

MESSAGE NOTES
Revelation Unveiled - Part 10
“Philadelphia – The Overcomers”
Revelation 3:7-13

Introduction: The city of Philadelphia was founded in the 2nd century BC by the King of the country of Pergamum. The capital of that country was also named Pergamum, which we said a few weeks ago was the Washington D.C. of that region. Philadelphia was named for the king's brother Attalus, whose loyalty had rewarded him with the nickname Attalus Philadelphos, literally meaning “one who loves his brother.” In the first century A.D., Philadelphia was under Roman rule because when the last emperor of the country of Pergamum died in 129 BC, he willed the country to Rome.

Philadelphia was called a “gateway city” because it was on the border of Asia Minor. It stood on an important trade route that connected Rome to significant cities in Turkey and on to the East. If you were going from west to east, you would pass through Philadelphia on the 1,600-mile Royal Road which started there and ended in Susa. It was an extremely important location as it was the door to other areas in that part of the world. Because of its location, when Alexander the Great conquered the city he used it as a launching pad to bring Hellenism to that part of the known world. Alexander was a great evangelist for spreading the gospel of Hellenism throughout the known world.

Philadelphia became the doorway for Hellenism to be spread into that part of the world and so it was in many ways what we might call a missionary city for Hellenism. Hellenism is the belief that the Greek culture is superior to all others in Education, Sports, Theater (the Arts), Business, and Religion. Alexander thought if he could win the world to the Greek culture, he could unify and control the world. He did a great job as much of Greek Hellenistic thought has shaped western thought, and even today the philosophy of Hellenism influences our culture.

Hellenism is a worldview and lifestyle where the main belief is that man, (not God) is the measure of all things. The mind (human reason) is the standard of truth (not God). Truth is what I say it is or what the majority says it is. The human body is the standard of beauty, and so there is all this emphasis on making the body beautiful. To influence the world for this way of thought and living life, Alexander founded over 70 cities (many named Alexandria) to act as hubs for Greek culture. These cities were designed with specific lifestyle features to help win the world for Hellenism. There was Education and Sports in the Gymnasium, The Theatre and the Arts, Business in the Agoras, and Religious syncretism.

Philadelphia was a city that was decimated by earthquakes and had multiple rebuilds. After the rebuilds which were greatly financed by the Roman Emperor, the city was renamed after the emperor. Philadelphia became Neo-Caesarea, and then Flavia, before returning to it's original name.

Grapes and wine making were prolific and a huge part of the economy in that area. The soil contained a particular kind of volcanic ash with minerals which produced amazing grapes and wine. The wine was so good that people in Rome and Italy were buying it instead of wines from Italy. Because the emperor wanted to help the wine industry in Italy, he ordered the people of Philadelphia to uproot 50-75% of their grapevines and plant wheat even though they were warned that that the soil in that region was not conducive to growing grain. He did this not only to help the wine industry in Italy, but also because the empire was badly in need of more grain. Rome was having a major grain shortage, and they were doing everything they could -- treaties and agreements with Egypt -- trying to get enough grain for their empire.

NOTE: Remember we have been saying throughout this series that we are approaching our interpretation of Revelation from the perspective of what John's readers and hearers heard, not from the perspective of trying to figure out the future end times. We have also been seeing how much of Revelation draws on the people's culture and their past history, as well as on the apocalyptic writings in the Old Testament. What was going on in Philadelphia was referenced later in Revelation 6:6 as John uses the exact same phrase archeologists read when they unearthed different records from the same period of time. **Read Revelation 6:5-6...**

With this background in mind, listen for the historical-cultural context and phrases from the Old Testament apocalyptic writings in Jesus' words to the church at Philadelphia:

Revelation 3:7-8... See Isaiah 22:22 and understand the symbol of the key on the shoulder is a reference to what occurred in the ancient Near East as the chief steward carried a large, heavy key (symbolizing access to the king's treasures, storehouses, and doors). He wore that on his shoulder as a visible badge of supreme administrative power. Spiritually and prophetically, the passage serves as a powerful type of Christ, pointing forward to Jesus as the ultimate sovereign ruler who holds absolute, uncontrollable authority over the kingdom of God, salvation, and eternal access to the Father. That is the meaning of Revelation 3:7 which explicitly echoes Isaiah 22:22, applying the phrase "the key of David" directly to Jesus Christ, and emphasizing His absolute sovereignty over salvation, judgment, and eternity.

The phrase, "What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open." means that when God grants an opportunity, an open door, or eternal life, no human or demonic power can reverse or close it. Conversely, when He closes a path or shuts a door, it is final or serves as divine protection and redirection. This image as well as Revelation 1:17, relate to Pluto's Gate or The Plutonian which was in the City of Hierapolis. It was built over thermal water and a seismic fault line and belched toxic gases. It was believed to be the entrance to Hades. The entrance was guarded by the Greek God, Hades (Meaning "The Lord of the Dead"). His Roman name was Pluto.

Jesus is saying, It is not Pluto, BUT I who hold the keys of death and Hades. I open and shut the door to death and Hades. John 10:9 relates to this as Jesus opens the door to a relationship with God. When we walk through the door of salvation that he opens up to us, he opens other doors to us -- doors of ministry so we can be difference makers for HIM in our world. **See Acts 14:27, 1 Corinthians 16:8-9, 2 Corinthians 2:12, Colossians 4:2-6...**

JESUS IS SAYING I am going to use you, a small congregation of ordinary Christians, to reach many people for faith in Jesus because what they have done has gained God's favor. We Know they walked through those doors because within a few generations the Province of Asia Minor went from being the most evil in empire to 80% + Christians.

Jesus calls us to walk through open doors of ministry. As we hear these words to the church in Philadelphia WHAT ABOUT US? Here is a church on the front lines of a culture opposed to God and His people and God is giving them an open door- an opportunity for this church to seize. It doesn't mean the road will be smooth. There will oftentimes be opposition and oppression.

Open doors often lead to opposition. See Revelation 3:9... The Jewish people were not persecuted in this region but allowed to have their religion if they paid a tax to Caesar. For a while, Christians were considered part of the Jewish faith, but eventually the Jewish leaders began to tell Roman officials they are not part of us and persecution began. Jesus calls the Jewish Synagogue in Philadelphia, "The synagogue of Satan," because there is a group of Jews who did not accept the Gentiles. They turned against them.

Jesus offers encouragement and strength to endure. See Revelation 3:10... The Greek phrase that is used here in the original language can mean either keep you FROM IT, or keep you THROUGH IT. It can mean the church at Philadelphia IS EITHER going to be spared from a time of testing that is coming as Domitian is going to ramp up his persecution of the church, OR it can mean God will see them through that time of testing. Whichever it is, Jesus is saying God will be with them in the time of trial that is coming.

Revelation 3:11... The Greek word he uses is *Parousia*, which means presence or arrival. It was used to describe Emperors who would be arriving for an official visit to the city. It was a formal and highly anticipated visit of a Roman emperor or a high official to a provincial city, and it triggered all kinds of preparations the city would make for his arrival. The New Testament writers adopted this political word to describe the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ. By doing so, they were subverting the empire and saying our ultimate royal welcome and loyalty, is to Jesus. We are giving Jesus, not the emperor, sovereign authority over our life. Jesus encourages the believers at Philadelphia to hold fast, stay faithful, continue in obedience and loyalty no matter what, so that in the end they don't lose or forfeit their crown (the wreath given to the athlete winning the race which symbolizes the rewards God will give his people in heaven as a result of our faithfulness to him here on earth).

Jesus' promise that gives us encouragement and hope. See Revelation 3:12-13... In the Jewish synagogue, people who were part of that faith community would have their names imprinted or carved into the pillar. But when they became Messianic Jews (followers of Jesus) their names were cut out of the wall. Jesus is saying: God will make us like a pillar in his temple, and he will write on us his name identifying us as his and we will never be separated from him. He will never cut out our name. Jesus is also drawing on their city's history to encourage them and give them hope. Philadelphia was a city in a bit of an identity crisis, because it had been named and renamed 3 times. Jesus mentions their new name 3 times. He is saying, I will give you an unchanging name, one that will stand forever. You will live in and be citizens of an eternal city that cannot be shaken. You'll never have to move, hide, evacuate, leave, board up, pack up, pick up, or rebuild again. **YOU WILL BE PART OF A PLACE OF WORSHIP WHERE YOU WILL WORSHIP FOREVER and YOUR NAME WILL NEVER BE REMOVED FROM THE PILLAR OF THAT TEMPLE.** What a great promise that encourages us, gives us hope, shapes our identity, and motivates us to look for open doors as long as we are alive and have breath. I pray that you and I will step up to the plate and look around us to simply come alongside and B.L.E.S.S. them.

Will you and I long to be a difference maker and not a bench sitter in people's lives? In John 15:8, Jesus says, *"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."* John 15:8 (NASB)