

Revelation 3:7-13

Letter to Philadelphia The End Times

In my last post, we examined the letter to the **Messianic Community at Sardis**. In this post, **Yeshua's** letter to the **Messianic Community at Philadelphia** will be examined.

Historical Setting ¹



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Ancient Philadelphia

(Pictures Courtesy of Google)

The city of **Philadelphia** was twenty-five miles south of **Sardis**. It was named for its founder, Attalus Philadelphus, who was king of **Pergamum**. Today the city is named Allah Shehr, meaning **City of God**, and is populated largely by Greeks. The remains of early Messianic influences are more clearly seen today in this city than in any of the other cities in Asia where the seven churches were located. The ruins of twenty-five churches can be found there, and marble pillars - the remains of great churches - can be plainly seen. As most of us know, the name **Philadelphia** means *brotherly love*.

The city was an outpost of Hellenism in Anatolia. It lies on a broad, low, easily defended hill, which explains why **Philadelphia** was the last city of Asia Minor to fall to the Turks in 1390 CE. The district is disastrously seismic, and the great earthquake of 17 CE that also hit **Sardis** ruined it completely. Placed right above the fault, **Philadelphia** was tormented for 20 years by recurrent quakes after the disaster of 17 CE. The district was vine-growing and a center, in consequence, of the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and intoxication.

In 92 CE, their relationship with the emperor reached rock bottom as Domitian ordered **Philadelphia's** vineyards destroyed, apparently to encourage production of corn at a time when Asia Minor was suffering from a food shortage. In this political and economic context, the church has *little power* and is small and suffering, but **Yeshua** says they *have obeyed my message*. That is, they have been faithful to him in practice. They have obeyed Scripture (primarily the Old Testament) and the teachings of **Yeshua** that would have been handed down to them from the apostles or through the Gospels, which would have been in circulation by this stage. Furthermore, they *have not disowned me*. They had stood firm for **Yeshua** throughout.

Smyrna and **Philadelphia** were the only churches to receive **no** condemnation or discipline from their Lord. Other similarities between the two churches are notable. They both suffered persecution at the hands of the Jews. Both are told that this opposition is of the **Adversary**. Both churches are told that they will inherit a crown. Yet Believers in this church at **Philadelphia** will need to endure further persecution and so they need encouragement. This is what **Yeshua** gives them.

⁷ "To the angel of the Messianic Community in Philadelphia, write: 'Here is the message of HaKodesh [the Spirit], the True One, the one who has the key of David, who, if he opens something, no one else can shut it, and if he closes something, no one else can open it.' ⁸ I know what you are doing. Look, I have put in front of you an open door, and no one can shut it. I know that you have but little power, yet you have obeyed my message and have not disowned me. ⁹ Here, I will give you some from the synagogue of the Adversary, those who call themselves Jews but aren't - on the contrary, they are

¹ Halley's Bible Handbook: Deluxe Edition

lying - see, I will cause them to come and prostrate themselves at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you. ¹⁰ *Because you did obey my message about persevering, I will keep you from the time of trial coming upon the whole world to put the people living on earth to the test.* ¹¹ *I am coming soon; hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown.* ¹² *I will make him who wins the victory a pillar in the Temple of my God, and he will never leave it. Also I will write on him the name of my God and the name of my God's city, the new Yerushalayim coming down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name.* ¹³ *Those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the Messianic communities.*” ~ Revelation 3:7-13 (CJB)

Here is the message of HaKodesh [the Sprit], the True One, the one who has the key of David, who, if he opens something, no one else can shut it, and if he closes something, no one else can open it. **Yeshua** identifies Himself as being **HOLY**. He is imminently qualified to call this church or any church to a life of faithfulness. He is calling them to be holy as He is **HOLY** (see 1 Kefa 1:16). **Yeshua** further states He is *the true one*. He mirrors the characteristics of God in His own life. He is genuine; He is the same through and through. Genuine Godly conduct is a product of holiness. The third thing **Yeshua** mentions about Himself is that He is the one who possesses *the key of David*. **Yeshua** holds the *key of David* because He is the promised Davidic king whose throne lasts forever. Isaiah 22 gives rise to the idea of the key. *"I will place the key of David's house on his shoulder; no one will shut what he opens; no one will open what he shuts"* ~ Isaiah 22:22 (CJB). In that passage Elyakim replaced Shevna as steward of the palace and became the one who controlled entry to the king's household. This is who **Yeshua** is. He alone can give access to God's Kingdom and to an inheritance of God's covenant promises. He can also shut people out: *no one else can open it*. This self-description itself is full of encouragement to this suffering but faithful people. **Yeshua** is the sovereign King and in control whatever may appear to be true at times on the ground in Philadelphia.

In Revelation 1:18, **Yeshua** declares that He has *the keys of Death and She'ol*. As keys have always been a symbol of authority, the important truth to understand is that **Yeshua** possesses all authority, both in life and in death. He opens the door of salvation to all who believe, and will one day condemn the unbelievers to hell.

As stated earlier, along with the church in **Smyrna** (Revelation 2:8-11), the church in **Philadelphia** was not told to repent, a charge strongly issued to all the others (Revelation 2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19). The church in **Philadelphia** had both right doctrine and right living.

I know what you are doing. Look, I have put in front of you an open door, and no one can shut it. I know that you have but little power, yet you have obeyed my message and have not disowned me. **Yeshua** has set before them an *open door*. We tend to forget that only **Yeshua** can open the door for ministry. It is not our plans, our promotions, our revivals, our tracts or our works that opens the door to a community, but our blessed Lord. It is God, the Ruach HaKodesh, who prepares the hearts of men and women to receive the Besorah. Note, in the reason for His approval, He mentions two things that should be fundamentally true of any Body of Believers: the motivation to stand true to the **Word of God** and absolute commitment to the **Son of God**.

Here, I will give you some from the synagogue of the Adversary, those who call themselves Jews but aren't - on the contrary, they are lying - see, I will cause them to come and prostrate themselves at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you. The Lord promises to vindicate His people and the truth which they uphold. It is just a matter of time until the whole world will know who has been preaching the truth and who has been preaching a lie; who is of the household of faith and who is identified with the *the synagogue of the Adversary*.

Because you did obey my message about persevering, I will keep you from the time of trial coming upon the whole world to put the people living on earth to the test. Here we are given one of the most precious promises found in all of the Word of God. This verse refers to the "rapture," the time when **Yeshua** shall come and remove all true believers from this earth. In this promise to the Philadelphian church God assures them they will not go through the Tribulation. This promise not only concerns the church of Philadelphia but can be applied to all true believers. Oliver Greene writes:

There are many ideas, doctrines and dogmas concerning the church and the Great Tribulation period that shall come upon the earth during the reign of the Antichrist. Some teach that the church will go through the

*first half of the Tribulation. Some teach that the Church will go through all of the Tribulation. There are those who teach that the Church will be raptured in mid-Tribulation. And then there are those who preach the truth: that the Church will be raptured before the appearing of the Antichrist, before the beginning of the Tribulation, **the time of trial coming upon the whole world to put the people living on earth to the test.***

The church in **Smyrna** had been told that they were to suffer persecution (2:10). The church in **Philadelphia** is given the promise that they will be kept from suffering. Both were faithful churches. However, God does not deal with all in the same way, but with each as He Himself knows best, beyond our understanding until we reach the other shore.

I am coming soon; hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown. The **Second Coming of Yeshua** is the theme of the book of Revelation, and to the saints all down through the ages, it is our **blest hope**; it is our only hope. There have always been some very difficult hours in the life of the church and during these times of distress the prayers of the saints are raised to God, and among their utterances, like John of old, the words, ***Come Lord, Yeshua*** ring out to heaven (Revelation 22:20). He is coming!!!

I will make him who wins the victory a pillar in the Temple of my God, and he will never leave it. Also I will write on him the name of my God and the name of my God's city, the new Yerushalayim coming down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name. One needs to notice that there are three prominent symbols in this letter to **Philadelphia**: **a key, a door, and a pillar**. The key represents **Yeshua's** authority; the door represents the church's opportunity; and the pillar represents the Believer's security. A pillar always represents stability and/or security, as you will see if you study carefully the significance of the pillars in Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 7:15-22). This verse (Revelation 3:12) also gives a beautiful example of adherence! **Yeshua** the Son does nothing outside of the Father's will (John 8:29). Notice the four times **Yeshua** refers to the Father, **my God**. You get the feeling that **Yeshua** is totally devoted to the Father and to doing His will. What we find in **Yeshua** is a powerful example for us.

The **new name**. In 2:17, a **new name** seemed to refer to unimaginable joys to be realized in heaven. Here, he **who wins the victory** will receive God's own name. It is a sign of ownership and a mark of citizenship. In the same way, followers of the beast receive the mark of their master (13:16-17). Each of us belongs either to the Lord or to the beast.

Special Comparative Note on Chapters 3:7-13 ²

The **Historicist** and some **Futurists** see **Philadelphia** as representing the church at the time of the Great Awakening (from 1793 and beyond). This began with the era of Wesley, Whitefield, Finney and Moody whose activities ranged from the early eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries. The "open door" that Yeshua had placed before this church refers to the great opportunity for evangelistic harvesting. This period will continue until the return of Yeshua, overlapped in the latter days by the Laodicean period.

In my next post, we will look at the letter to the **Messianic Community in Laodicea**.

² Material in this section is taken from "Revelation: Four Views, Revised & Updated" by Steve Gregg