

Living Word Fellowship Church

Revelation

The Church of Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13

Part I

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I. Introduction

Only the letter to the church at Philadelphia contains no word of rebuke. Even today this Asian city has a Christian group. Although so worthy, this church was, nevertheless, to know a time of severe trial. Note carefully that the word is trial here, not *tribulation*. But in the trial, the believers were to be divinely kept (see Jn 17:15).¹

Christ referred to their enemies as the synagogue of Satan (cf. 2:9). They were Jews who opposed the believers' Christian testimony. False religion has always been formidable and antagonistic against the true Christian faith. The day will come, however, when all opponents of the faith will have to acknowledge the truth (cf. Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10–11). Then Christ declared, I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.² Despite how formidable their opponents are, God said He "will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth". (vs. 10b; NASU)

This church is kept and praised by God because it endured the testing of their oppressors, remained faithful to the Lord proving to be overcomers, and as a result they will win the "crown of life" and in God's holy temple, they will be a pillar with God's name written on them.

The church of Philadelphia joins the church of Smyrna as a church that is praised by God. Both churches were attacked by the people in the synagogue of Satan, both churches endured and both churches received the "crown of life".

II. Background Information

A. Background Information:

This city (see Bible Dictionaries *in loc.*) lies some 28 miles south-east of Sardis. From the words of our author, it is clear that its Christianity was of a high character, standing in point of merit second only to Smyrna among the seven Churches. In the time of Ignatius (*Ad Phil.* 3, 5, 10) it enjoyed the same high reputation.³

The Philadelphians have little strength to exercise their God-given key of authority, undoubtedly because of the opposition of the "synagogue of Satan." Therefore, Jesus intervenes and opens a door for them that their opponents cannot shut. The shut door has been understood to refer to the excommunication of Christians

¹ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F. (Eds.). (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Re 3:7). Chicago: Moody Press.

² Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 939). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ Charles, R. H. (1920). [A critical and exegetical commentary on the Revelation of St John](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 84–85). Edinburgh: T&T Clark International.

from the synagogue according to the Twelfth Benediction issued by the Jews at the Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90. However, this benediction only formalizes the earlier practice of local synagogues, which excommunicated those who professed Jesus (cf. John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). The “open door” metaphor in the New Testament usually refers to an opportunity to evangelize. Paul wrote to the nearby church at Colosse, “And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message” (Col. 4:3). Evangelization, however, does not appear to be in mind here since Jesus admonishes the Philadelphians only to “hold on to what you have” (Rev. 3:11), which is not an encouragement for active outreach. Rather, the phrase looks forward to the open door to heaven, which John is given in 4:1. This same open door to fellowship with God is likewise available to the Philadelphians, despite their exclusion from the synagogue.⁴

“Crown” here alludes to the victor’s crown, received at the end of a race or for military exploits.⁵

A contrast may be intended between the immovableness of the Christian’s future position and the liability of pillars in the Philadelphian temples to succumb to the effects of the frequent earthquakes which took place there (see on ver. 7†). Such pillars, moreover, were frequently sculptured in human shape. (3) Matthew Henry suggests that a reference may be intended to monumental pillars bearing inscriptions; the significance being “a monumental pillar of the free and powerful grace of God, never to be defaced or removed; not a support—heaven needing no such props.” But it seems much more likely that St. John is alluding to the Hebrew temple.⁶

III. Definition of Key Terms

A. *Christ Description of Himself:*

1. Its fundamental idea is separation, consecration, pure, and abstaining from earth's defilement.
2. The word indicates the display of the character of God whose perfect attributes cause Him to be separated from His creation.

B. *'Who is true':*

1. He is pure from all error.
2. Everything Christ is saying is factual. It is a pure representation of a present or coming reality.
3. No matter if what Christ is saying seems unrealistic, they can rest their hats that it contains no error and it will be factually represented.
4. The Word of God (Logos) means, He is saying time will expose it’s factual because God does not just say it, He has the power to put every part of what He is saying in place.

C. *'Key to David':*

1. In Revelation 1:18, Jesus declares that He holds “the keys of death and Hades.” Jesus here describes his spiritual authority using language drawn from Isaiah. God instead promises to give His authority to

⁴ Arnold, C. E. (2002). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*](#). (Vol. 4, pp. 274–275). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ Keener, C. S. (1993). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*](#) (Re 3:11). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁶ Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Ed.). (1909). [*Revelation*](#) (pp. 112–113). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

another named Eliakim (22:20–21). “The key of David” —a symbol of that authority—would be placed upon his shoulder.⁷

2. Whereas the keys in 1:18b are those of “death and Hades,” here we have instead a quotation from Isa. 22:22: “the one having the key of David, who opens and no one shuts, and who shuts and no one opens” (the change from singular “key” to plural “keys” is probably not significant). The substitution is meant to amplify the idea of the original phrase in 1:18b by underscoring the sovereignty that Christ holds over the sphere of “death and Hades” (for further support see below).⁸

D. “Who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens says.”

1. Though the “open door” primarily means the church’s “own assured entry into the New Jerusalem, it is also the way by which others are to be brought in.” Therefore, Jesus, who holds sway over the power of salvation and judgment, exerts this power through His followers (so Matt. 16:18).⁹
2. The shut door has been understood to refer to the excommunication of Christians from the synagogue according to the Twelfth Benediction issued by the Jews at the Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90. However, this benediction only formalizes the earlier practice of local synagogues, which excommunicated those who professed Jesus (cf. John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). The “open door” metaphor in the New Testament usually refers to an opportunity to evangelize.¹⁰

E. *Synagogue of Satan*:

1. These Jews are called “the synagogue of Satan,” which probably means that they were persecuting the Christians (cf. on 2:9; Ignatius, *Philad.* 6:1 reveals that a conflict between the Philadelphian church and some form of Judaism continued into the second century). These ethnic Jews claim to be the true Israel, though they are not.²⁰¹ In reality, they are liars because they do not believe in Jesus, the true Jewish Messiah, and they persecute those who are faithful witnesses to Him (see on 3:14 and cf. Prov. 14:5). The economic prosperity of the Jews of this region (see below) suggests that they may have compromised their Judaism to some degree by accommodating to the religious practices of the trade guilds and even imperial religion, which itself had become mixed with local pagan worship (in this respect see further on 2:9). The Talmud (*b. Shabbat* 147b) asserts that “the wines and the baths of Phrygia have separated the ten tribes from Israel,” which comes close to the pronouncement here that the “Jews” in Philadelphia are “not” true Jews but liars.¹¹

- F. Keep you from the hour of testing – Christ, knowing their desire to obey Him, will not allow them to breakdown under the pressure placed upon them to sin.

⁷ Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, pp. 273–274). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (pp. 283–284). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁹ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 287). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹⁰ Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, pp. 274–275). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (pp. 286–287). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

1. They had an open ministry (3:8) and experienced victory (3:9). They were promised to be kept from the “great time of testing” (3:10) in contrast with “those who belong to this world,” referring to the people who continue to reject the salvation of God (6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:8).¹²
 2. Verse 10 is one of the strongest declarations, that the church will not go through the Tribulation. True believers today are a part of the Philadelphia church and will not enter into those seven years of awful judgment on earth. See also 1 Thess. 5:8–9. The very text of Revelation is another proof, for there is no mention of the church until 22:16. The prayer of 22:20 would be impossible to pray if we had to wait for the Tribulation to come before we would be raptured.¹³
- G. *‘those who dwell upon the earth’* - Because the Philadelphians have heeded the command to endure patiently, Jesus pledges to exempt them from the universal trial to soon come upon “those who live on the earth” (or “earth dwellers”; *katoikountes*). This distinctive participle is found here and in ten other texts. The earth dwellers consistently oppose God and His will on earth (13:8; 12, 14 [2x]; 17:2, 8). Within Revelation, this hour of trial unfolds through the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. Exemption from the hour of trial is not deliverance from persecution in the great tribulation, because those later depicted as slain are martyred at the hands of the earth dwellers (6:9–11; cf. 11:10 [2x]). The trial is God’s wrath poured out on the rebellious earth dwellers (8:13), and only the Christians are spared divine judgment.¹⁴
- H. Crown of life – The Crown is a reward for those who prove victorious through trials.
1. We must not allow anyone to take our crown (this is why we must fight the fight of faith, 1 Timothy 6:12; These crowns are incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25).
 - a) Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4).
 - b) Crown of Life (James 1:12).
 - c) Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 2:10).
 2. Those believers who remained steadfast through adversity and persecution receive a victorious prize; the best of the best Christ provides to those who remain faithful in the midst of trials.
 - a) The Christian must always be ready for Jesus’ coming (3:3). Christ’s return with expected suddenness is an incentive to persevere in faithful service. Through misconduct one can lose a crown that had been previously attained (2 John 8). The crown signifies the royal authority given to the victorious co-heirs of Christ. The judgment seat of Christ will be an occasion of either reward or regret (2 Cor. 5:10).¹⁵

¹² Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 739). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

¹³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 804). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁴ Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, p. 275). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁵ Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson’s new illustrated Bible commentary* (p. 1740). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.