

# Revelation 3:7-13 Letter to Philadelphia

## BACKGROUND THE ECCLESIA AT PHILADELPHIA

We know the letters to Sardis and Laodicea are vital for our days because of Christ's urgent appeal in **Rev 16:15**. It is easy for us to lapse into a Sardis or Laodicean way of thinking. Philadelphia however is also very relevant for the last days. In **Rev 22**, the final chapter of the Bible, Christ repeatedly warns that he is not coming slowly. He says, as he does to Philadelphia, that he is "coming quickly" ie. suddenly: **Rev 22:7,12,20**. This means that his return to the earth is going to be extremely unexpected to some. Christ says to Philadelphia: "Behold I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" **Rev 3:11**.

**v7 Philadelphia:** The name means "brotherly love". It derived its name from Attalus II in BC159-138. Philadelphia's history was marked by certain features that find reflection in the letter to its ecclesia. First, it was a city established for propaganda purposes in the Roman Empire. The ecclesia however proclaimed the name of the Jesus Christ: **Rev 3:8**. Also, its people lived in fear of earth tremors, even as the ecclesia faced a coming "hour of trial": **3:10**. In its appreciation for imperialism, the city assumed a new and royal name. Christ in his letter offered to write upon those who overcame, the name of the New Jerusalem: **3:12**. These features established a historical connection between the city and those in the ecclesia to whom the letter was addressed.

**He that is holy:** Jesus Christ: **Psa 16:10**. Sacred and blameless, translated as *saint* in **Rev 5:8; 8:3,4; 11:18**. Description of Yahweh: **Isa 1:4; 5:19,24; 10:17,20; 12:6; Ezek 39:7**. The saints also: **Hab 3:3**. **He that is true:** Jesus Christ: **Jn 4:23; Heb 8:2; 9:24**. He is the true light: **Jn 1:9**; the true bread from heaven: **Jn 6:32**; the true vine: **Jn 15:1**. He is **the reality**, the true fulfilment of all types.

**He that hath the key of David:** A clear reference to the days of Hezekiah in **Isaiah 22:22** where it is described as "the key of the house of David." A key gives a person power to open a house as well as control who comes in and out: **Rev 1:18**. In this context the house is **the Kingdom of God**. **He that openeth, and no man shutteth:** See notes on **Rev 3:8**.

## OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND: ISAIAH 22

**Isaiah 22** is set in Hezekiah's time when Assyria came against Jerusalem. Isaiah prefigures two states of David's Kingdom by a comparison between two of Hezekiah's officers: **Shebna** (in control of Yahweh's house, but a proud man) and **Eliakim** (the one who Yahweh would set up to replace Shebna). Hezekiah is reigning as king. He has undertaken a great reformation and re-established the feasts. However Assyria was on the march and were taking one city after another. They were a serious threat to the Judah and Jerusalem. A time of trial came on the ecclesia in Jerusalem - just like Philadelphia. Read the historical background to Assyria's invasion and defeat in **Isaiah 36-39**.

**Why is this example used for Philadelphia?** There were false Israelites in the ecclesia, the "Synagogue of Satan": **Rev 3:9**. These appeared to have control over the house, but Christ encourages Philadelphia by reminding them that **he** has the key.

Shebna was over Hezekiah's house, the house of David: **Zech 12:7**. He had a key, but he had a real problem with pride. Shebna desired to set up for himself a large sepulchre for when he died: **Isa 22:15-16**. In **22:17-18** there is a play on Shebna's name, which means to *be captive*. He had the key, but it was to be *taken away*. In **22:20-22** we see the one who will be given the key, Eliakim. His name means *Ail shall set up*. Eliakim was given control over the house of David: **36:22; 37:2**. Christ in effect says to Philadelphia, "I am the Eliakim. I am the one who Yahweh will set up". Eliakim was "a servant" **22:20**, a type of Christ.

Shebna was typical of unholy and false Israelites who, claiming special relationship to God because of the Temple, would nevertheless go into captivity: **Jer 7:3-7**. Such were also in Philadelphia, the *synagogue of Satan*: **Rev 3:9**. On the other hand Eliakim, though a *servant*, would be clothed with honour and given authority over the house of David, inheriting the glory of his father's house: **Isa 22:21-25**. Without an understanding of the background to **Isaiah 22** the full force of Christ's words would not be appreciated. The ecclesia would have carefully scoured the record to understand Christ's message. So should we.

7 And to the angel of the church in <sup>4</sup>Philadelphia write; **These things saith <sup>7</sup>he that is holy, he that is <sup>h</sup>true, he that hath <sup>h</sup>the key of David, <sup>1</sup>he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and <sup>h</sup>shutteth, and no man openeth;**

8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee <sup>o</sup>an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

9 Behold, I will make them of <sup>o</sup>the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, <sup>o</sup>I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, <sup>o</sup>I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

11 <sup>o</sup>Behold, I come quickly: <sup>o</sup>hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take <sup>o</sup>thy crown.

12 <sup>o</sup>Him that overcometh will I make <sup>o</sup>a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him <sup>h</sup>the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is <sup>h</sup>new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him <sup>h</sup>my new name.

13 <sup>o</sup>He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

## THE LORD'S COMMENDATION

**v8 An open door, no man can shut:** The priests had responsibility to keep the doors of God's house: **1 Chr 9:27**. Ahaz cut in pieces the vessels and shut the doors: **2 Chr 28:24**. His son Hezekiah then opened the doors: **2 Chr 29:3**. Hezekiah's son Manasseh closed the doors again. Christ has the key and he will open that temple. The Pharisees shut up the Kingdom: **Mt 23:13**. In the Holy City, New Jerusalem, the gates are open all day long: **Rev 21:25**. Philadelphia are now offered entrance into that temple! See also **Acts 14:27; 1 Cor 16:9**.



**v8 Little strength:** Gk. *dunamis* ie. "power", Read **Mt 25:14-30**. In the talents parable, talents were given according to each one's "abilities" (*dunamis*). This ecclesia was either small, poor or predominantly elderly. **Key verses:** **1 Cor 1:26-27**. **Kept my word:** See notes on **1:3**. A key theme in Revelation. **Not denied my name:** Openly preached: **Mt 10:32; Lk 12:8**. Witnessing for Christ is a constant theme. See notes on **1:9**.

**v9 Synagogue of Satan:** False brethren, also in Smyrna. See notes on **2:9**. **Worship before thy feet:** In the Kingdom age: **Psa 110:1; Isa 49:23; 60:14**. **I have loved thee:** A deep personal relationship between Christ and his ecclesia: **Isa 43:4; Gal 2:20**.

**v10 Word of my patience:** See notes on **Rev 1:9**. **The hour of temptation:** Appears to be a specific time, most likely the persecution of believers in AD248: **Rev 6:7-9**. They would all be asleep in the grave by this time. **Come upon all the earth:** ie. Roman Empire. See the distinction with "world" in **Mt 24:14; Rev 12:9; 16:14**. Also prophetic of the future when the saints will be protected from the terrors of Armageddon: **Isa 26:19-21**.

## EXHORTATION AND PROMISE OF THE KINGDOM

**v11 Behold, I come quickly:** Explains **the way** in which Christ will intervene rather than **the time** that will elapse prior. Also points to the future: **Rev 22:7,12,20**. This is used to warn of impending punishment on the Ephesian ecclesia: **Rev 2:5**. Also to false brethren in Pergamos: **2:16**. **No man take thy crown:** See notes on **2:10**. **Him that overcometh:** See notes on **2:11**.

**v12 Pillar in the temple:** A pillar is a fundamental structure in a building. In **Gen 28:22**, God's whole house is represented by a pillar, while in **1 Pet 2:4-10** the ecclesia is represented by *lively stones* who are "built up a spiritual house" with Christ as head. The *holy city*, *temple* and *New Jerusalem* all represent the **united body of immortal believers**: **1 Cor 3:16; 6:18-20; 2 Cor 6:16**. The Jewish temple was typical of immortal saints, and as such was filled with Yahweh's glory: **1 Kgs 8:11**.

**Write upon him the name of my God:** Jesus Christ prayed for this in **Jn 17:21**. Yahweh's name is written on their foreheads because they have His thinking: **Rev 7:3-4; 14:1**. Yahweh's Name was given to the angel in **Ex 23:20-21**. Saints are called to be a people for the Name: **Acts 15:14**. The *Name of Yahweh* comes in judgment against Israel's enemies: **Isa 30:27**. **New Jerusalem:** This promise is explained further in **Rev 21:1-10** where it is revealed as *the bride*, *the Lamb's wife*, and the *Holy City*. See also **Heb 11:10; 12:22**.

**Colour code:** Blue (God and Jesus Christ); Red (sin/devil/judgment of wicked); Green (Kingdom); Orange (important words & phrases); Purple (return of Jews to the land); Yellow (practical exhortation). Prepared for Rathmines Bible School Teenagers.