

7 Churches Tour – 2019 - Philadelphia

Introduction

- 40 miles south-east of Sardis is Philadelphia, located on a broad hill between two fertile valleys. One of the valleys provided a natural gateway pass through the mountains to the east – an “open door” – which contributed to Philadelphia’s commercial success. Regularly shaken by earthquakes, the Philadelphians would live in booths in fields during the long periods of aftershocks.
- Philadelphia means “brotherly love,” a name given by King Attalus II of Pergamum in memory of his older brother, King Eumenes III. Colonists from Pergamum wanted to propagate the Greek language and culture, and founded the city in the reign of Attalus II (159-138BC).

The Message to the Church of Philadelphia

- **Rev. 3.7-13.** As with the church of Smyrna, there is no rebuke for the Philadelphia church. Likewise, the church of Philadelphia represents the era of Protestant missions in the 18th and 19th centuries (1790s – 1850s), when Bible and mission societies were established, and Protestant missionaries took the Gospel around the world. It is the era of Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Adoniram Judson, William Miller and Ellen White.
- The faithful remnant of God has heeded the letter to the church of Sardis, where Jesus calls on His church to “strengthen” what remains, but now the Philadelphia church has “kept” His word (3.8, 10).
- Whereas the church of Sardis may be asleep in self-satisfied and delusional security, for whom the 2nd Coming is as an unexpected thief in the night, for the Philadelphia church the 2nd Coming is the object of intense desire, study and prayer. Millions around the world heard the Midnight Cry, and prepared for the soon return of Jesus.
- Hassidic Jews in Europe also proclaimed the arrival of the Messiah in the year 5603 (1843/1844AD). The Baha’i Muslims proclaimed that the *bab*, the door to the hidden Imam, would appear in the year 1,260 after the *Hegira*, i.e. in 1843/1844. Not to be outdone, in the atheist world, Karl Marx proclaimed from 1844 a brave new world.
- Fervent was the desire of the Philadelphian church to meet Jesus. Intense was their preparation. Great was their disappointment when He did not return as expected. To their disappointment comes the wonderful affirmation, “I am coming soon, hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown” (3.11).
- “I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world” (3.10). The 7 letters speak of 3 tribulations: the persecution of Smyrna in which thousands of saints would die; the great tribulation of Thyatira, in which millions would die; and the final hour of trial that comes upon the whole world in which all humanity will be tested and God’s saints delivered. In that final crisis, “Your people will be delivered” (Daniel 12.1-2).
- How then are we to prepare for the final tribulation? “Because you have kept my word of patient endurance...” Jesus counsels his saints in Philadelphia to face patiently the trials of everyday life, and through being faithful today, in the daily temptations we each face, by adherence to His word, our characters are prepared so that by His help, we can overcome when the final crisis hits planet earth. Character is revealed in times of crisis, never made. Faithfulness in the small decisions of everyday life prepares us for whatever tribulation lies ahead.
- To His faithful saints, Jesus promises that they will be like a pillar in the temple of God, “you will never go out of it.” To a community used to earthquakes, crumbling buildings, living in booths in fields during aftershocks, comes the promise that they will be as a pillar in a temple that will never crumble, and which they will never have to leave for fear of collapse. Pakistan earthquake. ADRA. Tents. Cries of dying under collapsed school.

Conclusion

- In this letter to the church of Philadelphia, Jesus sets before His people an “Open door, which no-one is able to shut.” What is this open door? Is it an open door to mission service and opportunities? Possibly. Maybe. Paul certainly spoke of open doors for new mission opportunities (1 Cor. 16.9; 2 Cor. 2.12).
- Yet, just a few verses after this letter to the church of Philadelphia, John sees an open door to the throne-room of God Himself (4.1). Most public buildings around the world have closed doors, guarded doors, locked doors. But not the door to heaven. It has an open door policy and “The Spirit and the bride say come” (22.17).
- For the Philadelphian missionary church, for dedicated servants of God who are committed to sharing the Gospel, there is the promise that we have an open door to the throne room of heaven, and we can enter by faith through Jesus Christ, our heavenly mediator, to find grace and mercy to help in every hour of need. Heb. 4.14-16. Hallelujah!