

**The Holy Genuine Door
The Church at Philadelphia
Revelation 3:7 – 13**

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We now come to the sixth church that Jesus is writing to. This is the 3rd church of the four that are referenced by Jesus as being in existence at the time leading up to the tribulation. This is the church at Philadelphia.

Just like Thyatira, there is very little excavation work that has been done in Alashehir, which is the name of the city that Philadelphia now goes under in Turkey. The site has been continuously occupied since at least 138 BC



(Bolen 2012, Used with Permission)

The city's name was chosen in recognition of the loyalty of Attalus II to his brother Eumenes II. (Thomas 1992, 270)

Philadelphia was founded more for consolidating and regulating and educating the central regions subject to the Pergamenian kings. The intention of its founder was to make it a centre of the Græco-Asiatic civilisation and a means of spreading the Greek language and manners in the eastern parts of Lydia and in Phrygia. It was a missionary city from the beginning, founded to promote a certain unity of spirit, customs, and loyalty within the realm, the apostle of Hellenism in an Oriental land. (Ramsay 1904, 391-392)

Nestled as it was at the southern edge of a level river basin, it sat astraddle the main routes north and south, and at the head of a large plain of lava deposit soil that was perfect for vineyards. (Fee 2011, 50)

Looking from the acropolis of Philadelphia to the south, you can see the source of the volcanic soil as well as the source for the earthquake activity in the region



(Bolen, Philadelphia view to south from Acropolis 2012, Used with Permission)

As you can tell from the image above, evidence of vulcanism still remains in the area.

Due to the nature of the soil in the area, grapes became an important crop. Since wine grapes were the crop of the area, there was also worship of Dionysus as well. Again, the area has been continually inhabited for over 2000 years.



(Bolen, Grapevines west of Philadelphia 2012, Used with Permission)

Grapes were one of the principal crops, and, in keeping with this, Dionysus was one of the chief objects of pagan worship. Through the centuries, a nominal Christian testimony continued in this city of Philadelphia and prospered even under Turkish rule. But all nominal Christians left the city for Greece after World War I. (Walvoord 2008, 83-84)

In the earthquake of 17 AD that damaged most of the cities of Asia Minor, Philadelphia was almost completely destroyed. Tacitus provides some additional background about that earthquake.

In the same year, twelve important cities of Asia collapsed in an earthquake, the time being night, so that the havoc was the less foreseen and the more devastating. Even the usual resource in these catastrophes, a rush to open ground, was unavailing, as the fugitives were swallowed up in yawning chasms. Accounts are given of huge mountains sinking, of former plains seen heaved aloft, of fires flashing out amid the ruin. As the disaster fell heaviest on the Sardians, it brought them the largest measure of sympathy, the Caesar promising ten million sesterces, and remitting for five years their payments to the national and imperial exchequers. The Magnesians of Sipylus were ranked second in the extent of their losses and their indemnity. In the case of the Temnians, Philadelphenes, Aegeates, Apollonideans, the so-called Mostenians and Hyrcanian Macedonians, and the cities of Hierocaesarea, Myrina, Cyme, and Tmolus, it was decided to exempt them from tribute for the same term and to send a senatorial commissioner to view the state of affairs and administer relief. (Tacitus, et al. 1925-1937, 459-461)

In gratitude, the city renamed itself Neocaesarea during the reigns of Tiberius and Claudius. An inscription in faraway Puteoli in Italy (quite near Naples) recording the gratitude of fourteen cities in Asia Minor for such imperial aid includes Philadelphia and Sardis among them. (deSilva 2018, Philadelphia)

The earthquake of 17 AD though was something that was not easily forgotten by the citizens of Philadelphia due to the continuing issue of aftershocks. For years after, people would not live in town due to the fear of another earthquake but preferred to live away from buildings that might collapse on them.

From Strabo we read” ...and the city Philadelphia, ever subject to earthquakes. Incessantly the walls of the houses are cracked, different parts of the city being thus affected at different times. For this reason but few people live in the city, and most of them spend their lives as farmers in the country, since they have a fertile soil. Yet one may be surprised at the few, that they are so fond of the place when their dwellings are so insecure; and one might marvel still more at those who founded the city.” (Strabo 1924)

In Philadelphia, the city near it, not even the walls are safe, but in a sense are shaken and caused to crack every day. And the inhabitants are continually attentive to the disturbances in the earth and plan all structures with a view to their occurrence. (Strabo 1924)

This state of panic set in at Philadelphia, and continued when Strabo wrote, A.D. 20. Many of the inhabitants remained outside the city living in huts and booths over the vale, and those who were foolhardy enough (as the sober-minded thought) to remain in the city, practised various devices to support and strengthen the walls and houses against the recurring shocks. The memory of this disaster lived long; the very name Katakekaumene was a perpetual warning; people lived amid ever threatening danger, in dread always of a new disaster; and the habit of going out to the open country had probably not disappeared when the Seven Letters were written. (Ramsay 1904, 397)

The insecurity of the people was furthered by a devastating earthquake near Laodicea in 60 CE. Added to this was the economic disaster imposed on them by the emperor Domitian in 92 CE, just a couple of years before our letter. In the kind of ill-advised move that the powerful can make, the emperor required grape growing empire-wide to be reduced in half—most likely, it is thought by historians, as a way to force the growing of corn for his armies. This rather foolish law had particularly devastating effect on places like Philadelphia, which were largely dependent on vineyards for their livelihood. It appears to have fostered a strong sense of betrayal among the people, who had always been very pro-emperor. In a variety of ways much of this history makes sense of some of the data in our letter. (Fee 2011, 50-51)

Thus Philadelphia was distinguished from the other cities by several characteristics: first, it was the missionary city: secondly, its people lived always in dread of a disaster, “the day of trial”: thirdly, many of its people went out of the city to dwell: fourthly, it took a new name from the Imperial god. (Ramsay 1904, 398)

Philadelphia Background

1. A missionary city for Hellenism
2. Lived in constant fear and dread of another disastrous earthquake
3. Citizens lived in the countryside and refused to live in town because of fear
4. Received a new name, more than once

Revelation 3:7–13

“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: ‘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. 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. 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. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (NASB95)

What is the first thing you notice about the letter from Jesus to the church in Philadelphia? There is nothing negative said about this church by the Lord, just like the church in Smyrna. Recall that Smyrna was the church undergoing active persecution, so what is going on in the church in Philadelphia?

As we have also noted before, each church not only represents a real church at a point in time as well as churches throughout time, but they also appear to represent a period of church history. Let’s quickly recap:

1. Ephesus = the Apostolic Period, A.D. 33–100 (Pentecost to John)
2. Smyrna = the Period of Persecution, A.D. 100–313 (John to Constantine)
3. Pergamum = the Period of Constantine, A.D. 313–590 (Constantine to Gregory) Church married to the world
4. Thyatira = Papal Rome, A.D. 590–1517 (Gregory to Luther) Church of the Dark Ages
5. Sardis = Reformation, A.D. 1517–1792 (Luther - Carey)
6. Philadelphia = Modern Missionary Movement, A.D. 1792–1914 (Carey to rapture)
7. Laodicea = Period of Apostasy, A.D. 1914 - Parousia (WWI - Parousia) (Utley 2001, 30)

It is fitting that the city, specifically founded to spread Hellenism to the region, a missionary city for Greek culture; is also characteristic of the missionary church that is sending out men and women to spread the Good News around the world.

The Missionary Church

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:” (NASB95)

This is the first description provided to us from Jesus that does not make a reference back to Revelation 1:16-18, it is something new. Jesus is telling the church in Philadelphia who He is. The first two terms He uses are not adjectives, they are titles.

The first thing Jesus reinforces is He is Holy. In Exodus, God is compared to all of the other Elohim who are part of His creation and there is no comparison – He is unique.

Exodus 15:11

“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you?—majestic in holiness, fearful in praises, working wonders?” (NET)

We see that same emphasis on His holiness in Psalm 111:9 “He delivered his people; he ordained that his covenant be observed forever. His name is holy and awesome.” (NET)

As we consider just exactly who He is, that He is indeed God and He is Holy, we also remember what this Holy God has said to us back in Leviticus 19:2. “Speak to the whole congregation of the Israelites and tell them, “You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.” (NET) God is holy, it is one of His attributes. It is part of who He is.

Even a cursory reading of the scriptures reveals that we cannot even come close to that measure of holiness on our own. Manoah, the father of Sampson, fully realized that as a result of an appearance of

the Angel of the Lord in Judges 13:22 “And Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, because we have seen God!”” (NKJV)

The only way that we can approach God, is on His terms, not ours. Isaiah realized that Isaiah 6:1–7 “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!” And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged.”” (NKJV)

All false religions, all aspects of the occult, try to relate to God on man’s conditions. That is the fallacy, we cannot make God meet our conditions, He is God. We must meet His conditions and primary is holiness. We fail.

God judged man in Genesis 11 for trying to do the same thing as Nimrod and company tried to work out a way to do life with God on man’s terms rather than God’s. Beginning with blatant disobedience to the command to fill the earth did not help either.

Jesus explained it for us in Matthew 7:13–14 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (NASB95)

Only He is the way to approach God, there is no other way. Every other way fails. Jesus says in John 14:6 “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”” (NASB95)

We continually try to negotiate with God in order to see if we can approach Him on our terms. Not only is this impossible, if we think we have succeeded in doing so, we will have a huge shock in store at the great white throne judgement.

Matthew 7:21–23

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (NKJV)

Romans 10:8–11

But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” (NASB95)

It is simple, Jesus is Lord, He is not our buddy, He is not my co-pilot, He is God. He is in charge and He has made provision for us to approach Him, but on His terms. If those terms are rejected, then there is only one thing to look forward to. Hebrews 10:31 “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (NASB95)

But because of what Jesus did on the cross, we have access. If we accept that He is the only way, as He tells us in John 14, then our prayers can go directly to the throne room of the universe where Jesus is.

Mark 16:19

“So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.” (NASB95)

Hebrews 1:3–4

“The Son is the radiance of his glory and the representation of his essence, and he sustains all things by his powerful word, and so when he had accomplished cleansing for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Thus he became so far better than the angels as he has inherited a name superior to theirs.” (NET)

Hebrews 7:25

“So he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” (NET)

We have no holiness of our own. We have no ability to produce holiness, or do anything that is truly holy. All the holiness we have is what we get from Christ. (Fortner 2003, 143-144)

After Jesus tells the church in Philadelphia that He is the very living definition of holiness, He then moves on to also tells them He is the very definition of truth.

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (NASB95)

Jesus is genuine. Whenever He speaks, it is truth. The Greek word used is *alethinos*. ἀληθινός - pertaining to being in accord with what is true, true; being in accordance with fact, true; being real, genuine, authentic, real. (Arndt, et al. 2000, 43)

When we pray, our voices are not simply banging off of the walls, Jesus is listening, He is real, He is authentic, He is at the right hand of the Father and He is making intercession for you and me.

John 14:12–15

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (NKJV)

Everything Jesus said, He will do because He is holy and because He is genuine. These are attributes of God, Jesus is God and as He said, “Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9, NKJV)

He also has the “key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens...” Jesus is making reference to Isaiah 22 and a discussion God had with Shebna about Eliakim and why he was being replaced by Eliakim.

Isaiah 22:22

“The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open.” (NKJV)

Eliakim had the key to the storehouse of the King. He had access to all of the wealth of the king.

The reference here, however, seems to be to spiritual treasures. (Walvoord, Revelation 1985, 939)

Jesus Christ, The Holy God, the genuine, faithful God is telling the church at Philadelphia that He is the one who holds the key of David, He is the one who has the capability of opening and allowing access to

the riches of the King and He also has the capability of denying access to the riches of the King. He is in the business of opening and closing doors.

What are doors in the scriptures?

Genesis 7:1

“Then the LORD said to Noah, “Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time.” (NASB95)

Genesis 7:15–16

“So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life. Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; and the LORD closed it behind him.” (NASB95)

YAHWEH invited in Noah and his family into the ark, and then YAHWEH is the one who closed the door to the past, the old world, the sinful antediluvian world.

Isaiah 45:1–3

“Thus says the LORD to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held— To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: ‘I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel.’” (NKJV)

In Isaiah, we see the open door is literally, an open path to achieve that which God wants to have done. God is using a pagan to achieve His ends and is saying He is the one who opened up the door for it to happen. We see essentially the same thing in the new testament.

1 Corinthians 16:8–9

“But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” (NASB95)

2 Corinthians 2:12

“Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord,” (NASB95)

The open door of opportunity that was seen by Cyrus, is also an open door of opportunity for Paul for ministry.

Acts 14:27

“When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” (NASB95)

We are also told that Paul asked for those supporting him that they would pray for open doors for opportunity to share the Word. Open doors are also for missionary opportunity.

Colossians 4:2–4

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.” (NASB95)

We also see that Jesus is Himself the door, He is the access, He is not only the keeper of the key of David, He is literally the access.

John 10:7–11

So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. “All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” (NASB95)

Everyday Jesus opens up doors for us, and He also closes them as well. In my life, I have experienced having a door closed, I really liked doing Christian radio in Austin TX, but the Lord wanted me somewhere else. There were things I needed to learn and because I am incredibly stubborn, even though I was praying and asking for direction and guidance from the Lord, He had to do it by having my day job position be eliminated. He has done this, in order to make me ready and willing to do what I said I would do, more than once. To follow Him.

Is it scary? Yes, it really is.

What doors are being opened and closed for you?

Jesus is the one who, as we will see later in this letter, not only opened the door but supplied the power and the outcomes. And yes, the enemy will attack us to try and take us down. Our job though, to remain faithful in the midst of whatever is going on and ask Him to open up the next door. Remember though, the enemy can also impersonate and make something look very attractive like an open door from the Lord, when it really isn't. It is important to pray. When the door opens, and it is in response to prayer and it is clear, start walking, look to Him.

Genesis 17:1

“Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless.” (NASB95)

About the commands

Walk before me

Behave or walk with your face turned towards me

The implication is this is to be a lifestyle

...and be blameless

Be perfect without any blemish, without any imperfection, complete, sound

Again, a lifestyle

Abram considered himself to be...

Too old

Too disobedient

Passed over

On the shelf

In time out

Now God can use him because...

Now God can use you and me, because we are now out of the way, we can do nothing without Him

John 15:5

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” (NASB95)

In Acts 12 we read about a door to ministry being closed, violently with Herod putting James to death, but in the same story we see a door opened, literally

Acts 12:5–10

“So Peter was kept in prison, but those in the church were earnestly praying to God for him. On that very night before Herod was going to bring him out for trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the prison cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, “Get up quickly!” And the chains fell off Peter’s wrists. The angel said to him, “Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.” Peter did so. Then the angel said to him, “Put on your cloak and follow me.” Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening through the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. After they had passed the first and second guards, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went outside and walked down one narrow street, when at once the angel left him.” (NET)

God did not force Noah and his family to go into the ark, He invited them and then closed the door to the old world

The Holy Spirit invites us to come and see Jesus, we see Him and He is the door we enter and at the same time, He closes the door to the old world

Peter had gone through an open literal door, Peter could have stayed in jail or he could walk through the door, walking through the door changes everything

More about the door that was opened to the Philadelphia church next week.

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