

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-17-13 PM NOTES
"A SMALL CHURCH WITH A BIG GOD"
REVELATION 3:7-13
#8 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through Revelation"

I. The Correspondent (v. 7)

A. His Attributes (v. 7a)

1. He Who Is Holy

Isaiah 40:25 (NKJV) "To whom then will you liken Me, or *to whom* shall I be equal?" says **the Holy One**."

Habakkuk 3:3a (NKJV) "God came from Teman, **The Holy One** from Mount Paran."

Luke 1:35b (NKJV) "...**that Holy One** who is to be born will be called the Son of God."

1 Peter 1:15 (NKJV) "but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct."

2. He Who Is True

B. His Access and Authority (v. 7b)

Isaiah 22:22 (NKJV) "The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open."

John 14:6 (NKJV) "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

Philippians 4:19 (NKJV) "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory **by Christ Jesus**."

C. His Sovereignty (v. 7c)

II. The City (v. 7)

III. The Commendation (vv. 8-11a)

A. Their Open Door (v. 8)

1 Corinthians 16:9 (NKJV) "For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries."

2 Corinthians 2:12 (NKJV) "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord."

Colossians 4:3 (NKJV) "meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains."

Revelation 3:8 (HCSB) “I know your works. **Because you have limited strength**, have kept My word, and have not denied My name, look, I have placed before you an open door that no one is able to close.”

2 Corinthians 12:10 (HCSB) “So because of Christ, I am pleased in weaknesses, in insults, in catastrophes, in persecutions, and in pressures. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

B. Their Enemies (v. 9)

Philippians 2:10-11 (NKJV) “¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

C. Their Assurance (vv. 10-11a)

“Because the believers in Philadelphia had successfully passed so many tests, Jesus promised to spare them from the ultimate test. The sweeping nature of that promise extends far beyond the Philadelphia congregation to encompass all faithful churches throughout history. This verse promises that the church will be delivered from the Tribulation, thus supporting a pretribulation Rapture. The Rapture is the subject of three passages in the New Testament (John 14:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-17), none of which speak of judgment, but rather of the church being taken up to heaven. There are three views of the timing of the Rapture in relation to the Tribulation: that it comes at the end of the Tribulation (posttribulationism), in the middle of the Tribulation (midtribulationism), and the view that seems to be supported by this text, that the Rapture takes place before the tribulation (pretribulationism). Several aspects of this wonderful promise may be noted. First, the test is yet future. Second, the test is for a definite, limited time; Jesus described it as the **hour of testing**. Third, it is a test or trial that will expose people for what they really are. Fourth, the test is worldwide in scope, since it will **come upon the whole world**. Finally, and most significantly, its purpose is **to test those who dwell on the earth**—a phrase used as a technical term in the book of Revelation for unbelievers (cf. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8,12,14; 14:6; 17:2,8). The **hour of testing** is Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:25-27), the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), the seven-year tribulation period. The Lord promises to keep His church out of the future time of testing that will come on unbelievers.”

[MacArthur Commentary on Revelation, Page 124]

IV. The Command (v. 11b)

2 John 1:8 (NKJV) “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.”

Colossians 2:18a (NKJV) “Let no one cheat you of your reward...”

V. The Confidence (vv. 12-13)

A. Honor (v. 12a)

B. Ownership (v. 12b)

C. Fellowship (v. 12c)

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Almost all churches can be categorized in one of three categories. We find all three of these types of churches here in Revelation two and three. First, there are “undertaker churches”. These churches are dead, or mostly dead. The perfect example of an undertaker church is the one we looked at in the last study – the church at Sardis. It could be said of these undertaker churches what one man prayed: “Lord, I pray for our church; the fire is out but the blower is still blowing.” Second, there are “caretaker churches”. A caretaker church still has some life in it, but they seem only interested in keeping the status quo. These caretaker churches resist change and they tend to be really big on tradition. They are big on just keeping the peace. Their motto is, “As things have been they evermore shall be”. The churches at Pergamos and Thyatira have elements of the caretaker church in them. The third category of churches is the “risk-taking church”. This is the church that lives out on the edge. These churches are willing to try new things and go through doors that God has opened – even if they don’t see how it is going to be done, they just trust God. The risk-taking church is not afraid of controversy if they believe that they are following God. Their only question is, “Is this what God wants us to do?” The risk-taking church is always conscious that they are on a mission. They understand that from the human perspective, accomplishing God’s mission always involves risk; it always involves jumping into water over your head. The church at Philadelphia was a risk-taker church. If I could be a member of any of these churches, it would be this church at Philadelphia.

The church at Philadelphia was a small church, but that didn’t stop them from attempting great things for God. They understood that while they were small and weak, they knew that they had a BIG GOD and they trusted Him to guide them and to empower them as they walked through the open doors that He set before them. Jesus had nothing, not even a hint of anything negative to say to this church. The church at Philadelphia was made up of weak people who knew that they were weak, but also knew that they had a big God and in His strength they stepped through the open doors that He set before them.

I. The Correspondent (V7)

At the beginning of each letter, Jesus shares some things about Himself that is important for the church He is addressing to know.

A. His Attributes (V7a)

1. He Who Is Holy

Only God possesses absolute holiness. Jesus in ascribing this attribute to Himself is declaring His deity. **Isaiah 40:25 (NKJV)** “To whom then will you liken Me, or *to whom* shall I be equal?” says **the Holy One**. **Habakkuk 3:3a (NKJV)** “God came from Teman, **The Holy One** from Mount Paran.” The word translated “holy” means to be set apart. The best (not perfect) synonym for holy is “transcendent”. He is set apart from His creation because He is the Creator; He is set apart from man because He is God; He is certainly set apart from sin because He is the Savior. Everything about Jesus is holy. He is holy in His character, holy in His words, holy in His actions; He is w-h-o-l-l-y holy! When the angel announced His birth to Mary in **Luke 1:35 (NKJV)** he called Jesus, “...**that Holy One** who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” Over and over in the Old Testament, God is called “The holy one” and in the New Testament, Jesus is called “the holy one”. Our command; our longing is given in **1 Peter 1:15 (NKJV)** “but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct”.

2. He Who Is True

Five other times in Revelation, the attributes of holy and true are used together in referring to Jesus. This word translated “true” means genuine, authentic, and real. All other gods are idols, phoneyes, shams. Because He is genuine, He can be trusted.

B. His Access and Authority (V7b)

We find that phrase “the key of David” in the Old Testament in **Isaiah 22:22 (NKJV)** “The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open.” The text in Isaiah refers back to a man named Eliakim. King Hezekiah was the king over the Davidic Kingdom. Eliakim was Hezekiah’s royal treasurer who alone had keys to the king’s treasures. When the word “keys” is used in a context like this it speaks of access and authority. Only Eliakim had the access and authority to open the vault to the treasures of the king. In Revelation 1:18 we are told that Jesus has the keys of Hades and death. Here the keys are to salvation and blessing. Jesus is the guardian of the riches of God. Our access to the Father and the riches of the Father is only through Jesus. **John 14:6 (NKJV)** “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” **Philippians 4:19 (NKJV)** “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

C. His Sovereignty (V7c)

Jesus is here claiming absolute sovereignty over His church. He opens and shuts the doors of salvation, provision, and opportunities. No one can shut the doors of salvation, provision, and opportunities if He has opened them and no one can open the doors of salvation, provision, and opportunities that He has closed. Why did Jesus reveal Himself in this manner to the church at Philadelphia? It is because they had very little strength and resources. They needed to be reminded that their Savior had the keys and success in the quest to bring Him glory is not tied in to the size of the church, but the size of the church’s God.

II. The City (V7)

As with many of the other churches, knowing some historical facts about the town the church is located in gives some insight into some of the things that Jesus says to the church. Philadelphia is now called Alasehir in Turkey. It is just about 28 miles from the church we studied last week (Sardis). In 17AD Philadelphia was destroyed by an earthquake. In the months and years after the earthquake, there were some very strong aftershocks. The fear was so great that some of the people left the city and lived in the surrounding fields for fear that they would be buried alive. Even though the earthquake had happened some 70-75 years earlier, there was still a fear of earthquakes.

III. The Commendation (V8-11a)

Here is a church that the Lord said nothing negative about them.

A. Their Open Door (V8)

What is this open Door”? As we often say, “Allow the Scripture to interpret Scripture.” The phrase “open door” is used many times by the Apostle Paul. Open doors refer to ministry or evangelism opportunities that the Lord provides. Let me share a few of the places that this phrase is used in that way: **1 Corinthians 16:9 (NKJV)** “For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries.” **2 Corinthians 2:12 (NKJV)** “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord”. The Lord had opened up some amazing opportunities for this small church to do some really big things. I believe that in this concept of doors that the Lord opens is the key to where a church – however weak and small they might be – focuses their mission. Henry Blackaby uses some different terminology, but basically says the same thing in the discipleship study called *Experiencing God*. This course had had a deep impact on tens of thousands of Christians and churches as they seek direction from God. In that course, Henry Blackaby says that a church focuses on being open and surrendered to the Lord and the church simply looks for doors that the Lord of the church opens. When we see God at work, we simply join Him. That sounds too simple, but its not. Let’s look at some Scriptural examples of these open doors, some examples in recent history, and then some examples in our own church. We see how the Lord guides His people and churches on Paul’s second missionary journey. Paul attempted to go into the province of Asia to preach the Gospel, but was stopped by the Holy Spirit as He closed that door. Paul then tried to go to Bithynia, but the Lord shut that door also. But when Paul came to Troas he received a vision from a man from Macedonia beckoning him to come there. Paul took this as an open door from the Lord and the Gospel went into Europe. What I am about to say may sound

like an exaggeration, but I do not believe that it is. This open door that the Apostle Paul walked through changed the course of the entire western world. That going through the open door has greatly affected all of civilization since that time. You can read about all this in Acts 16:1-10. Paul asked those believers in Colossae to pray that God would continue to open doors of opportunity for the spread of the Gospel. **Colossians 4:3 (NKJV)** “meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains”.

I am reminded as I look back on the years I’ve been at this church, that the times when we fell flat and failed to accomplish what we planned was when we tried to do something that we initiated without an open door and deep burden from the Lord. On the other hand, some of the things that God has and is mightily using began when God opened a door, gave deep burdens to people and we simply joined Him in what He is doing. Allow me to give you just a few examples. In the early 1990’s some of the men of our church began to get a burden for missions in other countries. Several men went on some trips with another church or individual. They came back with stories and a deep passion for getting the Gospel to unreached areas. God had opened a door. We began to plan trips and send teams. Soon our youth were getting involved. The “youth retreats to the beach” fell by the wayside. Our young people were going to the desert of Arizona and sleeping in tents to get the gospel to the Navaho. I remember going with them one year about 12 years ago and there were 92 youth and adults in the desert. The missionary we worked with had been trying to start a church in a town close by, but the tribal leaders wouldn’t allow it. We invaded that little town and held VBS for the children, did service projects in the town, built a ramp for a Senior adult in a wheel chair, and repaired homes of Senior Adults. Shortly after the kids came back home, the missionary called and said that the tribal counsel had changed their mind and said they would welcome a church being planted in their town. Soon we refined our strategy, looking at the places where God was opening doors and burdening hearts. Now, by His grace we have adopted four unreached people groups or cities and send 350-400 people a year from this body to share the Gospel and plant churches. If time allowed, we could talk about how the mobile home park ministry started with a burden and an opened door. We could talk about how the inner-city ministry started with a burden from God and open doors. Our Fountain City Campus was not a part of a master plan; God opened a door and we walked through. This church that had gone down to 60 or so people (mostly senior adults). Last Sunday the church was teeming with young families and had 268 in attendance.

As we look in recent history, we can see many examples of how God has opened doors for the churches in areas that were previously closed. In the late 1980’s seemingly out of nowhere the Soviet Union and the stronghold of communism began to fall apart. The experts were mystified and yet it was happening. Countries like Russia, Romania, Hungary, Poland, and so many others were suddenly open to the Gospel and God sent His people to nations spiritually starving under the stronghold of Communism, and countless numbers of people began to come to Christ. God leads His obedient churches by opening doors for the Gospel to go through.

Let’s go back to the church at Philadelphia. Let me give you another translation of the last part of verse 8. In the NKJV it sounds like their little strength is a bad thing. I don’t think that is what the Lord is saying. **Revelation 3:8 (HCSB)** says “I know your works. **Because you have limited strength**, have kept My word, and have not denied My name, look, I have placed before you an open door that no one is able to close.” The Lord opened a door for this church BECAUSE they had little strength! The church at Philadelphia was so greatly used of God because they knew how weak they were and thus looked to God for strength. It is when we know that we are weak that we look to Him for His strength. **2 Corinthians 12:10 (HCSB)** “So because of Christ, I am pleased in weaknesses, in insults, in catastrophes, in persecutions, and in pressures. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” In our weakness, we become a conductor for His power.

This church was commended also because as they walked through the open doors, they had kept God’s Word and refused to deny His name. These people in Philadelphia were fiercely committed to God’s Word. They proclaimed it, taught it, and believed it. They also had refused to deny His name. They were not ashamed to proclaim Him. This is why God set the open doors before them. God puts open doors

before churches that channel His strength because they are aware of their own weaknesses, churches that keep His word and refuse to deny his name.

B. Their Enemies (V9)

Sardis had no enemies because they were dead and were not a threat to anyone. Philadelphia had enemies! There was a large population of Jews in Philadelphia. It was some of these Jews who were physical descendents of Abraham, but certainly not spiritual descendents that were persecuting the church. When these unbelieving Jews met in their synagogue, Jesus called it a synagogue of Satan. How is Jesus going to deal with them? I think that the last part of this verse is referring to one of two things. Either they will be converted and bow with the church at Philadelphia in worship, or in judgment they will bow one day. **Philippians 2:10-11 (NKJV)** “¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” God often chooses the love of a persecuted church to break their enemies and convert them. Our command is not to kill our enemies, but to love them to the cross that they may bow in submission and surrender to the Lord of the church

C. Their Assurance (V10-11a)

Verse ten is a hotly debated verse. When Godly people who love God and His word disagree on a passage, it behooves us to approach it with humility and without a dogmatic mindset. I will tell you what I believe this passage is saying and I have adopted my view not because there are no good arguments from other views, but because I think that it best fits in with other Scriptures. Jesus gives this church assurance that they are going to escape a horrible tribulation that is coming. I believe that this promise encompasses not just the church at Philadelphia, but all true churches – true believers. Let’s notice some things about this “hour of trial” or “testing”. I believe that this is referring to the church being caught up prior to the seven years of tribulation that is coming upon the earth. There are three views by people who take a premillennial approach to the Second Coming of Christ. By premillennial I mean that Christ will return and set up a physical kingdom here on the earth. The Latin word for the term “caught up” is “rapturo” that we get the word rapture from. Some believe that the rapture will occur at the end of the great tribulation. In other words, the church will go through all that the book of Revelation details in chapter 6-19 of Revelation. This view is called “post tribulation rapture”. Others believe that the rapture will occur at the mid-point of the seven years of tribulation. This view is called “mid-tribulation rapture”. Others (including me) believe that while the church is continually going through tribulation, the church will be caught up before this horrible seven years of tribulation detailed in Revelation 6-19 begins. This view is called “pre-tribulation rapture”. Disagreement on the timing of the rapture is not a test of fellowship. I didn’t say that it is not important; I am saying that godly people disagree and Christians should not fall out of fellowship with one another over differences in these views. As we go through the book of Revelation, I will detail the reasons that I teach this as I do. The reason that I believe the Lord is speaking of this great tribulation that is coming upon all mankind is that He calls it the “hour” (a set time – 7 years) and He says in verse 10 that it is not just coming in Philadelphia, but it is coming on the whole world. The Lord states plainly that He is keeping the church from this hour of trial. As we go through the book of Revelation, we will find that this hour of trial is used often and every time it refers exclusively to unbelievers as the objects of God’s wrath. [Summary from MacArthur Commentary]

“Because the believers in Philadelphia had successfully passed so many tests, Jesus promised to spare them from the ultimate test. The sweeping nature of that promise extends far beyond the Philadelphia congregation to encompass all faithful churches throughout history. This verse promises that the church will be delivered from the Tribulation, thus supporting a pretribulation Rapture. The Rapture is the subject of three passages in the New Testament (John 14:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-17), none of which speak of judgment, but rather of the church being taken up to heaven. There are three views of the timing of the Rapture in relation to the Tribulation: that it comes at the end of the Tribulation (posttribulationism), in the middle of the Tribulation (midtribulationism), and the view that seems to be supported by this text, that the Rapture takes place before the tribulation (pretribulationism). Several aspects of this wonderful promise may be noted. First, the test is yet future. Second, the test is for a

definite, limited time; Jesus described it as the **hour of testing**. Third, it is a test or trial that will expose people for what they really are. Fourth, the test is worldwide in scope, since it will **come upon the whole world**. Finally, and most significantly, its purpose is **to test those who dwell on the earth** – a phrase used as a technical term in the book of Revelation for unbelievers (cf. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2,8). The **hour of testing** is Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:25-27), the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), the seven-year tribulation period. The Lord promises to keep His church out of the future time of testing that will come on unbelievers.” [MacArthur Commentary, Page 124] (289 Words)

In verse 11a, the Lord reminds the church that He is coming quickly. That Greek word can better be translated “suddenly”. This coming is speaking of the promise of deliverance. This is speaking of the immanence of His return – it could be any day, any time.

IV. The Command (V11b)

As the coming of Christ draws nearer and nearer, there is more and more pressure on the church to conform to the world, compromise the clear teaching of God’s Word, and let go of the truths that are in the Word of God but offend a world that hates Him. Jesus says, “Hold fast to what you have.” While it is not possible for a true Christian to lose their salvation, we can lose reward. **2 John 1:8 (NKJV)** “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.” **Colossians 2:18a (NKJV)** “Let no one cheat you of your reward...” Jesus is saying, “Don’t let up and don’t let go of my truth. Hold to it diligently in the midst of all you are going through.

V. The Confidence (V12-13)

Remember that all true Christians are overcomers. Here is what Jesus promises these faithful saints at Philadelphia.

A. Honor (V12a)

A pillar was an ancient symbol of security and strength. To a land scarred by massive earthquakes, Jesus says to the church at Philadelphia that He will make them pillars that no earthquake can shake. Also it was a custom to erect a pillar to honor a dignitary or a person of great accomplishment. Their name would be written on the pillar erected to honor them. There is coming a day of reward.

B. Ownership (V12b)

In that day, to write your name on something was a mark of ownership. A master would write his name upon his servants. He is saying that we are secure – our God has marked us as His by putting His name on us.

Why the name of that city called the New Jerusalem that we will live in forever and ever? That is where our citizenship is. We are so sure for home that the name of our home is written on us.

C. Fellowship (V12c)

What is that new name? We don’t know now, but we will. A name represents the fullness of a person. We will know intimate fellowship of our Lord as He shares a special name with us.

These names remind us of the security we have because we are owned by God, our citizenship is sure in the New Jerusalem, and our eternal fellowship with the Son of God is sure. What confidence!