
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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Revelation 3: 7-13 "The Church of Philadelphia"

General idea: "The church of brotherly love." Jesus had a special provision in His heart for this church, even though they were weak in their standing and resources, and tried by persecutions from a demented culture and the apostate Jews that surrounded them. Jesus encouraged them to persevere, and told them that they could do it. Christ plainly tells us that when He gives us opportunities, He also gives us the empowerment to pursue them; therefore, He wants us to take advantage of them. What Jesus does not want from us is apathy or complacency, laziness caused by burnout, or anxiety caused by our failures. We are not to allow suffering or past experiences rule us. He does not want us to neglect Him because we are afraid of others or of what He might call us to do. He will never call us to do anything that we are not capable of doing with excellence, or to go anywhere we would hate to go. Our gifting means that we will desire to be used and even thrive in it. Our service to Him will be a joy and a pleasure, even when times are dark.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is Holy and true! That means He is untouched by sin and always comes through for those who are in sin. He also has the ability and right to judge our sin. He is not required to forgive us because of duty; however, He forgives us anyway. This is the love and grace that He gives us.

Even though the church in Philadelphia had little left to give, they still gave. When most people would have given up and churches would have closed, they persevered. They recognized His holiness and wanted to continue to please Him in their spiritual formation and service, even though they did not know how, where, or even if they could. Jesus was with them, as He is with us today, saying *yes you can, and I will help you!* This church has persevered all through the centuries, experiencing devastating earthquakes, disasters, invasions, and famine, and is still there to this day! Imagine what Christ can do for us when we do not give in to fear or give up because of our situation!

Vs. 7-9: The Church of Philadelphia, as with the other six churches, was surrounded by countless gods and goddesses, all worshiped and adored even though they were all made up in the minds of people to suit their own agendas and needs. (Only Christ is true and can satisfy - 1 Cor. 8:5-6; Rev. 6:10.) They were burnt-out, weakened by all their bad experiences, and wondering what was next. Like the Church of Smyrna, they too were expelled from the Jewish community and synagogue, cut off from their friends, family, and all networking and business opportunities, which were their livelihood. This left them open for more persecution from the Romans. Even with their strength depleted and no options visible, they were still in the hands of God who had a plan and was presenting them with new chances and prospects to thrive, all for their betterment and His glory.

- *Church in Philadelphia.* The name *Philadelphia* means “loyalty and devotion,” which we translate from the Greek word as “brotherly love.” This was the city’s way to reverence its gods, Artemis, Helios, Zeus, Dionysus, and Aphrodite, and the Roman emperors Attalus II and Eumenes II (220-130 B.C.) who were brothers. The city was devastated by frequent earthquakes and was destroyed in 17A.D., then rebuilt. However, it then had a smaller population than the other cities. This city is now called Alashehir. It was a city of some importance from John’s time through the Middle Ages because of its commercial centers and trade roads leading in and out, and was considered the gateway to Asia Minor.
- *Holy and true* refers to the deity of Christ, meaning that God is the Holy One (Isaiah 40:25; Hab 3:2-3; Mark 1:24; Rev. 6:10; 15:4; 19:11).
- *Key of David* is one title of Jesus Christ as the Messiah from the line of David. *Key* means the person who holds the authority of the house, connecting it with David, and denotes His authority to open and shut all things and that He is in command of His Kingdom. It also means that only Christ is authorized and able to lead and save us. Jesus uses this image to encourage them, that even though they have been excluded from the synagogue and from their friends and family, they are not excluded from Him! They are special and the real heirs to David (Isaiah 22:22; Hab. 3:2-3; Matt. 16:19).
- *What he opens* has two meanings. Our opportunities would be one; the other is His opening the door to the Kingdom in contrast to the Jews who shut it (Matt. 23:13; 1 Thess. 2:15).
- *Little strength.* This church has remained faithful throughout all of the devastating persecutions, but they are worn out, and need encouragement and hope.
- *Synagogue of Satan* means being apostate, opposing Christ, and refusing to heed the precepts of God’s Word and call; it means doing the opposite, which is one’s own will and agenda. A *Synagogue* was a place of worship, a place for learning and studying, and a place for community activities. Jesus refers to the local Synagogue, which, as with the Church of Smyrna, was very antagonistic to the Christians (John 8:39-44; 2 Cor. 11:14-15; Rev. 2:9-10).
- *Claim to be Jews.* These Jews were claiming that all the nations would eventually bow down to them because they were the real children of God by lineage and history versus the Christians, who were His real people by faith. To be *His people* means we accept His election by faith; thus by faith, as demonstrated by obedience, we are His children. This is compared to someone who just goes to a church, or says he or she is a Jew or Christian but never takes his or her faith seriously or for real. We either belong to Christ or to Satan; there is no middle ground (Psalm 72:10-11; Prov. 14:19; Isa.

49:23; 60:11-14; Mal. 1:2; Rom. 2:28-29)!

- *Fall down at your feet* refers to reverence and a posture of worship and of great respect and awe. Here, it means that Christians will be at Christ's feet (Isa. 45:14; 60:14; Acts 10:25; Phil. 2:10; Rev 1:17).
- *Acknowledge that I have loved you* means that since Jesus loves you, you should not care who else does or does not. Also, the opponents of Christianity will be judged, so we are not to concern ourselves with those who oppress us; they will get what they deserve! We, who are His faithful, have received our place in His kingdom; the pretenders will not have a place (John 17:23).

Our bad experiences can be like a prison, keeping us within the bars we have made from fear, anxiety, and stress. Such a prison prevents our being stretched or experiencing any growth from learning, therefore preventing us from taking what we have been through and making it sweet and productive. Having persevered in the past helps us persevere in the future. The church at Philadelphia was able to do so, so we can, too. The key is to hold on even when we do not see any handles to grasp. When we hold on to Him, and Him alone, Christ will reward and keep us, and we will be victorious!

Vs. 10-13: When others come against us, they are coming in opposition to Him. He knows about this, and will respond in His time. We may not feel it is the right timing, but we do not see all the interwoven circumstances, His grace, or His persistence. He wants us to trust Him and have the determination to press on with our faith and obedience. The Jews were giving this church a hard time, and they were worn out from it. However, Jesus was saying *Do not fret or worry; I will take care of it*. He will take care of you, too!

- *Keep you from*. The meaning here is that Christ will deliver and protect those who are faithful and righteous, who claim Him as Lord. Many commentators have taken sides with this verse saying Christians will be spared from the Tribulation. This is reading into the text what is not there. *Keep* does not mean to *remove* or *prevent*; it means to *preserve* (John 17:15; 1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 7:3).
- *The hour of trial*. This is a way to say the "Apocalypse," or times of extreme hardship, trials, suffering, and/or being tested. This phrase denotes a widespread, universal (as throughout the Roman Empire) suffering as opposed to a local persecution. This can also refer to the "Great Tribulation" and/or the "Great Judgment" (Rev. 2:9-10).
- *To test those* means we are purified and refined when we go through the consequences and essence of life. These have a purpose; nothing happens to us without a reason that is meant to teach and grow us (Job 23:10; Psalm 12:6; Prov. 17:3; Isa. 43:2; Jer. 11:4; Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:4-28; Mark 13:19; 1

Cor. 4:3-5; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Pet. 1:5; 4:13; 5:1; Rev. 13:5-10).

- *I am coming soon* was a phrase used by the early church as a yearning for the Second Coming of Christ, that He could come sooner. Here, Jesus is saying *hold on to your patience*. This infers that Christ's return is imminent, not necessarily in timing, but in His actual presence amongst us. Whatever we face, it is only for a season and then it will be over! Our hope is our relationship with Him and in His imminent return, not in what is going on around us (James 5:9; Rev. 1:1; 22:7, 12, 20).
- *Crown* means victory; we have triumph in Christ no matter what happens around us.
- *Him who overcomes/one who conquers* means 'be faithful,' referring to the winning of an athletic event or military campaign. The application for us is to persevere in the face of adversity, and so be better for it. (Rev. 2:7).
- *Pillar* refers to the faithful people of God who are stable and can support others. Pillars hold up large buildings. We, as the faithful, hold up Christ (as in glorifying Him), and we hold up others (as equipping and encouraging them). There is a "play on words" here because of the earthquakes (Ex. 24:4; Isa. 56:5; 1 Cor. 3:16; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5).
- *Temple* refers to the inner sanctum where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, rather than the whole of the temple building. This is where the presence of God dwelt (Lev 26:11-13; Rev. 4:6-8).
- *Name of my God*. This refers to the seal of God's ownership, as names meant not only possessions, but also who possessed you and that person's character (Rev. 14:1; 21:2, 10; 22:4).
- *New Jerusalem* refers to the city and its eminence in Jewish culture and faith. Being faithful is the key that opens to us the door to life in the New Jerusalem (Psalm 87:5-6; John 13:34; 16:33; Gal. 4:26; Phil. 1; 1 John 4:20; 5:4-5; Rev. 2:11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:1-22:5).
- *Coming down* is used figuratively to contrast where God rules from above and we, as humanity, live below. Also, it could be a possible reference to the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30).

When we feel weak, we still have His strength, and our faith and resolve to continue to grow our faith will become a mighty pillar that others can look to for encouragement and as an example. We are His example to others; even at our lowest, we can excel for His highest. Let us understand what He has done for us so we can do our best to be faithful even in times of pressures, waiting, and uncertainty.

As with the Church of Philadelphia, each of us personally, and collectively as a local church, has a special provision in His heart. He deeply cares for us and wants us to take the opportunities He gives and make the most of them. Jesus has the authority to open up opportunities in ministry and service as well as exhibit His Fruit and character. In addition, Christ gives us the ability and gifting to accomplish that to which He calls us. Our Lord is genuine and true; there is no other god, deity, or object in all of creation or time that can match or copy Him. He is our authentic God, worthy to be adored and trusted. Our true God cannot be conjured up or manufactured. He is the “real deal.” All others are fabrications that are false, worthless, and meaningless. They only satisfy the lusts of sinful people who do not care what was truly revealed and done for us.

When God opens a door for you, the only one who can shut it is you! Do not allow your trepidations and past experiences rule how you will proceed in your life and call. We are not responsible for how others treat us. We are only responsible for being our best for His glory, to produce Fruit, and to be contagious for the faith. We cannot do that if we wallow in self-pity. Yes, we need times to rest and lick our wounds, but we are not to make a prison out of it, cutting ourselves off from His call and His best!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. How would you feel if you were cut off from all of your friends, family, and all networking, business opportunities, and livelihood?
2. What would a church of “brotherly love” look like to you? How does it make you feel to know that Jesus has a special provision in His heart for your church?
3. Are you, or have you been worn out and in need of encouragement and hope? What can your Christian community do to help you? How do you find hope in the fact that even though your strength is depleted and no options

may be visible to you, you are still in the hands of God?

4. What has Jesus given to your church in the way of opportunities and the empowerment to pursue them? What have you done to take advantage of them? How does taking the open door He gives you bring you joy and pleasure?
5. Jesus will never call us to do anything that we are not capable of doing with excellence, or to go anywhere we would hate to go. How does this encourage you to pursue your gifts and opportunities to please Him?
6. How does your church recognize His holiness and exercise the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ is Holy and true?
7. When God opens a door for you, the only one who can shut it is you. How have you and/or your church lost out on good opportunities to please Him and serve? Even when you may not know how, where, or even if you could please Him, remember *faith!*
8. Imagine what Christ can do for you when you do not give in to fear or give up in your situation? Can you list some?
9. What can you do to understand what Christ has done for you so you can fully do your best to be faithful, even in times of pressure, waiting, and uncertainty?
10. Do you realize that with His strength, and by allowing your faith to continue to grow, you will become a mighty pillar that others can look to for their encouragement and example of strength? Who in your life needs you as a pillar (support)?
11. Many churches have given up and have closed; they have failed to persevere in Christ. What are some of the hardships that your church could face that might cause them to fail? What can be done to make sure your church continues to persevere and seek to please Him?
12. How do you deal with anxiety and disappointments? What can you do to look to Christ for perseverance? How can you prevent sufferings and past experiences from ruling you? How can deepening your walk with Christ help you understand that *you can do it*, He will help you to persevere?