

# PHILADELPHIA

**TRADE |** Philadelphia benefitted from its location at the juncture of several important trade routes, earning the title “Gateway to the East.” Leather and textile businesses provided much income to the city.

**GEOGRAPHY |** The city was located in a volcanic region whose fertile soil was ideally suited for its well-known vineyards. The downside to living in such an area, however, was the increased threat of an earthquake.

**DEVASTATION |** A powerful earthquake finally hit the city in AD 17, causing significant damage as the aftershocks continued for 20 years. The city was eventually rebuilt though financial aid from Caesar Tiberius.

**RELIGION |** Their chief god was Dionysus, who was worshipped to ensure a productive grape and wine harvest. Jewish believers risked excommunication and disenfranchisement from the synagogue when they trusted Christ. Non-Jewish believers risked being branded a traitor.

This week, we explore the letter written to the church in Philadelphia. This was the sixth letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. Believers in Philadelphia were facing persecution all around them, much of it from the Jewish population of the city. Like Smyrna, this Jewish opposition was so fanatical that Christ calls it “A synagogue of Satan” **They “claim to be Jews though they are not, they are liars” (Revelation 3:9).**

The fierceness of this opposition probably tempted these Christ followers to keep their faith private – to hold their peace and mind private. Perhaps some church members counseled discretion rather than boldness, that they should avoid trouble when their beliefs ran against the grain of culture.

## REVELATION 3:7-13

<sup>7</sup>To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. <sup>8</sup>I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup>I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup>Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the

earth. <sup>11</sup>I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. <sup>12</sup>The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. <sup>13</sup>Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

## FOCUS ON CHRIST

In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. Jesus describes himself to this church as the one “who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open.” **(Revelation 3:7)**.

His language refers to Isaiah 22 where Eliakim receives authority from the kingdom of Judah in negotiations with Assyria. In this act, Eliakim prefigures Jesus as the head of God’s household, the church **(Hebrews 3:6)**. It is Jesus who has the keys, not only of “death and Hades,” **(Revelation 1:18)**, but also of salvation. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Davidic King who would rescue the whole world from sin, death and evil. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, the door of salvation is all about Jesus, and how Jesus uniquely accomplishes it.

Scripture is clear that Jesus alone holds these keys, which means he alone is the gateway to God. There are no others.

**Q: *Have you placed your faith and trust in Jesus, the “one who holds the key?” If so, share what it means to serve Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life?***

## FOCUS ON THE CHURCH

The Church of Philadelphia doesn’t receive correction; Jesus comforts them. In the midst of severe persecution and opposition, and in light of his return, Jesus offers comfort. He encourages them, “Hold onto what you have, so that no one will take your crown.” **(Revelation 3:11)**.

We may not understand all that God is accomplishing through our “troubles,” but we do know he offers to comfort us in them. And he promises that “we can comfort those in our trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” **(2 Corinthians 1:3-7)**. Our troubles become a channel of comfort for others.

**Q: *Have you experienced Jesus’ comfort in the midst of trials? .***

There are many places throughout scripture where God assures us that he is with us no matter what we are going through. Sharing some of these scriptures can be very encouraging for those who are experiencing suffering.

Psalms in general are a great place for us when we are experiencing trials. It is where people are real with their struggles, despair, heartache and all emotions. Most of them resolve by pointing to God for comfort in the middle of trials.

- *Psalm 23 (a familiar psalm, although often read at funerals, it is a promise that when we are in the 'valley' God promises to be with us.*
- *Psalm 46 reminds us that God is our refuge and strength, and ever present hope in times of trouble.*
- *Psalm 56 tells us that God actually collects our tears in a bottle - he knows our agony and our pain and wants to comfort us.*
- *Isaiah 43 reminds us that God is with us as the waters rise, he will not allow them to overwhelm us, he tells us that we are precious in his sight -- that we do not have to fear.*
- *2 Corinthians 1 reminds us that Jesus comforts us in all our afflictions.*
- *The book of James reminds us that our suffering has a purpose and God does not allow us to endure alone.*
- *In 1 Peter 4, Peter reminds us that when we suffer (for standing up for our faith) we are sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and that ultimately, God's glory will be revealed.*

Today, ask the Lord to help you be more aware of those around you who are experiencing trials and troubles. Make a commitment to graciously sharing with them what God has done for you.

## FOCUS ON ME

A consistent theme in Jesus' letters to these churches is, "This world isn't all there is. I have so much more for you." For those who overcome and remain faithful, Jesus has promised incredible rewards. (**Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21**). To those in the church in Philadelphia, Jesus promises, "I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God" (**Revelation 3:12**). This would have been particularly significant to those in earthquake-prone Asia-Minor; pillars were the last things standing when everything else falls.

**Q:** *What significance does eternity have in your life today?*