

Revelation Chapter 3 v 7 to 22

Letters to Seven Churches – Philadelphia and Laodicea

The sixth letter – to Philadelphia (the ‘Missionary’ Church)

‘Philadelphia’ means ‘brotherly love’, and the city was founded by Eumenes II in 189 BC. The city is named after his younger brother, Attalus II, who was nicknamed ‘Philadelphos’, because he loved his brother. The city commanded the highway from Europe to the East and thus gained the reputation as a ‘missionary’ city of Hellenistic culture.

Philadelphia also suffered from frequent earthquakes. When a building collapsed in an earthquake often all that remained were the huge pillars. Jesus offers us this same strength, to remain standing in Him when everything around us crumbles (verse 12). True to her calling (verses 8, 11), in the 14th century Philadelphia stood alone against the Ottoman empire as a free, self-governing Christian city.

- Jesus uses the titles “holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut” (verse 7). Why are these titles relevant to the situation here?
 - What good things does Jesus have to say about this church (verse 8)?
 - What are Jesus’ concerns?
 - Jesus promises to do two things for this church – what will he do (verse 10)?
 - What one thing does Jesus command (verse 11)?
 - What does Jesus promise the “one who conquers” (verse 12)?
1. “Key of David” (verse 7) – see Isaiah 22 v 20 to 22. Eliakim was King Hezekiah's treasurer and having the key to the house of David meant he had power to grant access to the king.
 2. “Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut” (v 8) – this suggests opportunities for preaching the Gospel, as Paul urged the Colossians to pray for him (Colossians 4 v 2 to 4).
 3. “Synagogue of Satan” (verse 9) may refer to the large Jewish community in the city. Bishop Ignatius, writing to Philadelphia a few years later, refers to the Jews who had persecuted the Christians as being converted, and turning in contrition to those whose adversity they had caused.
 4. “(Out of) the hour of (the) trial” (ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ, *ek tes horas tou peirasmou*) (verse 10) suggests that Jesus promises to keep this church out of the Great Tribulation.
 5. “To try those who live on the earth” (verse 10) refers to ‘earth-dwellers’, as opposed to Christians who are pilgrims, strangers on earth, whose citizenship is in heaven.
 6. “The name of my God” (verse 12) – יהוה (Jehovah); “my own new name” (verse 12), “a name... that no one knows but himself” (see Revelation 19 v 12).
- **Admonitory** (all churches) – participate in missionary outreach to all nations (see Matthew 28 v 18 to 20).
 - **Homiletic** (personal) – be a loyal ambassador for Christ.
 - **Prophetic** – this letter fits the period of major international missionary expansion and growth, generally corresponding to the 18th and 19th centuries.

[MORE OVER...]

The seventh letter – to Laodicea (the ‘Modern’ or ‘Apostate’ Church)

South of Philadelphia stood the large prosperous city of Laodicea on the banks of the river Lycus, midway between the hot springs of Hierapolis and the cold waters of Colossae – the city was fed by an aqueduct from Hierapolis, the water being lukewarm when it arrived. Laodicea was a successful commercial and financial centre – it was never militarily defensible, so its strategy was one of compromise.

Founded by the Ionians in 2000 BC, it was later captured by the Phrygians; in 250 BC it was taken by the Syrians, and Antiochus II rebuilt the town, naming it after his wife, Laodice; ultimately it passed into the hands of the Roman empire.

Laodicea was a city of merchant banking, gold refining and textile manufacturing using black wool from the Lycus valley. There was also a famous school of medicine, known for its ophthalmic treatments.

- Why are the titles “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation” (verse 14) relevant? (Heresies denying God as creator were springing up at nearby Colossae.)
 - Does Jesus have anything good to say about this church?
 - What are his major concerns (verses 15 to 17)?
 - What advice does Jesus give church members (verse 18)?
 - What does he promise to those he loves, and to the individual who hears his voice and opens the door to him (verses 19, 20)?
 - What does Jesus promise the overcomer (verse 21)?
1. “You say ‘I am rich’...” (verse 17) – affluence leads to spiritual complacency and powerlessness (contrast with Smyrna: ‘poor but rich’).
 2. “I counsel you to buy...” (verse 18) – Jesus speaks to business people in their own terms: (a) the ultimate Refiner offers his gold; (b) the Bridegroom offers his covering of white clothes; (c) the great Physician offers his remedy to restore sight – his Holy Spirit.
 3. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock...” (verse 20) – a real indictment of that church: is he inside or outside the church (compare with Revelation 2 v 1)?
 4. Note the promise of intimate fellowship to anyone who responds to Christ’s invitation. “Sit with me on my throne...” (verse 21) – note also other New Testament promises for those who respond to Christ’s invitation: (a) to reign with him (2 Timothy 2 v 12); (b) to reign over Israel (Luke 22 v 30); and (c) to reign over angels (1 Corinthians 6 v 3).
- **Admonitory** and **homiletic** – the need to guard against prosperity, materialism, compromise and apostasy.
 - **Prophetic** – this letter fits the ‘modern’ period, corresponding to the 20th and 21st centuries, to the present day.

Prayer –

Lord, thank you for these letters. Help us to guard against prosperity, materialism, compromise and apostasy. Help us always to be loyal ambassadors for Christ. In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.