

**Revelation 3:7-13**  
**An Open Door**  
**Performance Review: Philadelphia**

**Philadelphia:**

- 1) The Greek words that form Philadelphia mean “brotherly love.” It specifically refers to the love that existed between two actual brothers, both local political leaders, one of whom was king of nearby Pergamum.<sup>1</sup>
- 2) Was the youngest of all the seven cities and is located about 30 miles southeast of Sardis.<sup>2</sup> On a clock face, Philadelphia was at 5:00 (Sardis was at 3:00).
- 3) Early church leader Ignatius wrote a letter to the church in Philadelphia (around A.D. 110).
- 4) The city is still inhabited; its modern name is Alasehir (allah-se-here). As late as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there were still people there who called themselves Christians (Greek Orthodox), but at the start of World War One they all evidently left Turkey and moved to Greece.
- 5) A big problem in Philadelphia was the severity of its earthquakes. Although many cities in Asia experienced the earthquake of A.D. 17, Philadelphia was hardest hit. This may play into some of what Jesus said to the church there.

**3:7**

**\*\*\*\*Normally when Jesus identified Himself, He drew descriptions from a vision found in chapter 1. He didn't do that this time (He went totally off script!). How did Jesus describe Himself in 3:7?** Jesus described Himself as **1)** the “holy one,” **2)** the “true one,” **3)** with the key of David, and **4)** opening doors that can't be shut and shutting doors that can't be opened (an open and shut case!). As with each of the seven churches, this description somehow has special relevance for the situation in Philadelphia.

**1) What would the title “holy one” mean to Jewish ears (3:7)?** It was a familiar Hebrew title for God and shows the deity of Christ. **Example:**

ESV **Isaiah 40:25** To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

**2) “True One” (3:7):** The Greek for true can also carry the idea of genuine, perhaps in contrast with the false Jews who persecuted the church in Philadelphia.

**Christology:** Both these two titles were combined and applied to God later in Revelation, suggesting yet again the deity of Christ:

ESV **Revelation 6:10** "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true ...

**3a) What does possession of a key symbolize (3:7)?** Keys represent authority—the authority to lock or to unlock, to prohibit or to permit.

**Exactly what is the “key of David” (3:7)?** This evidently is an historical reference to **Isaiah 22:22**, where the key to David's palace was given to a godly government official named Eliakim, giving him complete control over the royal household:

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<sup>1</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 115.

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *The Church in Prophetic Perspective* (Panorama City, CA: Grace to You), 99.

ESV **Isaiah 22:22** ... I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

**Why the key of David (3:7)? Why not Abraham or Moses?** Reference was likely made to David because it was the unbelieving Jews who were causing trouble for the church and likely excluding them from the Jewish community. In particular, David was man beloved by God, a king, and was promised that one of his descendants would always rule the throne. Thus, the keys of David are a symbolic reference to the kingdom of God. Jesus has the authority to admit or exclude from God's kingdom. Jesus has absolute power to control entrance into the God's kingdom.

ESV **Revelation 1:18** I have the keys of Death and Hades.

**4) "Opens ... shuts" (3:4). Relevance:** Jesus may have said this in contrast to the practice of the local synagogue in excommunicating Jewish Christians.<sup>3</sup> For example:

ESV **John 12:42** ... many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue ...

### 3:8

**\*\*\*\*According to 3:8, what did Jesus set before the church?** He placed before them an open door that no one could shut.

**Some door open to the outside, others into kitchens or living rooms. What did this door open into (3:8); an open door to what?**

**1) Ministry Opportunity:** Though foreign to the context, the idea of an open door elsewhere in Scripture refers to the door of opportunity:

ESV **1 Corinthians 16:9** ... a wide door for effective work has opened to me.

**2) Heaven:** More likely, the imagery of the open door that no one could shut may be been used by Jesus in contrast to the way the unbelieving Jews had treated them, perhaps excluding them from the synagogue, throwing them out and barring the door behind them: "Get out and stay out!" Whereas the Jews had kicked them out, Jesus had a door into God's kingdom permanently open for them.<sup>4</sup> This eschatological interpretation is more in keeping with the theme of Revelation.<sup>5</sup>

**Even though they had "but little power," what did Jesus appreciate about them (3:8)?** They had kept his word and had not denied his name.

**Application:** Most of us will ever and only have little power; that's God business. What God requires of us is faithfulness. *Are these qualities (kept His word, not denied His name) true for your life (3:8)? How faithful are you? What have you done with what God has given you?*

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<sup>3</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 116.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2468.

<sup>5</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 117.

ESV **Matthew 25:23** [parable]: “You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

### 3:9

\*\*\*\***What promise did Jesus make in 3:9?** He would cause those Jews who followed Satan to bow down at their feet and know that Jesus had loved them (amazing promise!).

**When is a Jew not a Jew, and in what sense did their synagogue belong to Satan (3:9)?** They were physical Jews but not spiritual Jews. They had rejected Jesus as Messiah and evidently persecuted the Jewish believers in Philadelphia. In as much as they opposed Jesus they were in league with Satan. Jesus said the same thing about the unbelieving Jews in Smyrna (**2:9**).

ESV **Revelation 2:9** I know ... the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

ESV **Romans 2:28-29** ... no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly ... a Jew is one inwardly ...

ESV **John 8:44** You are of your father the devil ...

**According to 3:9, these Jews would one day realize that “I have loved you” (3:9)? What does it mean for them to realize that?** Jesus would cause them to realize that the Christians were God’s true people, that the church is now the true Israel by way of faith (not flesh), and that being right with God is based on grace not genealogy.

**What is the purpose of causing these Jews to realize that Jesus loved the Christians (3:9)? What’s the purpose of that?**

**1) Judgment:** This would impress upon them the horrible truth of the fact that they had mistreated the true servants of the God and were under God’s condemnation.

ESV **Revelation 1:7** Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth [land] will wail on account of him.

As Stephen said:

ESV **Acts 7:52** Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered ...

**2) Encouragement:** It would vindicate the Christians and reassure them in their battered faith.

**Example:** Richard Jewel was falsely accused by the media of the Olympic Park bombing in 1996, and subsequently maligned. It ruined his life. Later, however, he was exonerated. His accusers had to admit he was right, they were wrong. This surely was comforting and encouraging to him (and financially lucrative!).

**Open Question: Has 3:9b been fulfilled? Rhetorical.** Many see the fulfillment as yet future, related to the second coming:

ESV **Philippians 2:10** ... at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth ...

However, the answer may lie elsewhere. We'll see if we can reach a tentative answer based on the next two verses (**3:10-11**).

### 3:10

\*\*\***Because they kept His word, what else did Jesus promise (3:10)?** Jesus promised to keep them from the “hour of trial” that was coming to “try” the whole world (**3:10**). They had kept His word and now He would keep them!

- **“patient endurance” (3:10):** From *hupomoné* (528); *hupo* means “under” (as in hypodermic) and *meno* means “to stay, abide, remain”; thus, “to remain under” (as in pressure). In a military context it meant “to stand your ground, to hold your position.” They had endured the weight of persecution bearing down on them.

**Jesus said He would keep them “from” the hour of trial (3:10). What does that mean? Would they avoid the trial or be assisted through it?**

**1) Avoidance:** **a)** Futurists see this as a reference to the rapture of the church before a final period of seven years of tribulation (which they call The Great Tribulation). **b)** Alternatively, perhaps the church in Philadelphia would escape the coming trouble as an isolated pocket of peace, even as the Hebrews remained in Egypt but were shielded from the plagues.

ESV **John 17:15** I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

**2) Assistance:** In **6:9-11**, the martyrs were told to wait until their full number would be killed. This suggests the protection offered Philadelphia was not physical.<sup>6</sup>

**Application:** No matter what our future holds, Scripture promises:

NAS **1 Corinthians 10:13** No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

**Has this hour of trial happened yet (3:10)?** Everyone in the church in Philadelphia that Jesus wrote to is now dead, making the promise meaningless if it didn't happen within their lifetimes. Furthermore, some translations (NASV) state that it was “about” to happen (**3:10**), based on the underlying Greek word *mello*. This word, *mello*, can mean “about to” or it can denote certainty.

NAS **Revelation 3:10** ... I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world ...

**What happened within the lifetimes of those in Philadelphia that might have constituted the fulfillment of 3:10? Rhetorical.**

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<sup>6</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 119.

**1) When John recorded this, to what did the “whole world” typically refer (3:10)?** Such phrases as this often referred to the “whole world” of the Roman Empire, roughly the area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea (N. Africa, the Middle East, Asia Minor and Southern Europe).

ESV **Luke 2:1** In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

ESV **Romans 10:17-18** ... faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

Thus, it sounds like an hour of trial was coming upon the entire Roman Empire. It is a fact that the Empire very nearly fell apart shortly after this was written. The “Year of the Four Emperors” was a year-long period (about A.D. 69) in which four emperors ruled in rapid succession after Nero’s death: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian. Arguably, this was predicted in later in Revelation:

ESV **Revelation 13:1-3** And I saw a beast rising out of the sea [the Roman Empire] .... And to it the dragon [Satan] gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.

**2) To what could “those who dwell on the earth” (3:10) refer?** Like “the whole world,” this sounds worldwide. However, the Greek for “earth,” *gē*, could just as legitimately be translated “land” (as in the Promised Land—*ha eretz*). If so, this could refer to a time of trial befalling those who dwelt in Judea.

In “The Great Jewish Revolt” (A.D. 66–70), the Judean Jews overthrew their Roman occupiers and declared a new, independent Jewish state.<sup>7</sup> In response, the Romans re-invaded Judea, laid waste to its cities, and destroyed the Jerusalem temple. Thousands upon thousands were killed or placed into slavery. The utter Jewish defeat in Judea sent shock waves to all Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire. The head of the snake had been cut off. In Matthew 24, Jesus very clearly predicted the destruction of the nation. Rejecting Jesus as Messiah, they looked to false Messiahs who promised political freedom and led them to revolt. The utter failure of the revolt, the destruction of the temple, and the failure of a true Messiah to appear to rescue them, clearly showed them that they had been wrong. The source of the church’s troubles in Philadelphia clearly was the unbelieving Jesus (**3:9**), but the Jerusalem defeat took the steam out of Judaism throughout the Empire.

### **Caveat:**

It is a fact that the Romans did not persecute the Jews outside of the areas that revolted:

“... during the First Jewish Revolt (66-70/73 C.E.), Rome showed little mercy to the Jewish insurgents. Yet no repressive measures were taken against the Jews of the Diaspora. Again,

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<sup>7</sup> *Atlas of the Roman World* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Partners, 2020), 38.

this happened not because Romans were generally tolerant, but simply because such measures were not necessary.”<sup>8</sup>

“Following this revolt, Rome tried to prevent further uprisings by expelling Jews to different parts of the empire.... But Judaism remained a legal religion and Jews continued to enjoy religious privileges.”<sup>9</sup>

“Jewish trade was a large part of the lifeblood of the empire’s interconnected economies. This was why, even at the peak of the Great Jewish Revolt, Emperor Vespasian never revoked Judaism’s status as a lawfully recognized religion.”<sup>10</sup>

### 3:11

\*\*\*\***What fantastic announcement did Jesus make in 3:11?** He declared that He was coming, and soon. This matches what John wrote earlier:

ESV **Revelation 1:1,3b** The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place ... the time is near.

Also, usually when Jesus threatened to “come” to various of the seven churches, it referred to a localized judgment. This time His promised coming seems to be different.

**Has this promised coming of Jesus happened yet (3:11)?** This cannot refer to the second coming, because in no sense of the word does a 2,000 year wait qualify as “soon” (*tachu*).<sup>11</sup> Thus, the predicted coming had to have happened while the church members were still alive, and must be something other than the second coming. The only satisfying conclusion is that yes, this particular coming of Jesus has already happened. Arguably, it refers to the A.D. 70 coming against Jerusalem in judgment.

**What did Jesus encourage them to do in 3:11?** He encouraged them to hold fast to what they had, lest someone take their crown.

**What was it that they had (3:11)?** They **1)** had little power, **2)** had not denied Jesus’ name, and **3)** had kept His word.

**To what crown does this refer (3:11)?** Crown is from *stephanos* (4735), “victor’s wreath.” It was a trophy awarded at athletic games. They were to remain faithful in their service, despite opposition from the Jews, until the Lord came and persecuted their persecutors. The Jews would lose, the church would win.

### 3:12

**What odd reward did Jesus offer to the one who conquers?** He promised **1)** to make him a column in God’s temple and **2)** to write on him **a)** God’s name, **b)** the name of the new Jerusalem, and **c)** Jesus’ new name.

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<sup>8</sup> Leonard Rutgers, “Roman Policy Towards the Jews”, Primolevicenter.org. Accessed December 31, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> “Religious Tolerance and Persecution in the Roman Empire”, crf-usa.org. Accessed December 31, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> National Geographic, *Atlas*, 80.

<sup>11</sup> Some argue that *tachu* refers to the way that Jesus will come (“quickly”) rather than nearness in time.

**1) What truth does the imagery of being a pillar in God's temple convey (3:12)?** The imagery conveyed is that of belonging and permanence in God's presence.

- **“Never go out” (3:12):** Philadelphia was earthquake central. Earthquakes were common and people regularly had to flee outside to escape collapsing buildings. Perhaps the reward of a column in God's temple where one would never go out is based on part on the history of earthquakes common to Philadelphia.<sup>12</sup> Jesus may have said this in response to the Jews kicking the Christian out of the synagogue.

**2) What are the three names written on the pillar (3:12)?** **a)** God's name, which shows ownership by God (like a tattoo or branding a cow!). **b)** The name of the new Jerusalem, which shows citizenship in the heavenly kingdom. **c)** Christ's own new name, which suggests a full revelation of knowledge of Jesus:<sup>13</sup>

ESV **1 Corinthians 13:12** ... now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully ...

**Has this new Jerusalem come down from heaven yet (3:12)?** Most Evangelicals believe its arrival is still a future event. Some, however, understand the idea of the new Jerusalem to be a metaphor for the church in this present age since the new Jerusalem “comes down from my God” (present tense—a present reality). In any event, the idea here is that they would be citizens of a heavenly city.

ESV **Revelation 21:2-27** ...I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband [the church?]..... Then came one of the seven angels who ... spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" [the church?]. And he ... showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.... By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it .... nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life [it sounds as if unregenerate people are on earth simultaneously with the new Jerusalem].

### 3:13 So What?

**\*\*\*\*How does 3:13 indicate that God intended for us to apply this to our situation today?**

**Overall: What criticism did Jesus have for the church in Philadelphia (3:7-13)?** Only two of the seven churches received no criticism: Philadelphia and Smyrna.

**What lessons can we learn from what Jesus said to Philadelphia (3:7-13)?** Even if a church has only a little power, if they patiently endure in keeping God's word, that counts for a lot with Jesus. Also, keep the future in mind. God promised a permanent place in His heavenly kingdom.

**\*\*\*\*** = Ask this question aloud before having someone read the text.

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<sup>12</sup> MacArthur, *Prophetic Perspective*, 99.

<sup>13</sup> Mounce, *Revelation*, 121.

**Note:** These lessons are designed for a 45 minute teaching slot and are based on the ESV.

You can hear this lesson being taught at [SermonAudio.com/NTRF](http://SermonAudio.com/NTRF).

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