

## Rev. 3:7-13: Philadelphia

In GR Philadelphia means “brotherly love.” Ancient Philly was famous for earthquakes and vineyards. Modern Philly is famous for cheesesteaks, crime, and political corruption. The city of brotherly love is now the city of brotherly mug. The only reason to visit Philly would be to see Independence Hall and eat a cheesesteak. The Philadelphia of the first century (under Roman rule) was a lot safer than the Philadelphia PA of 2021 under Democrat control.

Let’s analyze Jesus’ message to Philly with a series of questions.

What did Jesus promise Philly church?

First, an open door nobody can shut.

Second, the synagogue of Satan would acknowledge God’s blessing on the church of Christ.

Third, the church would be kept from a trial (pandemic) coming upon the whole world.

What is the open door?

The GR word door also means an occasion or opportunity.

There are two possibilities for the open door that cannot be shut. I like both but one fits the context better.

**Option 1: Philadelphia’s open door is a door of ministry opportunity.**

This is based on other scriptures referring to an open door.

*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.*

*1 Cor. 16:8-9: But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

First, Jesus is sovereign over ministry opportunities. When Jesus closes a ministry opportunity no person can re-open it and when Jesus opens a ministry opportunity no person or Satan can close it. In the book of Acts, Paul and Barnabas tried to take the Gospel to Asia, but the HS closed the door 2X and sent them west to Greece with a vision of a man from

Macedonia. That was Jesus and the Spirit working together to close some doors and open a door to Greece.

Second, it's an opportunity to increase in good works for Christ. We learned from the church in Thyatira that Jesus likes to see his churches increasing, 2:19: *I know your works and love and faith and service, as well as your patient endurance, and that you are doing more now than you did at first.* So, an open door is an opportunity to increase our service for Christ.

Third, it's an opportunity to serve even if we have little strength, because the strength comes from the Spirit. (GR word for "little" is mikros. So, even if you have "microscopic" strength Christ can use you when you depend on Him.) After all, Jesus opened the door of opportunity and he will give you strength, courage, and faith to use it even though you feel inadequate. In fact, it is better to realize you have little strength than to think you can handle it.

If Jesus granted a ministry opportunity to share the Gospel, then the "synagogue of Satan" would be impotent to stop it. When Jesus opened a door of ministry opportunity to share the Gospel in Macedonia, Satan tried to shut the door with a demon-possessed, fortune-telling slave girl. Paul commanded the "python spirit" to leave and the power of Jesus' name was revealed. See Acts 16:16-24.

The ministry opportunity given to the church was greater than that given to the synagogue. Jewish synagogues existed in almost every Roman and Greek city, but they only existed for Jews, the "chosen people." They attracted a few "God-fearing Gentiles" who submitted to the Law of Moses so they could attend the synagogue to worship the God of the Jews. Paul took advantage of the synagogue "ministry opportunity" as his starting point to share the Gospel. Some Jews and "God-fearing Gentiles" who believed left the synagogue and started a church next door. The synagogue continued to exist for Jews only. The church exists for all people who are saved by grace through faith and not the Law.

**Option 2: Philadelphia's open door is the door into the Kingdom of Heaven and the New Jerusalem.**

The background for what Jesus said to Philly is related to the separation of synagogue and church. For the first few years "Christianity" (also called "the Way") was a sect of Judaism that received Jesus of Nazareth as the

promised Messiah. During those years it enjoyed protection as a legal religion in the Roman Empire. Paul preached the Gospel in the synagogue first and some Jews believed in Jesus and all the “God-fearing Gentiles” believed and left the synagogue and formed the “church.” The Jews who rejected Jesus began to persecute the Jews and Gentiles who believed in Jesus. The Jews who rejected Jesus told the Roman authorities that Christianity was different and did not deserve the legal protection they enjoyed. So, the synagogue turned against the church. The Jews who rejected Jesus even started protests and riots against the “Christians.” The Roman authorities sided with the Jews who rejected Jesus and persecuted the Christians.

So, the context for what Jesus said to Philly is about the separation of the synagogue and church. Jesus rejected the Jews in the synagogue who rejected him as Messiah. Jesus said (3:9): *“Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.”* Jesus affirmed his support for the separation of synagogue and church. Jesus called the Jews who rejected him a “synagogue of Satan.”

The Jews expected the Gentiles to learn that God loved and chose them. They were the descendants of Abraham. They expected the Gentiles to bow down before their feet. They believed this based on OT prophecies like Isaiah 60. Isaiah 60 says the wealth of the Gentile nations would come to the Jews and the nations would bow down at their feet. They were proud of being “the Chosen.” Jesus declared just the opposite: the Jews of the synagogue will know that God has chosen and loved the church, and they will bow at the feet of those who believe Jesus of Nazareth is the Savior and Lord.

What Jesus claimed about Himself is directly related to this separation and acceptance of the church (3:7): *“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.’”* The “holy one” is a title for God in the OT. The “true/genuine one” means that Jesus is the true Messiah. This is to contradict the unbelieving Jews who claimed Jesus was a false Messiah.

Jesus has the “key of David.” The background for this is a story in the OT. There was a selfish steward over the house of David named Shebna who was unfaithful in his duties (Isaiah 22:15-25). God said he would replace Shebna with another man named Eliakim who would be an unselfish servant to the people. God promised: Isaiah 22:22: *“And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”* God promised Eliakim authority over the house of David. So, Jesus possessing the key of David means Jesus is the promised Son of David and Messiah who has absolute authority to control who gets into the Kingdom of Heaven and who gets thrown out. The Jews who reject Jesus as Messiah get thrown out. The door to the kingdom is slammed behind them as they are thrown out. The door to the kingdom swings wide open for those who receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. Jesus will let them enter the heavenly New Jerusalem: 3:12: *“The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.”*

#### Why did Jesus promise Philly an open door?

First, because they kept Christ’s word (logos) and did not disown Him. The Jews said Jesus of Nazareth was a false Messiah. Paul preached Jesus was the genuine Messiah. The pressure was on the Christians to disown Christ as a false Savior. A church disowns Christ when it fails to keep and obey His word. So, when churches become secularized and compromise with the culture, they are really disowning Christ even though they may still speak his name.

Second, because they kept Christ’s word (logos) about patient endurance. This refers to patient endurance of affliction. The synagogue of Satan and Roman authorities were persecuting the church. The Philly church was caught between “a rock and a hard place.” The ‘rock’ was Emperor Domitian’s demand that his image be worshiped; that is, the imperial cult. The ‘hard place’ was the Jewish rejection of Christians; that is, ‘the synagogue of Satan.’ Christianity was not a religio licita (legal religion) in the Roman Empire. Jews were exempt from participation in the imperial

cult. Christians could not claim the legal protection given to Jews. Christians claimed to be the new Israel of God, but Jews refuted this claim.

### What is the trial that will test the whole world?

3:10: *"Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth."*

Is it COVID-19 pandemic? Or a worse pandemic to come?

"The hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world" has several interpretations. Dispensational futurists (Baptists) believe it is a promise of a pre-tribulation rapture. Jesus promised "I will keep you from the hour of trial." The GR words (*ek tereo*) can mean either "keep from it" or "keep through it." So, either "keep you from undergoing the trial" or "keep you right through the trial." Apostle John, who wrote the Gospel and Revelation translated Jesus with the same GR words: John 17:15: *"I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."* Therefore, "keep from" does not require being raptured to heaven before the tribulation. Jesus is able to preserve his disciples through the 7 years of tribulation that begin in 6:1.

So, believers in Christ may be raptured before the final years of tribulation, or in the middle of them, or preserved through it. I hope for a Rapture before tribulation, but we must be prepared to go through part of it or all of it. Faith will be tested.

### The Reward

One big reward is being kept from the trial that will come upon the whole world like a PANDEMIC.

3:12 *"The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name."*

Faithful believers will become pillars in the New Jerusalem temple. The main point is we will never leave God's temple where God's presence is. We will stay in it and enjoy God's presence.

Faithful believers will receive 3 tattoos: 1) the name of God - YHVH, 2) New Jerusalem, 3) Christ's own new name.

There is a hidden meaning in the name of God YHVH.

Ex 3:15: God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord (YHVH) the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Isaiah 42:8: I am the Lord (YHVH); that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

GR Tetragrammaton (4 letters): YHVH (Hebrew HVHY)

When spoken with just the consonants (Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey). Add "a" vowel and it sounds like *YaHaVaH*. This is interpreted as "Self-existent Father of Love" or "Eternal life-giving Father of love." Yah = to be or exist. Av = father. Hava = breath of life/lifegiver. Ahavah = love. (Hebrew word for love is ahavah.)

John 17:26: Jesus prayed for the disciples, "*I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.*" Yeshua revealed the true significance of God's name to his disciples when he died as a sacrifice for sin.

1 John 4:8: Yahavah is ahavah (God is love).

I would have God's name YHVH tattooed on my pectoralis or trapezius muscles. Jesus will write it on me. So, he will be the tattoo artist.

[As Hebrew pictographs the name of God may have another hidden meaning: Y = Yod, H = He, V = Vav, H = He

Y = a hand accomplishing a mighty deed or a finished work

H = a man lifting hands toward heaven (to reveal, behold, show)

V = an iron nail or hook

"Behold the hand. Behold the nail."

John 19:5: Pilate said, "Behold, the man."]

Application

This message was given to a church, but I will try to make a personal application for you.

If you are faithful and persevere then Jesus will give you an open door of ministry. It is not an open door to retire, take it easy, be selfish, or make money. Decide to serve, to put your faith in action, and the Spirit will open doors to share the Gospel. Be ready. (I missed an opportunity recently! I purchased something that required it to be shipped to a person with a Federal License. When the transaction was completed, he gave me his business card. I searched everywhere for my *TrueLife* cards but did not have any. I was unprepared!)

Whatever trial you are experiencing the Lord will keep you through it. 1 Cor. 10:13: *No trial has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your ability (to endure it), but with the trial/temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to patiently endure it.*

Jews are not a synagogue of Satan anymore. Jews being saved today and becoming members of the body of Christ. Go to *OneForIsrael.org*.

[Summary: Ancient Philly was famous for earthquakes and vineyards. (Modern Philly is famous for cheesesteaks, crime, and political corruption.) The Christians in Philly were crushed between “a rock and a hard place.” The ‘rock’ was Domitian’s demand that his image be worshiped; that is, the imperial cult. The ‘hard place’ was the Jewish rejection of Christians; that is, ‘the synagogue of Satan.’ Christianity was not a *religio licita* (legal religion) in the Roman Empire. Jews were exempt from participation in the imperial cult. Christians could not claim the legal protection given to Jews. Christians claimed to be the new Israel of God, but Jews refuted this claim.

The open door that no one can shut is an OT reference to Isaiah 22:22. The Christians have been rejected by the Jews, but Jesus claims to have complete authority over who enters the New Jerusalem (3:12). The door is open for Gentiles!

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them from the evil one.); therefore, “keep from” does not require being raptured to heaven. Jesus is able to preserve his disciples through the years of tribulation that begin in 6:1.]