

Philadelphia, Home of the Saints

Revelation Chapter 3:7-13 Part 1 of 2

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The Letter to the church in Philadelphia

We have been studying the Book of The Revelation and we are currently in chapter 3, the second chapter of letters to the church dictated by Jesus himself and transcribed by the Apostle John on the island of Patmos in about 90 AD.

These letters are for instruction to His church during this amazing period of biblical history we live in, which we refer to as “The Church Age” or the “Age of Grace” or “The Time of the Gentiles.” (In this case “gentile” means non-Jewish.) This time period, described by Christ in Luke 21 and described by the angel Gabriel to the prophet Daniel, starts when the Messiah is “cut off” (crucified) and ends when the Anti-Christ signs a seven-year agreement, which starts the last 7 years of Earth’s current existence. Gabriel told Daniel that this period would not be the time of his people, the Jews. Their time would stop when they denied Christ and the Messiah was “cut off,” and will begin again with the start of the final 7-Year Tribulation. The interim is the time of the gentiles when Jesus builds His church and the gospel is spread to gentiles all over the world. Our time ends “when the time of the gentiles is fulfilled.” Then the coming period, also referred to as the “time of Jacob’s Trouble,” will end The Church Age and re-start the time of the Jews, a 7-year period that culminates with the salvation of Israel, the physical return of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of all of God’s promises to the Jews.

This book, The Revelation, was given to John by Jesus to “... let His servants know what must soon take place.” It is the only book in the bible that shouts out to the church today, “READ ME, I’M SPECIAL.” It starts and ends with a promised blessing for those who read it and take it to heart. NO OTHER BOOK IN THE BIBLE MAKES SUCH A PROMISE. In addition, it is directly from Jesus to the church in this age: TO US. It was written AFTER the gospels. AFTER the epistles. It ends with a stern warning not to add anything to it or take anything away from it. And yet, catastrophically, it is the most ignored chapter in the bible. I cannot fathom how this can be. Who reads a book and skips the last chapter? The last chapter of a book ALWAYS ties the rest of the book together and provides the end of the story. It is no wonder so many Christians are confused. They don’t know how the story ends!

It is true that the book can be hard to understand. That is primarily for 2 reasons:

1. It was written to an audience that was assumed familiar with the whole bible. You can’t understand the last chapter if you didn’t read the book. There are over 800 allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation, so if you don’t know the Old Testament, you will miss a lot just reading Revelation. It is written to the saints, the church of today, so you need to know the New Testament for understanding of what Jesus intended the church of today to be.
2. You have to understand that prophesy is not just “specific prophesy = specific fulfillment.” Though many examples of this exist to prove the reliability of prophesy, that is just our gentile view. Jews saw, and we see when we look, patterns of prophesy. Understanding Revelation

requires understanding the patterns. We are all familiar with prophetic patterns in general. Well known examples are Abraham willing to sacrifice Isaac on Mt Moriah and God sacrificing His Son on the same mountain. The blood of the lamb on the doorposts at the first Passover and the blood of The Lamb on the cross. The Revelation is replete with these patterns, and we will look at one of them in depth here in our study of Jesus' letter to the church in Philadelphia.

In addition to these two issues specific to the book of Revelation, there is the general problem that it is very difficult to exactly interpret prophesy until it has been fulfilled. Once a prophesy has been fulfilled, it is much easier to understand. That is why we can be so clever about the interpreting the prophesies about the coming of the Messiah. They have been fulfilled clearly in Jesus Christ. We understand those prophesies now because we have seen them fulfilled, not because we are so much smarter or more spiritual than the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law in Christ's time.

The same holds true for Revelation, which is primarily prophesy.

We have seen many 7s so far in the book. 7 Lampstands, 7 stars, 7 spirits and letters to 7 churches. We will see 7 seal judgements, 7 trumpet judgements and 7 bowl judgements, to name only a few of the sevens. Seven is the number of Divine Completion.

But let's talk about six. The letter to Philadelphia is the 6th letter. Man was created on the 6th day. Solomon's annual salary was 666 talents of gold and Revelation 13 tells us

¹⁸ Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number *is* 666.

In biblical numerology, 6 represents man and sin. The number 6 is also associated with an important biblical pattern: it introduces an interlude.

The interlude may be before the 7, or it may be the 7. For instance, Genesis 2 tells us God created the universe and all that is in it in 6 days, then there was an interlude of rest on the 7th day. The 7 IS the interlude in this case.

In Revelation chapter 7 we see that after the 6th seal is broken and the terrible cataclysm of the 6th seal judgment is complete, there is an interlude where Israel is saved and 144,000 Jewish evangelists bring uncountable multitudes to Christ. In this case the interlude in judgement and the salvation of multitudes is between the 6th and 7th seal judgements, so the 6 introduces the interlude before the 7, the 7th seal that releases the 7 trumpet judgements.

If we give "six" the relative definition of "not quite 7 and just before the 7" (as the bible seems to do) we see that Gabriel describes to Daniel a period of 69 (not quite 70) weeks of years for his people, then there is an interlude for an unknown period of time (the Church Age) and then the final 7 years – the time of Daniel's people again -- the 7-year tribulation.

Note that we are living in the "not quite 7 and just before the 7" period, a biblical 6.

So how does this "interlude at 6" pattern apply to Jesus letter to the 6th church, Philadelphia?

We have seen so far in our study of the first five letters what seems to be an irresistible slide toward apostasy and depravity. In the first letter, to the Ephesians, Christ rebuked the church for losing its first love. He rebuked Pergamum for allowing immorality and idolatry. He rebuked Thyatira for teaching immorality and idolatry. He told the church at Sardis they were dead, and we will see in the 7th letter to Laodicea that Jesus tells them they have been completely deceived and He's not even in that church, He's standing outside knocking on the door. The decent is complete. Only Smyrna, a church under heavy persecution, and Philadelphia seem to have escaped this destitution of the church and receive no rebuke from Christ.

We noted when we studied Smyrna that those in trouble, suffering persecution, painful times turn to the Lord and hold Him closely. This was clearly the case in Smyrna. That is why he tells them, "Be faithful, even unto death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."

So that explains why Smyrna had no rebuke, but what about Philadelphia?

I propose that in the decent to depravity described in these letters, Smyrna is an exception and Philadelphia is an interlude.

The 6th letter is quite different than the others. We have noticed there are generally seven parts to these letters:

1. The Name of the church, which is representative of its situation.
For example "Smyrna" means suffering.
2. The Salutation from Jesus where he describes His persona as author of the letter.
For example, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands." (Rev 2:1)"
This usually comes from the descriptions of Christ in John's vision in chapter 1.
3. Statement that He knows our situation.
Each letter says, "I know your deeds" or words to that effect. He is saying, "I know you. I now your situation. I know what you are going through."
4. Commendation
For example, he says to the Ephesians, "'I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.'" (Rev. 2:2-3)
5. Rebuke
For example, he says to the Ephesians, "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent." (Rev. 2:4-5)
6. Promise to Overcomer
For example, he says to the Ephesians, "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of

life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7)

7. A proclamation that each letter applies to the whole church.

Each letter says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Two letters are missing #4 – Jesus has nothing good to say about Sardis or Laodecia.

Two letters are missing #5 – Jesus has no rebuke or condemnation for Smyrna or Philadelphia.

Keeping in mind that this is the 6th letter, and by pattern an interlude, let’s see what else is different.

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true,

This salutation is NOT from Revelation chapter 1, as are the other letters. This is very old testament.

“He who is holy, He who is true” can ONLY mean God and both descriptions are used for God and only for God in scripture. This seems to make the persona of the author The Father within Jesus. This is the “Holy” that the living creatures around the throne say constantly. Isaiah describes his experience with God’s holiness in Isaiah Chapter 6:

It was in the year King Uzziah died¹ that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. ²Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³They were calling out to each other,

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven’s Armies!
The whole earth is filled with his glory!”

⁴Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke.

⁵Then I said, “It’s all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.”

⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷He touched my lips with it and said, “See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.”

⁸Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?”

I said, “Here I am. Send me.”

Seeing God’s holiness made Isaiah realize how depraved and unclean he *and his people* are, he repented and was forgiven and his guilt removed. He had a salvation experience. Note that his experience resulted in his willingness to be sent. Going is a deed or work.

In using this description of Himself, the Lord is clearly addressing His saints. This is the opposite of the 7th letter to Laodecia, which is directed to unsaved, non-believers who do not hold to the holiness and deity of Jesus Christ.

The Lord continues his letter to Philadelphia:

“He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”

This is essentially a quote from Isaiah 22:

²⁰ ‘Then it shall be in that day,
That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah;
²¹ I will clothe him with your robe
And strengthen him with your belt;
I will commit your responsibility into his hand.
He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem
And to the house of Judah.
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.
²³ I will fasten him *as* a peg in a secure place,
And he will become a glorious throne to his father’s house.

In this scripture, a prophesy against Juda, Eliakim is a “type off” Christ. Consider him a “place holder” for Jesus that you can read more about in Isaiah 36 and 2 Kings 18. Hezekiah was the most Godly king Judah ever had, and Hezekiah was Eliakim’s king. So if Eliakim is a type of Christ, then Hezekiah is a type of the Father, who has given the “key to the house of David” to Christ. The point is that this key represents the sovereign authority to open the storehouse of God’s treasure and dispense it freely or lock it up so no one can access it. (There is much debate about the relationship to this key (note: singular) and Jesus giving the “keys to the kingdom” (note: plural) to Peter and then the other Apostles in Luke 16 & 18.)

⁸ “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it;

Since He has the keys, He has opened a door for His church that no one can shut. We are not told *what* door has been opened, but we know the door Satan wants to shut:

John 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Paul frequently describes ministry opportunities as “open doors” and that is primarily how it is used today. Many expositors interpret this verse to mean that Christ has opened doors to ministry for the

church in Philadelphia, and that is certainly an acceptable interpretation. Here's an example of that usage:

Acts 14:27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Matt 7:7-8 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

But I believe there is a bit more to it than that. In Revelation 4:1 it says:

After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

"These things" are the 7 letters which represent the Church Age. I think this clearly means that, at the end of the Church Age, the church is going through that "door standing open in heaven" and Jesus is assuring the church in Philadelphia that *no one* can close that door because it *is* Jesus Christ.

Stay tuned for part 2 – "coming soon"

