

# Patmos and the Seven Churches of Asia

By Doug Hamilton

## **VI) The Church at Philadelphia (3:7-13)**

*Rev 3:7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:*

Philadelphia was the newest of all the seven cities mentioned. The city was named for the founder, Atallus. He was a leader who had a deep love for his adopted brother, Eumenes. The word means, “*One who loves his brother*” (philo {love} + delphi {brother} = *philadelphia*). Philadelphia is often referred to as “the city of brotherly love”.

It is located near some of the richest soil of the world and was well-known for its grapes and wine production in the first century. It is the modern-day Alasehir situated at the foot of the Bozdag Mountain.

Christianity eventually became a strong religious presence in this region many years after the writing of the letter of Revelation. It would remain so until Muslim invaders charged in and destroyed the culture during the sixth-century.

Today there are remains of a large church building dating from that time period. The structure would have housed thousands of Christians for their worship services. Like many locations around the world where Islam has taken over, there is a mosque built on the site of the church to declare dominance over Christianity in the eyes of the present day culture.



For Christians, Philadelphia was a difficult place to live. This was for two reasons.

- A. It was built on an earthquake fault line. Every two or three years the city had to be rebuilt because it was shaken to the ground. This resulted in great rebuilding costs and poverty. Since Christians were already alienated, they suffered more.

## Patmos and the Seven Churches of Asia

By Doug Hamilton

- B. Like in many cities in Asia Minor, there was a large occupation of self-righteous Jews. They would belittle the Christians in their poor state and question their salvation openly. To them, the saints of God were an easy target, which led to more suffering.

Jesus was depicted in three ways from the opening of His address to the church.

- 1) He is *holy*.

This means Jesus is different or set apart from what is down here on this earth. He is special and as a result makes us special.

- 2) He is *true*.

This means Jesus is real compared to temporal. While the rest of the world is constantly changing, Christ changes not (Malachi 3:6). He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

- 3) He is the One *who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this.*

As previously discussed, most of the book of Revelation continually makes reference back to the first century Bible, the Old Testament. Jesus was making reference to *Is 22:22* “*Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, when he opens no one will shut, when he shuts no one will open.*” In that passage King Hezekiah hired a faithful steward named Eliakim. He possessed authority to permit people to enter and leave the presence of the king. Eliakim was the person who determined who could come before the king of Israel.

By making reference to such, they acknowledged that Jesus is the One Who has the authority to admit souls to the New Jerusalem; He holds the keys that make it so. *John 10:9* “*I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.* He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Nobody comes to the Father except through Him.

We must be able to appreciate Jesus for these facts. Christ is our holy, unchanging path to God the Father. He is the One who deeply desires for us to appear before the throne of God, without spot or blemish.

*Rev 3:8* *I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.*

Jesus saw their works of faith and presented an open door before them. He is the gatekeeper for the church and all that dwell within. An even deeper meaning to the text is understood through the history of the founding of the city. Philadelphia was situated near the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia, but was not considered a garrison town. It was established with the deliberate intention of being a missionary influence for Greek culture and language in the region. Philadelphia was considered to be the *key* and *door* for the lands beyond for the Roman Empire, but was now considered in Jesus’ eyes to be the same for His gospel.

## Patmos and the Seven Churches of Asia

By Doug Hamilton

God has always sought to leave doors open for the furtherance of His gospel. It is His will that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. We have an “Open-Door” Savior Who has been opening doors past, present and future for all the souls that love Him.

- *Acts 14:27 And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they {began} to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.*
- *1 Cor 16:9 for a wide door for effective {service} has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*
- *Col 4:3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;*

What makes the church in Philadelphia an “open door” congregation for God? The following reasons are given as the reason for the reality of their “open door” status.

1) Because they have little power

This has to deal with the humility of the Christian and his utter dependence of Jesus. Jesus cannot and will not leave an open door for the proud and independent, for He giveth grace unto the humble, for the last shall be first and one can do all things through Him wherewith the strength comes from.

2) Because they have kept His word

It is not enough for a man to come to God with humility alone, but also with the deeds of righteousness that are displayed as fruit of the Spirit. To look at the mirror, see the need to walk and then simply walk away will shut and open door quick. The open door is extended for the walkers for the light, for their deeds will follow them (Rev 14:13).

3) Because they have not denied His name

One might present themselves as humble and do the deeds of a servant, but still not have an open door through the denying of Jesus. *Matt 10:33 "But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.*

One could assume the same applies to the church in the twenty-first century. What would happen if the church were to adopt these positions in order to know that they had the “open door” status in the eyes of Jesus? Would we not be a church who would be more confident, more loving and more involved in the lives of others? Humility, obedience and faithfulness have and always will be the core of the church who is right in the eyes of God.

*Rev 3:9 'Behold, I will cause {those} of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie-- behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you.*

## Patmos and the Seven Churches of Asia

By Doug Hamilton

Once again, the Jews of this city are referred to as a “synagogue of Satan” in contrast to one of their favorite Jewish references the “assembly of the Lord” (Numbers 16:3; 20:4; 31:16). They say they were Jews, but in reality were liars, for even a Jew would not treat a Christian in a hostile manner. They say they represented God, but did not, therefore they are liars. They portrayed the actions of their father, Satan, the one who steals, kills and destroys (John 10:10). This was why they dwelt in the synagogue of Satan. As 1John 3:10 stated “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious...”

Jesus said He will cause the enemies to bow down to their feet and make known that they are loved by Him. There was a core Jewish teaching in the first-century that the new age of the Jewish kingdom would force the enemies of God to bow down at their feet. This type of forced humility was the ultimate sign of victory over the enemy.

- *Isa 45:14 Thus says the LORD, "The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush And the Sabeans, men of stature, will come over to you and will be yours; they will walk behind you, they will come over in chains and will bow down to you; they will make supplication to you: 'Surely, God is with you, and there is none else, no other God.'"*
- *Isa 49:23 "And kings will be your guardians, and their princesses your nurses. They will bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick the dust of your feet; and {you} will know that I am the LORD; those who hopefully wait for me will not be put to shame..."*
- *Isa 60:14 "And the sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, and all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; and they will call you the city of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel..."*

*Rev 3:10 Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that {hour} which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.*

The Philadelphians had been faithful; therefore Christ would keep them from their hour of trial. Their location was so far from the beaten path that Rome never had an interest in expanding the persecution to them. By the time which forced worship to Caesar had spread to Philadelphia, Domitian had already been murdered. Jesus prophetically kept his word.

*Rev 3:11-13 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown. <sup>12</sup> 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. <sup>13</sup> 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

Are there any sweeter words to be spoken by Jesus than “I come quickly”. An infant crying for his mother knows that she will most generally “come quickly”. The Christian who is holding fast to Jesus and hanging onto the crown knows that He is coming quickly. It is not a matter of someone stealing their crown, but of one not guarding it. We may forsake Him, but He will never forsake us. When there is forsaking in the relationship, it is from our side and not His.

# Patmos and the Seven Churches of Asia

By Doug Hamilton

What is their prize for overcoming? Jesus offers a three-fold package.

1) He will make them a pillar in the temple of His God.

You will remember that the city was built in an earthquake zone and would constantly be shaken to the ground. In fact, the majority of the residents lived in huts outside of town for fear of being buried under the rubble of collapsing structures. After the destruction, the first structures which would be rebuilt were their temples to their different gods. The setting up of the new pillars of these temples would have been a common sight among the Philadelphians. If they overcome, Jesus will set them up in the temple of His God!

2) He will make it to where they will not have to go out again.

The earthquake of AD 17, the one that destroyed Sardis and ten other cities in the area, caused aftershocks for decades to come in Philadelphia. A Greek historian Strabo (c. 63 BC - c.21 AD) wrote: *"Philadelphia has no trustworthy walls, but daily in one direction or another they keep tottering and falling apart."* Every time one of the pagan worshippers in the temple felt a tremor, they fled into the streets for safety. This panicked behavior of temple-fleeing had become an everyday occurrence.

Not only will Jesus make Christians a pillar in the temple of His God, but they will never flee again! We will never flee for fear in the future!

3) He will write upon them the name of His God, the name of the city of His God, and His new name.

Yet another common behavior of those in Asia Minor, including Philadelphia, was the reward for pagan priests who worked for a life of faithful service to their gods. In honor of those priests, the people would erect a new pillar in the temple with his name and the name of his father upon it. This was done so everyone who would come into the temple would know that this man was faithful to the gods.



Not only will Jesus make them pillars and make it so they will not have to flee again, but also make them a symbol of faithfulness for all the generations to see. They are who they are because Jesus is who He was. We are utterly dependent on Jesus in every way.

## Conclusion:

Where will our congregation be 10 years from now? Where will we be 50 years from now? 100 years? If we will just be the "Open Door Church" Jesus calls for us to be, how many generations will we continue? We must follow the pattern of Jesus or He will blow out our candle. We must make sure to carry out an open door policy for the cause of Christ. If we overcome, then we can trust the Lord that He will take care of us, making us a pillar with His name and His purpose in our lives, both now and in eternity. It is the basis of our hope.