

THE PHILADELPHIANS (PART 1)

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Revelation 3:7-13 contains Jesus Christ's letter to the church at Philadelphia. The text reads: "*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; 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 names. 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. 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. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*" This is an unusual letter, because the Lord has no rebukes for this congregation. We can learn much about how to be a faithful church in the sight of our Lord by learning and following the lessons taught in this letter to the church at Philadelphia.

The power of Christ

In Revelation 3:7, Jesus introduced himself to the church at Philadelphia as "*he that is holy, he that is true, he that has the key of David, he that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens.*" These words would have been a great encouragement to the righteous Philadelphians and should be to all faithful Christians forevermore. Faithful Christians must endure great tribulation for the Lord's sake (Acts 14:22) and must have great trust in the Lord's promises of deliverance and eternal reward (2 Cor 1:9-10). Jesus reminds us that he is holy and he is true. Therefore, he will not fail to protect and save our souls if we follow him. Jesus also has the key of David and power that no man can resist. Therefore, the Lord not only has the *will* to take care of us and fulfill his promises, but also has the *power* to do it. In verse 8,

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(continued)

the Lord says he knows their works. For the Philadelphians, this was not a warning but a comfort. Christ has nothing bad to say about this congregation and he does not forget the works of the righteous (Heb 6:10). Jesus commended this church for their strength, for keeping the word of his patience and not denying his name, and for enduring the persecution of the Jews. Christ knew these works. Therefore, he had set before them an open door which no man could shut, and in verse 11, he also had reserved a crown for them if they continued to hold fast to what they had. No man would have the power to stop what Christ had in store for them (Rom 8:34-39). This does not teach “once saved, always saved.” The Philadelphians could *let* their crown be taken (Rev 3:11), but if they held fast to it, then nobody would be able to take it away.

The true Jews

In verse 9, the Philadelphians, like the Smyrnans in chapter 2:9, had been suffering persecution at the hands of the Jews. In this verse, the Lord makes it clear who the true Jews are today. God no longer recognizes physical Israel. The Old Covenant was with physical Israel (Deut 5:1-3). In the New Covenant, Christians are a spiritual nation (1 Pet 2:5,9-12), spiritual Jews (Rom 2:28-29), and the Israel of God (Gal 6:14-16). Spiritual Israel includes physical Gentiles (Rom 4:11-13; 9:6-8; 10:24-25; 1 Pet 2:9-12). Only Christians are the true Jews according to the New Covenant. Physical Jews who do not believe in Christ are not true Jews. They say they are Jews but they are lying. Jesus says they are actually of the synagogue of Satan. The Lord also promised the Philadelphians that these Jews who had persecuted them would be made to come and worship before their feet and would know that Jesus loved the church they had persecuted. This does not say that the Philadelphians themselves would be worshiped, but that worship would take place before their feet. Christ did not state exactly when this would be fulfilled, but it likely will be on judgment day when all the unbelievers will bow before Christ and confess his name and glorify God for the good works done by his children (Rom 14:10-12; Php 2:9-11; 1 Pet 2:12). On that day, all the unbelievers will certainly know whom the Lord Jesus Christ loves.