

Revelation 3:7-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rev/rev-3/revelation-37-8/>

In the opening to the letter to the church in Philadelphia, Jesus promises this faithful church with an opportunity to walk in authority.

The sixth of seven letters written to *churches* in modern-day Turkey is the letter to the *church in Philadelphia*. Revelation 1:2 said that God communicated the message “by His angel to His bond-servant John.” There, the word translated *angel* comes from the Greek word “angelos,” which means “messenger.” In that context, the messenger referred to Jesus, who gives God’s message to John.

Here in Revelation 3:7, as with the greeting to each of the seven *churches*, the word *angel* is also the Greek word “aggelos” which means “messenger.” Following the instructions for blessing in Revelation 1:3 to read, hear, and heed, it can be inferred that the messenger here is the person, the messenger, who is going to read the letter to the church in *Philadelphia*.

It seems unlikely that there is a heavenly *angel*/messenger that John is referring to, but rather a human messenger who will deliver the letter from John to the people of *Philadelphia*. Therefore, Jesus the “messenger” gives a message to John, which he is instructed to write and deliver to the seven churches of the Roman province of Asia, located in modern-day Turkey, by means of human “messengers.”

The letters to each of the *seven churches* starts with a greeting, but it is more like a “memorandum” greeting format such as “To: all office employees” rather than the more formal greeting that is seen in the Pauline letters.

Here, Jesus greets the *church in Philadelphia* by introducing himself as,

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.

This is actually a paraphrase of Isaiah 22:22, which says:

“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.”
(Isaiah 22:22)

This verse is a part of a larger poem attributed to “the Lord GOD of hosts.” The term “Lord of hosts” can also be translated as “Lord of armies.” The *key of David* would seem to emphasize the authority of David as King. That authority also shows up in the fact that he *shuts* and *opens* with irrevocable authority. King David was promised that one of his heirs would sit on his throne forever, as God spoke to King David through the prophet Nathan:

“Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.”

(2 Samuel 7:16)

Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophesy. He is of the house and lineage of King David as a human. Jesus is adopted of Joseph, rightful heir of David (Matthew 1:1-17), and born of Mary, who was descended from David (Luke 3:23-38). On the divine side, Jesus is the Son of God (John 1:34; Romans 1:4; Hebrews 1:8, 4:14).

Therefore, the memorandum of this greeting might read “From: the King of Kings, and Lord of Armies.” This emphasizes the authority and power of Jesus. This will be important as the church in Philadelphia has a *little power*. Their Lord who helps them has all power.

Next, Jesus begins the actual text of the letter by saying:

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.

The pattern in the letters to the first five *churches* was that the letter started with a section of praise and then moved into a section of rebuke. With the previous letter to Sardis, there was no commendation, the letter moved directly to a rebuke. This sixth letter moves directly to the commendation, as there is no section of rebuke for the *church in Philadelphia*.

The statement that *I know your deeds* has been repeated in the letters to the churches in Ephesus, Thyatira, and Sardis. This may serve the purpose of further emphasizing Jesus as God—that He knows all, just as God does, because He is God. Since Revelation is written to “His servants” (Revelation 1:1), those being addressed are believers in Jesus. This letter refers to the *deeds* of the believers at *Philadelphia*, and the fact that Jesus is watching and evaluating their deeds. The deeds of believers will be judged at the judgement seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10), but Jesus does not wait to *know* and evaluate the *deeds* of His people.

Then, he references the *open door which no one can shut*. As was mentioned in the greeting, Jesus has the kingly authority of David. We can infer that the reason that *no one can shut* the *door* is because Jesus is the one who opened it and what He does cannot be revoked. But the reason that the *church in Philadelphia* has an *open door* instead of a *shut* one is *because* it has a *little power*, and it has *kept* Jesus’s *word*, and has *not denied* Jesus’s *name*.

The believers in *Philadelphia* would have had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which gives them infinite power. So this reference to a *little power* would necessarily refer to some other form of *power*.

The word used for *power* here is the Greek “*dynamis*,” which is where we get our words “dynamic,” “dynamo,” and “dynamite” from. It is used in 2 Corinthians, where Paul reports of God telling him that “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Paul then responds that “I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). This *power* is not one of might and strength but one of

weakness and humility. This would refer to *power* of walking by faith: the power of walking in obedience to Christ. This is something that is learned.

In Acts 1, when Jesus promised that He would give the disciples the Holy Spirit, He promised that the Spirit would bring them *power*:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

(Acts 1:8)

This *power* comes from the Holy Spirit, but we do not have a *little* Holy Spirit. We are given the Holy Spirit in full. However, it appears that we must learn to yield to the Spirit, and, in humility, allow that power to flow through our weakness.

The *power* the church in Philadelphia has in Revelation 3:8 is *little*. This might refer to the current positional authority of the church. Jesus has been given authority over heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). However, Jesus has not yet assumed a position of power over the earth—that is yet to come when He returns to earth a second time.

In Matthew 26, it says:

“Jesus said to him, ‘You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.’”

(Matthew 26:64)

Power can refer to ability, but it can also be based on position or role. It seems that while the church at Philadelphia has full *power* in a sense through the Holy Spirit, they do not have full authority. They just have a *little* authority or opportunity.

Jesus tells the Philadelphians that He has *put before you an open door*. That does not mean that He has opened every *door*, but just that there is one *door* that the *church in Philadelphia* has the opportunity to walk through. It is a *little* bit of opportunity, or a *little* bit of *power*, but that does not mean that the outcome of walking in obedience to the opportunity will be small. Anything done faithfully in the name of Jesus is great in His kingdom.

To illustrate this principle, Jesus said that serving children would lead to greatness in His kingdom (Luke 9:48). Jesus also stated that those who served His prophets and “whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward” (Matthew 10:40-42).

All seven *churches* who received these letters existed at once, so any *church* can have the characteristics and issues displayed by these *churches* at any time. This letter to the church at *Philadelphia* would indicate that any church has the chance to be faithful in and be rewarded for

any opportunity that it has, however small the opportunity might appear. But these letters can also be viewed as representing eras of the western *church*.

The *church in Philadelphia* can be viewed as representing the era from 1727 to 1919. 1727 is the beginning of the Moravian revival and 1919 is the end of World War 1. The Moravians were a persecuted group of Christians from Czechoslovakia. Heavily influenced by John Wycliffe and working at the same time as William Tyndale, John Huss also translated the Bible into the native language of his region of Czechoslovakia, and the believers that came out of that era were the same ones still hanging on amid persecution at the time of the Moravian revival.

In 1722, a poor Moravian man arrived on the doorstep in Germany of Count Zinzendorf, a member of the court of the Holy Roman Empire and a devout Christian. Count Zinzendorf had decided that he was going to help the poor in order to do all he could for Christ. Therefore, when this Moravian man showed up and explained that he was persecuted and asked if he could settle on Count Zinzendorf's land as a serf, he let the Moravian do so.

As Zinzendorf started to visit the Moravians, he started to disciple them. Meanwhile, the Moravians were encouraging their friends still in Czechoslovakia to come with them to Germany where they could all be free, so soon there were 300 Moravians living on the settlement on Zinzendorf's land, and he continued to teach and encourage them. There were factions that emerged as the population grew, but in learning about God they grew in love for each other and were able to live in harmony.

In 1727, there was a revival that broke out among the Moravians where they started truly loving each other and they started a 24-hour prayer initiative that lasted for a hundred years! Not only that, but the community of 600 inhabitants sent out 70 missionaries to spread the Gospel and encourage other communities, including to the Caribbean, which was a place of extreme poverty at the time. In fact, John Wesley was enlightened in part due to an experience meeting some Moravians on a ship during a storm who were not afraid to die but sang hymns all through the storm.

The Moravian revival was at the start of what is known as the Great Awakening, a revival that happened in America in the 1730s-1740s. All in all, it was a period of great love for God and for one another where believers committed themselves to prayer and to spreading the word and making disciples.

This period also encompasses the Second Great Awakening in America, which was led by Charles Finney. Out of this Awakening came the abolition of slavery. It also includes the Third Great Awakening in America, which was started in 1857 by young businessman Jeremiah Lanphier, who started a prayer meeting on Fulton Street in the Financial District of New York City one week before the stock market crashed. Within six months, ten thousand people were gathering daily in New York City for prayer at noon. One man started a prayer meeting, and then God blessed it. That is how movements and revivals get started.

John Huss, Count Zinzendorf, and Jeremiah Lanphier are all good examples of what it looks like to be a faithful witness that acts without fear of loss or rejection. This letter of Revelation

encourages every servant of Jesus, every believer, to be such a witness, so they will gain a great blessing (Revelation 1:3). In the case of these three, we can see the impact they made on others by their faithfulness. With most people, their faithfulness will go unnoticed by history. But it will not go unnoticed by Jesus.

Just one person acting in obedience to God's calling has huge impact. It is inferred that same type of impact for God's kingdom awaits through the *open door* that the *church in Philadelphia* has the opportunity to walk through. That does not mean that there will cease to be persecution. After all, John Huss was burned at the stake for wanting to translate the Bible from Latin into a common language. It does mean, however, that God will continue to bless those who are faithful and multiply their *deeds* with spiritual fruit.

Second, Jesus commends the believers in *Philadelphia* because *you have kept My word*.

Philadelphia means "brotherly love." God praises the *church* for having a spreading truth, but also inferred here is that the church has combined truth with love. Jesus's primary commands involved love:

- Jesus said that the second greatest commandment God gave Israel was to love their neighbors as themselves. This was the way to live out the first great commandment, which is to love God with all their being (Matthew 22:39).
- Jesus built upon this and gave a new commandment to His followers, His servants, to "agape" love one another (John 13:34).
- Jesus also commanded His followers to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44).

The word love here is the Greek word "agape." The other word used for love in the Bible is "phileo," which indicates an affection for someone or something. "Phileo" is a root of *Philadelphia*, which means "brotherly love."

But "agape" love goes beyond affection. "Agape" love is a love of choice. Jesus showed "agape" love when He laid down His life for humanity.

"Agape" love refers to making a choice to do something that is in someone else's best interest. An example is in [1 Corinthians 13](#), which says that "love (agape) is patient." To be "patient" is to make a choice to persist in an undesirable circumstance while having to endure an irritation of some kind. No one is called "patient" when they persist in spending time doing something pleasurable.

Why would someone choose to endure an irritation that can be avoided? In the case of "agape" love, it is because they make a choice to do this because they see a greater purpose. The goal of Revelation is to help its readers see that being a faithful witness, even if it means enduring rejection, loss, and death, serves a greater purpose. A part of that greater purpose is that we gain the greatest blessing possible from living our lives here on earth (Revelation 1:3).

The rest of the seven churches have to be corrected for the ways that they have not *kept My word*, whether they are committing sexual sin and eating food sacrificed to animals, or have not maintained the reputation they once had for being faithful witnesses.

The fact that the *church in Philadelphia* has *kept My word* leads to God ensuring they are given the responsibility of the *open door*. They have been obedient to God in the past, so Jesus ensures they have a continued opportunity to be obedient to Him in the future.

Third, Jesus commends the church at *Philadelphia* because *you have not denied My name*.

Walking through the *open door* will likely entail needing to tell others about Jesus, just as the Moravians sent out missionaries to bear witness of Jesus's *name*. After all, it was Jesus' final commandment to His disciples, known as the Great Commission, to tell others about Him and show them how to become faithful witnesses:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:16-20)

The believers in the *church in Philadelphia* have had the boldness to be a living testimony to Jesus. They have applied the *little power* they have to keep Jesus's *word*. This means that they did not *deny* His *name*. They have been steadfastly doing what they can to be faithful witnesses, even though their opportunity is small. But God judges what we do with the opportunities we are given (Luke 12:48).

It is important to note from scripture that there is room for forgiveness for those who have *denied* Jesus' *name* in the past. An example is the Apostle Peter who denied Jesus three times the night He was crucified. But it is a credit to the *church in Philadelphia* that they have not *denied My name*.

Biblical Text

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: ⁸I 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.