

## Revelation Class 9

### 3:7-13

Since I did not complete last week's lesson, we will return to last week's notes to look at the Letter to the Church at Sardis 3:1-6. The Church at Sardis is warned that its failure to persevere could lead to trouble when Jesus 'comes like a thief', at a time they do not and will not expect. So let's turn back to last week's notes...

Now, let's look at the letter to the Church at Philadelphia. Some preliminary comments, first, this is the only letter in which Jesus seems to have nothing against the church in view. The Church in Philadelphia is encouraged to keep on keeping on...to continue to endure the slanders and rejection from the Synagogue and maintain their faithful witness, even in the face of ostracism from Jews and persecution from Rome and their pagan neighbors.

The background OT scriptures in view are primarily from the prophet Isaiah. The explicit quote of Is 22:22, the potential tie to Eliakim as Yahweh's 'servant' would suggest to believers a further tie to the Suffering Servant of Is 40-53, further the notion of Eliakim having the 'key of the House of David' on 'his shoulder' recalls the prophecy of Is 9:6,7 of the future rescuer upon whose shoulder would the government be placed. Further there is a heavy influence of the so-called "Volume of Comfort" Is 40-60, particularly Is 45:1ff. There is great irony here in the relationship between the Christ followers in Philadelphia and the members of the local synagogue. This can sound anti-Semitic but in fact, intends to encourage the Christ-followers to maintain their witness as the one and only hope for their Jewish detractors to see Jesus as the rescuer sent by Yahweh as the deliverer of his people both Jews and Gentiles...just as Isaiah prophesied more than 6 centuries before Christ.

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The town of Philadelphia was situated in an earthquake zone. It had been destroyed in 17 AD by a devastating earthquake not unlike what we witnessed in Port Au Prince, Haiti a few years ago. The city was established in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC by the king of Pergamum Eumenes in honor of his brother Attalus, whose loyalty he remembered in naming this city Philadelphia or city of brotherly love. The Roman Empire rebuilt the city and in honor of the Empire's support it was renamed Neocaesarea, and later named in honor of the Emperor Vespasian with the name of his dynasty Flavia. It was a city filled with pagan temples, and whose calendar was filled with religious festivals. It was a place regularly visited with tremors and aftershocks and the people lived with vivid memories of their houses being shaken and buildings and temples destroyed. While the city's name recalled a brother's loyalty, this letter extolls the church's loyalty to its Lord in the face of opposition from Jews and persecution and disdain by Gentiles. Also, to those who overcome the opposition the reward is stability in God's unshakable temple.

So let's look at the text... "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: "The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of the house of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens. I know your works, "Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut; I know you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

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**We see 'keys' in 1:18b the keys of death and Hades...here we see the one with the 'key of the house of David' recalling Is 22:22 which describes King Eliakim's control of the kingdom of Israel. Eliakim serves as all of the sons of David served as a 'type' of the one to come...the Real or True or Final son of David. Eliakim in Is 22 also serves as a type of the King who is also Yahweh's "servant" in a way that Jesus would Himself be. Let's turn to Is 22 and look at these verses. God overthrows the false leader and unseats him, taking this robes, and girdle of authority and gives them to the King of his choosing. Like is so often is the case Eliakim's name means something...Yahweh establishes...the hero of this prophecy is not Eliakim but Yahweh...it is Yahweh who establishes Eliakim as the rightful and righteous king and overthrows Shebna and transfers his authority. What Eliakim has temporarily Jesus has eternally in His Kingdom which once begun will never come to an end. We see this same sense of overthrow and transfer of authority associated with keys in Mt 16 as the corrupt priesthood is overthrown and authority transferred to the Apostles.**

**The key that is spoken of here I think is the key to the Heavenly Temple, opening a door into the very presence of God in his throne room. This entry into the throne room of God is explicit in 4:1. Let us turn also to Is 45:1 in reference to the only human called messiah in the OT...ironically Cyrus, not a Jew, not a son of David...nonetheless, seen as the Lord's deliverer and in a sense a type of the One to come. Doors will be opened to him that no one shut...an entrance into his kingly authority. Just as Israel stood powerless before her foes but was sustained and rescued by God so now the church in Philadelphia will be upheld and sustained by God in their trials and persecution. Further their witness is not vain.**

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V.9 ""Behold , I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you." Are you kidding me?! See Is 45:14; 49:23; 60:14 also Ps 86:9...have these verses just been stood on their head? In these verses who is to bow before whom? And in this letter who is to bow before whom? John knows these verses...what is his point? Here ethnic Israelites fulfill the role of Gentiles and believing Gentiles fulfill the role of Israel! See Is 60:10; the context of Is 60 is the voluntary worship of Yahweh offered freely by Gentiles...and this is the point of God's rescue of Abram in Gen 12 and the means of Jewish salvation in Deut 32:21 and applied by Paul in Rom 10:19 as the reason he 'magnifies' his ministry to the Gentiles...in order to save ethnic Israelites.

V.10 "Because you kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial, which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth." Notice the play on words here using the verb 'keep'. The Philadelphians 'keep' his word...and He keeps them I think in the final judgment. They can be confident now in the midst of the trial because it will be worth whatever it costs them now...in the future.

Vv. 11, 12 "I am coming soon; hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. And the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name."

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The background here is an earthquake...Has anyone experienced an earthquake? Asia Minor is earthquake prone...the evidence of earthquakes is virtually everywhere...but Philadelphia has faced destruction by earthquake in recent memory in the destruction of their homes and city. They are warned about the shaky nature of this world and offered something that cannot be shaken. Further, their unlikely position in God's temple is a recollection of a promise made in Is 56:3-5. Foreigners would find a place in God's temple...a better place than sons or daughters. The inscription of the name of God and of the city is a token of belonging, of family, and is imitated by the beast who also puts his mark on people he claims authority over. See Eze 48:35 and notice also how the theme of the end of the book of Revelation are already present here. This is another indication that the book covers the same ground from seven different angles and recapitulates its themes. The warnings are relevant in every age until Jesus comes, every age holds its challenges for believers as we seek to make our journey to the Promised Land.

**V.13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Enough said!**