 13:14]
- Rev 21:2—*the New Jerusalem*—begins full explanation of heavenly city

3. THE NEW NAME

a. The new name of Jesus is still a mystery

b. Some think it is ‘the name above all names’—**Ph 2:9**

- But Jesus Christ is ‘Lord’—does not reveal a *new* name

c. Revelation says He will come with a name we do not know

Rev 19:12—*His eyes are a flam of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself*

- The next verse says “His name is called the Word of God”
- But this does not describe His ‘unknown name’
- **Rev 19:13**—cannot reveal the ‘unknown name’ if it will be a mystery at the Parousia

d. The name is *still* unknown—but what we **know** this—we will share His name!!!

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