

The church in Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7 *“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; 8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee 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 the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, 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, 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 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. 13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”*

Introduction

Each of the churches the Lord addressed in these letters was different from the others. On the one hand, their faithfulness was not the same in all cases, but neither were the circumstances in which they had to bear witness. It is especially striking how opposite the Smyrna and Philadelphia churches were even though they were only about 100 miles apart. Let's look at some of these contrasts: The church in Smyrna is told that some were going to be locked up in jail (Rev 2:10), while in Philadelphia God was going to open a door that no one could close (Rev 3: 8).

Smyrna is told that they would go through a ten-day tribulation (Rev 2:10), while in Philadelphia the Lord was going to deliver them from the hour of trial (Rev 3:10). In Smyrna the church had to suffer the opposition that came from some who professed to be Jews but who were actually a synagogue of Satan (Rev 2: 9), while in Philadelphia the Lord was going to make those who claimed to be Jews, although they were a synagogue of Satan, would come and prostrate themselves before the feet of the believers and acknowledge that God had loved them (Rev 3: 9).

This is still a very common feature in churches today. There are countries where churches have their doors wide open to preach the gospel, while in other places believers are terribly persecuted. Ultimately it all depends on God's purposes for his people. In each case he allows us to be tested in different ways, as he sees fit.

The city of Philadelphia

Philadelphia was founded in 189 BC. by King Eumenes II of Pergamum on the route that linked Sardis with Colosse. It was known as "the eastern gate" because it was located on the main route of the imperial mail from Rome to the East.

The city was located on top of a tectonic plate that led to continuous earthquakes. In the year 17 A.D. Philadelphia was completely destroyed because of one of them, being rebuilt by Tiberius. As a result of this, those who survived were afraid, with most living outside its walls and others emigrating. The city changed its name three times. It was first called Philadelphia, which in Greek means "he who loves his brother." This was due to his founder, Eumenes II, who thereby wanted to honor his brother Atalo II. Later, after the earthquake of the year 17, when the city was destroyed, Tiberius gave generous help to rebuild it, and for that reason it received the name of Newcaesarea in his honor. And half a century later, under Vespasian, he changed the name again to Flavia.

The one who sent the letter

(Rev 3: 7) *"Write to the angel of the church in Philadelphia: This says the Holy One, the True One, the one who has the key of David, the one who opens and no one closes, and closes and no one opens"*

1. "This says the Holy One, the True One."

Our Lord Jesus Christ is presented in the first place as "the Holy One", a title that is used again in (Rev 6:10), but in that case applied to God. Actually, this was one of the ways that God was known in the Old Testament (Hab 3: 3). For example, the prophet Isaiah refers to the "Holy One of Israel" no less than twenty-five times (Is 54: 5). We can conclude then that the identification of Jesus Christ as "the Holy One" is a clear confirmation of his deity.

The second title, "the True One," serves to indicate that Christ is worthy of complete trust. He is real and genuine in everything he says. He is not a figment of human imagination, nor does he in any way misrepresent the truth.

2. "He who has the key of David, who opens and no one closes, and closes and no one opens."

As on previous occasions, the Lord uses an Old Testament character to express his message to a church. This time the quote comes from the prophet Isaiah:
(Is 22:22) *"And I will put the key of the house of David on his shoulder; and it will open, and no one will close; he will close, and no one will open."*

When we read the Isaiah passage we realize that Shebna's sin had been his self-reliance and the pompous importance he placed on himself. For example, he had carved a tomb for him in a high place with the intention of perpetuating his name (Is 22:16). He too had made chariots for his glory (Is 22:18). But none of those things were going to provide security or prevent him from being taken into captivity. This judgment of God came upon him because his behavior was inappropriate in such an important member of the royal house of David, that is why it is called "shame of the house of your lord." His sin consisted fundamentally in taking advantage of the benefits that his position gave him to promote his own person, trying to leave a lasting mark of himself in history. Therefore, he was a man who liked to flaunt himself and who felt confident about the future. But God changed all his plans and removed him from his position, placing another in his place.

Unlike Sebna, Eliaquim was a man of integrity, responsible, who inspired trust and respect among the people. A man who is said to be "a seat of honor to the house of his father" (Is 22:21). That is, he would not be a man like Shebna, seeking his own honor, but would serve the house of David faithfully.

Without a doubt, it was a very great honor for him that he was promoted in this way, but now we see that he received an even greater honor, because in Revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself used the words that Isaiah said about Eliakim to apply them to himself. . This is logical, because the Lord was not seeking his own glory, but his heavenly Father's (Jn 17: 4). That is why Christ is worthy of all authority and trust.

Therefore, now it is the Lord Jesus Christ who has the key of David, and he himself is the one who opens and no one closes, and no one opens. This key is undoubtedly a symbol of authority. No one can interfere in what he decides or does. Only Jesus determines who can enter his house.

And although here we are not told what he closes and what he opens, nevertheless, we have already been told previously that "he has the keys of death and Hades" (Rev 1:18). Christ has opened the way to salvation and no one will be able to close it. But it is also he who when people reject his Word, he closes the door of salvation and no one will be able to open it. In relation to the latter we must remember the way in which God himself closed the door of Noah's ark so that no one else could enter it (Gen 7:16).

In any case, in the immediate context of this letter, we will see below that the Lord uses this key to close the door of persecution against them and opens new opportunities for them.

Christ praises his church

(Rev 3: 8) "I know your works; behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one can close; because although you have little strength, you have kept my word, and you have not denied my name. "

1. *"Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one can close."*

What "open door" do you mean? Some believe it means that the Jewish authorities had excluded the believers in Philadelphia from God's people, when in reality, it is only the Lord Jesus Christ who actually provides access to the new Jerusalem.

Others interpret this "open door" as an opportunity to spread the gospel through preaching. And this would not be surprising, since the same expression is used that way in other places (Acts 14:27) (1 Cor 16: 9) (2 Cor 2:12) (Col 4: 3).

2. *"Because although you have little strength, you have kept my word, and you have not denied my name"*

"Because even though you have little strength."

It seems that the church in Philadelphia was small, and perhaps its members were mostly from the poorer classes. None of this would be surprising in a city that constantly suffered violent earthquakes. However, recognizing the lack of own resources and trusting in the Lord and in his power, is the fundamental requirement for him to open the door to new opportunities. That Christians have little power is a positive thing before God; power is easily abused; However, weakness very often leads to dependence on God's power.

"You have kept my word."

Of the believers in Philadelphia the Lord Jesus Christ says that they had "kept his word." After all, what should characterize God's people is their obedience to the Word. They had remained faithful to the gospel message, without altering its content or embracing heretical teachings. Of course, this is one of the main purposes of Satan in attacking the church: to remove the Word of God from it or to dilute it by mixing it with other things. This church is presented to us as an example of purity in this sense.

"And you have not denied my name."

It seems that at some point the believers there had been tempted to deny the name of Christ, but had not fallen for it. In relation to this, it is interesting to remember that the city of Philadelphia

had changed its name three times to honor its various benefactors, but the church had remained faithful to the name of Christ.

Various promises to the church in Philadelphia

(Rev 3: 9) "Behold, I deliver out of the synagogue of Satan those who say they are Jews and are not, but lie; behold, I will make them come and bow at your feet, and acknowledge that I have loved you. "

The church in Philadelphia had encountered opposition from the Jews. Here it is explained that they were Jews in name only, perhaps racially, culturally, and ceremonially, but not spiritually. After all, true Jews are those who believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah (Ro 2: 28-29) (Ro 9: 6-9). But as the majority of the Jewish nation rejected their Messiah, their synagogues became strongholds from which Christianity was fought and used for that purpose by Satan.

Now this verse seems to indicate that some of those Jews would convert to Christianity and the church would grow with some of its most outspoken and fierce adversaries: "Behold, I will cause them to come and bow at your feet, and acknowledge that I have loved you".

This is really very curious, because the Jewish hope was that the Gentiles would be subdued by them, but here the Word promises the opposite; it would be the Jews who would bow down to the Gentile believers. This would be so because after having rejected their Messiah, it was the Gentiles who had to teach the Jews the way to approach God. And they would also have to submit to the church because Christ is in it and loves them.

To be sure, these Jews would also show no predisposition to accept that Christ loved the Gentile Christians of Philadelphia. The Jews considered that only they were the people of God, and therefore, the only ones whom he loved. This had led them to despise the Gentiles as strangers to God's covenants. But now Christ vindicates believers as his beloved people.

(Rev 3:10) "Because you have kept the word of my patience, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."

In the case of this church, keeping "the word of my patience" can be understood as having obeyed the Lord's command to be patient, or also as having followed the example of Christ (2 Thes 3: 5), who He was patient with sinful men throughout his earthly ministry (He 12: 1-3), and still is today, when he continues to wait for his enemies to be made his footstool (He 10:13). In any case, one way or another, the Philadelphia Christians had faithfully persevered through their trials and difficulties.

As a consequence of this, says the Lord, "I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is to come upon the whole world." This may mean that the Lord would keep them in such a way that they would not have to go through the test, or that they would be kept by him in the middle of the test.

As for *"the test that was to come on the whole world"*, it most likely has to do with the persecution of the Roman Empire against Christianity that in a short time if it was going to extend over the entire Empire. As for the purpose of this test, it was "to test those who dwell on the earth."

An exhortation

(Rev 3:11) "Behold, I am coming soon; retain what you have, so that no one will take your crown. "

"Behold, I am coming soon."

Now, the risen Lord speaks of his return: "Behold, I am coming soon." His purpose is to encourage his people to be prepared to meet him and thereby "no one take the crown from him."

To the church in Ephesus he told them that he would take the lampstand from them (Rev 2: 5). To the church in Pergamos, he told them that he would fight them (Rev 2:16). And to the church in Sardis he told them that he would come upon them as a thief in the night (Rev 3: 3). In these three cases the coming of the Lord on his church would be for the purpose of judging her, but in the case of the church in Philadelphia the opposite occurs, his coming would be to protect them in the hour of trial.

"Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

Christ exhorts each believer to hold what he has in the face of the temptations and attractions of the world. In reality, what God has given us now, if we keep it faithfully, is what constitutes our crown in the future. This does not mean that the Christian can lose his salvation, but it does mean that he can stop receiving his reward.

A promise for the one who overcomes

(Rev 3:12) "He who overcomes, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never leave there again; and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven, from my God, and my new name. "

1. "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God and he will never leave there again." This means that they will not only be welcomed into the house of Jesus, the temple of God, but they will be part of it, and therefore, they will never have to leave there. This is a promise that gives assurance to believers. Especially to the believers in Philadelphia, who because of frequent earthquakes were used to having to constantly flee their homes looking for open spaces to save their lives.

But being a column in the temple of God could also imply something else. Ancient temples had large columns, sometimes to support the building, but other times they were used for ornament. For example, in Solomon's temple there were two great columns named Jachin and Boaz, which were in the portico of the temple (1 Kings 7:21). Its mission was to support two large capitals that were on top of them and that had been beautifully decorated. They were there so that people could admire the beauty of those capitals.

2. *"And I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven, from my God, and my new name."*

The idea is that now true believers belong to God, and if a person approaches them he will be able to see something of God's character and of his eternal city, the new Jerusalem, "written on them." Of course, these are not just written names, but as living columns believers can personally speak of their experience in the house of God.

As for the "new name" of Jesus, it possibly refers to the new state of affairs produced by the consummation of redemption. Now Jesus appears in a new way that was not possible before the work of the cross was completed. Surely this new name is related to the new song that the four living beings and the twenty-four elders sang and that had to do with the redemption achieved through the blood of the Lamb that was slain (Rev 5: 8-10).

A call to hear the voice of the Lord

(Rev 3:13) *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*