

**"REVELATION MADE RELEVANT"**

*A verse by verse exposition of the Bible's most controversial book*

*Notes are Fr. Ward's personal observations with the exception of the historical background information*

**II. The Messages to the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22)**

**F. The Message to Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13)**

**1. Historical background of the city and church of Philadelphia**

- a) located about 25 miles southeast of Sardis, along the Hermus River valley, Philadelphia (the modern Turkish city Alasehir) was an important fortress city that connected the western part of Asia Minor with the east and beyond to Rome. In fact, two major highways - one from Sardis (100 miles east) and another (that originated in Rome!) ran through the city. To the city's northeast was a great vine-growing district, which, along with textile and leather industries, contributed greatly to the city's prosperity. It was the westernmost city of the seven churches addressed by Revelation and served as a gateway to all of Asia.
- b) established by the Pergamenian king Attalus II (159-138 BC) who had been given the name "Philadelphus" or "brother lover" due to the great love for his brother, the city was thus named "Philadelphia." However, during its history it also took the name Neocaesarea ("New Casesar") in honor of the assistance the city received from Emperor Tiberius after an earthquake in 17 AD, destroyed the city and many other cities, including Sardis and Laodicea. Due to the fear of earthquakes, many preferred to live on the outskirts of the city.
- c) There are no historical records remaining concerning the origin of the church in the city. In addition to Revelation, the earliest reference to the church in Philadelphia comes from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* where he writes that the church prospered during the first half of the second century AD. Long after Islam took over the area, there still was a Christian presence in the city until 1392.

**2. The Words of Christ to the Church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13)**

- a) **v.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:"** God is the only One who is Holy (set apart from all else and totally righteous and pure) – cf. **Hos. 11:9**. Thus, when Christ says that He is holy and true, it confirms His equality and unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit as the One True God. He has the key of David which hearkens back to **Is. 22:15-25**, when Judah's unfaithful secretary of state, Shebna, was replaced by the faithful Eliakim, who actually represented King Hezekiah before the Assyrian Ruler Sennacherib who sent a huge army to attack Jerusalem but was supernaturally defeated by the angel of the Lord – one of the greatest miracles of the OT that is often overlooked (**Is. 36:3, 11, 22**). The keys of a city were reserved for the king and anyone the king appointed. Such keys represented the authority the king had over the city. The Messianic reference to "David" highlights Christ's role as the Messiah who came into the world to save it. Therefore, as God in the flesh and as the Messiah of God, Christ is the *only* one who has the authority to open and close the doors to the Kingdom of David. Indeed, it has been granted by His Father! This is the beginning of Christ's assurance to the church in Philadelphia that they are the true heirs of God's Covenants rather than those Jews who reject Christ.

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- b) **v.8: “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.”** Jesus, the all-knowing One, knows the condition of the small church in Philadelphia. He has witnessed their faithfulness to His Word and Name. They may have a small influence but it will not be squelched and they will have the open door to the Lord’s Kingdom!
- c) **v.9: “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.”** Although they are opposed by many in the Jewish community, it is these “false” Jews who will in the end be forced to recognize the believers in Philadelphia as the true Jews! Recall Paul’s words from **Gal.3:7**. The rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and only Son of God and the persecution of those who follow Christ as Lord and Savior is not only demonic but it originates from Satan, himself! Thus, “*the synagogue of Satan*” also found in **Rev. 2:9** points to the evil behind those who not only deny Christ as Lord but who persecute those who follow Jesus. Such Jews and all others who do the same have *the spirit of the antichrist* (**1 Jn. 2:22**). The great irony is that these Jews, who look to their Scriptures (**Is. 43:4; 45:14; 49:23; 60:14**) where God says the Gentile nations will bow before Israel, will themselves be bowing before Christ and His Church! This will be true not only for Jews but for all Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and anyone else who denies the Lordship of Christ. As the Apostle Paul states in **Philp. 2:10-11**: “*At the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.*”
- d) **v.10: “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.”** This is probably the most difficult verse in the messages to the seven churches. What precisely is the “*hour of testing*” that “*is about to come upon the whole world?*” It certainly does not mean something that only the people living in and around Philadelphia are going to experience. It will affect the entire world but the faithful church will be spared in some way. Such language is used again in **Rev. 6:10; 6:13; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8, 12, 14**. Those who live on earth will go through a time of great tribulation (**Dan. 12:1; Joel 2:31; Mk. 13:14; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; Rev. 14:7**). This time was understood by the Jews to be the “*messianic woes*” that would take place when the Messiah comes, and is also known as the coming of the great “*Day of the Lord*” (see references above) when God comes and judges the world. Jesus warned of this day in His teaching on the end times on the Mount of Olives in **Matt. 24-25; Mk. 13 and Lk. 21**. Some argue that this means that God will keep His people from Satan as Jesus prayed in **Jn. 17:15**. Others believe it is a reference to God’s protection of His people from His wrath on the world during the tribulation. Still others see this as the first indication in Rev. of the “*Rapture of the Church*” before or during the great tribulation.
- e) **vv.11-13: “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.” “I am coming quickly.”** Jesus repeats a phrase he first uttered in **Rev. 2:16**. He says it again several times in the last chapter - **Revelation 22**. As humans who get caught up in the hustle and bustle of everyday life we forget how quickly time goes by. Life is short. As James writes in **James 4:4**, we are “*like a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes and is gone.*” We get bogged down by many trivial pursuits and concerns. The truth is we are just a breath away from eternity! And Christ’s Return or are coming to Him is only a few moments away in relation to all of human

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history. The clock is ticking! So Jesus tells us to hold fast what we have. For those who overcome we will be a pillar in the Temple of God! We will have a new name – the very name of God written on our bodies and hearts! We will be an integral part of God's new city in the new heaven and earth! This would have significant meaning to those in Philadelphia and the other churches of Asia Minor. Often after an earthquake, only the pillars of a building would remain. Also, it was common for a pillar to be named after notable priest or civil servant and added to a temple. To the fledgling but faithful church in Philadelphia, God is assuring them of great honor in His Kingdom. They may not be honored by pagan Rome or traditional Judaism but they will be honored by Almighty God! The inscribed new name and pillar all signify Christ's ultimate authority and power over everything in creation as well as his devotion and love for His people.

### G. The Message to Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22)

#### 1. Historical background of the city and church of Laodicea

- a) Forty-five miles southeast of Philadelphia and one hundred miles due east of Ephesus, Laodicea, along with Colossae and Hierapolis, was one of the cities in the fertile Lycus valley. It was an important center of trade and communication since it was connected by a Roman highway running from Ephesus on the coast and continuing on to the inland of Asia Minor. Known for its wealth, the city was famous for its production of fine quality glossy black wool. It was also a banking center. In fact, it was so wealthy that after a great earthquake in 60 AD, the people refused imperial help and rebuilt the city themselves!
- b) The city had a famous school of medicine and was known for a special eye ointment (Phyrgian powder) that helped eye defects. There was a temple to the special god associated with healing, *Men Karou*, who later became associated with Asclepius. Zeus, the supreme deity of the Greek and Roman pantheon was also worshipped in the city,
- c) However, the city had no great temple or particular cult or notable accomplishments that really stood out like many of the other cities. It was a city of accommodation and compromise. It also had a poor water supply as the water it received came via a six-mile long aqueduct that when it arrived, was lukewarm!
- d) There was a large and influential Jewish population and the church may have been founded by Epaphras (Col. 4:12-13).

#### 2. The Words of Christ to the Church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22)

- a) **v.14:** *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:"* Jesus identifies Himself with a threefold affirmation. He is *"the Amen."* "Amen" is the certain and sure acknowledgment of that which is true. It is the faithful human response to God and His will. Likewise, Jesus is the perfect human response of obedience to the divine plan of the Father. He is also the "Amen" to all the promises of God (cf. Paul's words in **2 Cor. 1:20**). Like Christ, we should be little "amens" in our response to God's call on our lives. He is also *"the faithful and true Witness"* which affirms the same thoughts expressed in **Rev. 1:5; 9; 2:13**) as well as those in the word, "Amen." Finally, He is the *"Beginning of the creation of God."* Not that Jesus had a beginning. The Greek word here is *"arche"* which can be translated as "source" or "origin." All creation is under Christ's absolute authority and rule for He is the source and originator of it. It comes from Him and He controls all of it! (**Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13**). Such affirmations of Christ's deity as the perfect response to the divine plan, the faithful and true witness of God's revelation, and the source and means of

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all Creation calls out the sin of faithlessness, ignorance and disobedience of the Laodicean Church!

- b) **vv.15-16: “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. ‘So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.’”** Here, the Lord, who knows all things, addresses the failure of the Laodicean Church using a metaphor they all knew from personal experience. Like their water supply, they are neither “hot” like the hot springs located seven miles north of the city in Hierapolis or “cold” like the waters at Colossae ten miles away. In other words, just as lukewarm water falls short in comparison to hot or cold water, and makes one want to vomit, so too the spiritual condition of the church is like the city. Compromise and cultural accommodation have crept in. The church like lukewarm water has become useless. Worse, the church is dead spiritually! For then Jesus declares...
- c) **vv.17-18: “Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.”** Unlike the church in Smyrna the church in Laodicea is materially wealthy but spiritually bankrupt. It seems that like the city, the church is wealthy financially. Rather than being different and standing out in contrast to the culture, the Laodicean Church has become like the culture! Worse, they don’t even realize they have a problem. They are “wretched and miserable” meaning that they are in great need as such words were used after everything one owns has been plundered or destroyed. They are also “poor, blind, and naked” again highlighting their spiritual poverty, blindness, and selfishness. Jesus gives them the remedy. He tells them to buy the true gold refined by fire from Him (the spiritual riches that only come from the cross of Christ), the white garments of Christ to cover their shame and guilt rather than rely on the black wool of the city! Finally, for those who were blind to their spiritual condition, the “Phrygian powder” or eye salve won’t help. Only the salve that comes from Jesus will help us see the true light of the gospel. The truth is the great sin of the Laodicean Church might have been that they never really knew Jesus in the first place! They were Christians in name only.
- d) **vv.19-20: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.’”** Even though the church is in desperate straits, there is still hope. Jesus calls on the church to be zealous and repent. The call to follow Jesus requires passion and commitment. Jesus offers the promise to enter the lives of those who repent and turn to Him as one who enters a home and eats dinner with the closest of family and friends. He is intimately offering His very self to be united with those who trust in Him. The Holy Eucharist and celebration of the Lord’s Supper is certainly in view, here.
- e) **vv.21-22: “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”** Similar to the words He used for the church in Sardis, Jesus promises that those who overcome will rule with Him. The promise to sit down with Him on His throne will take place after His return. As Jesus overcame death and the grave with His resurrection and sat down at the right hand of the Father, so too we are promised to do the same with Him on His throne when He comes again!