

# Letters to the 7 Churches: Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13

## Context

---

The church of Jesus Christ is made up of people who are not perfect, but seeking to become more like its perfect head. It is not a place for people who have 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.<sup>1</sup> The church at Philadelphia in one of two churches identified in Rev 2-3 as a church that was seeking to fulfill that goal without any statements of correction from the Lord.

## 7 noted points for each of the 7 churches

---

### I. Identification of “The One”

**Revelation 3:7**—*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:*

- **Holy**—utterly separate from sin. Reference to Christ's deity, because only God is holy.
  - **Revelation 4:8**—*And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.”*
  - **Isaiah 6:3**—*And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.”*
  - **Psalms 71:22**—*I will also praise You with a harp, Even Your truth, O my God; To You I will sing praises with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel.*

(cf. Revelation 16:7, 9:2, 11).

- **True**—means authentic, genuine, real, as opposed to the false and the fake
  - **Revelation 15:3**—*And they \*sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!*
  - **Revelation 6:10**— and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, <sup>1</sup>will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”
- **Key of David**— Messianic authority; in the line of David; keys are emblematic of authority, control, and here, sovereignty; Christ has complete control of the kingdom and its resources.
  - **Isaiah 22:22**— “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.
  - **Revelation 1:18**—*and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.*

---

<sup>1</sup> The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 1-11, p 118.

## II. Identification of the church

**Revelation 3:7a**—*And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:...*

- Angel (Aggelos)—messenger. This is a representative from the church who will take the letter back to the church—likely an elder or pastor.
- There are no other specific biblical references to this church; however, there is one reference that is a possibility: **Acts 19:10**—*This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*

## III. Identification of the city

**Revelation 3:7a**—*And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:...*

- Founded in 186 B.C. by King Eumenes of Pergamum or his brother, Attalus II.<sup>2</sup>
- Attalus II nickname was Philadelphus ("brother lover") because of his loyalty
- It was along the postal route and along several major trade routes which gave it some advantages

## IV. Identification of what they did well

**Revelation 3:7-11**—*'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. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

- **I know your deeds**—The omniscient Christ knows our deeds and assesses accurately our deeds.
- **Little power**—The church was relatively small but was positively affecting the city. It was made up of poor, uninfluential people.
  - **Luke 12:32**—*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.*
  - **I Corinthians 1:26-29**—*For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; <sup>27</sup>but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, <sup>28</sup>and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no man may boast before God.*
- **Kept My word**—The church was obedient to the commandants of the Lord.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p 120.

- **Did not deny His name**—They remained faithful and loyal to Christ even in the midst of intense persecution.
  - **Revelation 14:12**—*Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.*
- **Kept the word of My perseverance** (v 10)—enduring well; steadfastness in the midst of trying times
  - **Hebrews 12:2-4**—*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. <sup>4</sup>You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;*
  - **2 Thessalonians 3:5**—*May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.*
- **Cause those...[to] come and bow down at your feet**—These were hostile Jews standing in opposition to the claims of Christianity and were opposing God—as is always the case with their father, Satan. The Jews accretion that they represented God Almighty was a lie. They were (and are) deceived (Rom 2:28-29; 9:6-7). Bowing down represents a submission and humility.
  - **Isaiah 45:14**—*Thus says the LORD, "The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush and the Sabeans, men of stature, will come over to you and will be yours; they will walk behind you, they will come over in chains and will bow down to you; They will make supplication to you: Surely, God is with you, and there is none else, no other God."*
- **I also will keep you from the hour of testing**—An incredible promise of God's faithfulness to this church but also to all churches that are faithful to Him. This is also true of the future church being delivered from the Tribulation period of intense persecution because of the rapture (I Cor 15:51-54; I Thes 4:13-17).
- **Hour of testing**—1) future test; 2) specific period of time; 3) it will expose people to determine genuineness; 4) it will come upon the whole earth; 5) testing people—the whole unbelieving earth (Rev 6:10)

## V. Identification of what they did not do well

There were no words of condemnation to this church. There were only two churches that received no words of correction—Smyrna and this church.

## VI. Identification of how to change

Because there was no reference to what they were not doing well, there was no correction on what they needed to do to change.

**Revelation 3:11**—*I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

- **Coming quickly**—this coming is different from the other references to his coming for purposes of judgment against their refusal to repent. Here the reference is to his second coming to deliver the church (2 Thess 2:1). His return

is imminent; it will happen!

- **Hold fast**—remain faithful until I come.
  - **Matthew 10:22**—*You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.*
  - **Colossians 1:21-23**—*And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, <sup>22</sup>yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— <sup>23</sup>if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.*
- **Crown**—the crown which leads to life (Rev 2:10)

## VII. Identification of exhortation and promise

**Revelation 3:12-13**—*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. <sup>13</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.<sup>1</sup>*

- Promises are connected to “him who overcomes” (1 John 5:4-5)
- **God promises 4 things:**
  - **1) Make his a pillar in the temple of My God**—represents stability, permanence, and immovability<sup>3</sup>
    - **Temple**—represents heaven
  - **2) Write on him the name of My God**—we belong to Christ. He owns us.
    - **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**—*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup>For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*
  - **3) ...and the name of the city of My God**—the new Jerusalem (Rev 21) identify home, safety, and security.
  - **4) My new name**—Christ’s new name is Lord. It represents the totality of who He is.
    - **Philippians 2:9-11**—*For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
    - **1 John 3:2**—*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*
- Each of the 7 letters ends with “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Pay attention! Listen up!

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 126