

NOON BIBLE STUDY: REVELATION 3: PHILADELPHIA

REVELATION 3:7-13 - PHILADELPHIA

"PHILADELPHIA WAS FOUNDED IN 140 BC BY GREEK KING ATTALUS OF GREECE. HE BUILT IT TO BE A HUB FOR GREEK COMMERCE AND TO BE A MISSIONARY CITY THROUGH WHICH GREEK LANGUAGE AND CIVILIZATION WOULD BE SPREAD TO ASIA MINOR AND BEYOND. AS SUCH, THE CITY WAS A CENTER OF GREEK CULTURE AND REFINEMENT. THE OLD CITY SOMETIMES BORE THE TITLE "LITTLE ATHENS" BECAUSE OF THE MAGNIFICENCE (AND ABUNDANCE) OF ITS TEMPLES AND OTHER PUBLIC BUILDINGS. (HARRY KYRIAKODIS, "LYDIA OR NEO-CAESAREA OR ALASEHIR? JUST CALL IT PHILADELPHIA" VIA HIDDENCITYPHILA.ORG)

"IT WAS LOCATED ON ONE OF THE GREATEST HIGHWAYS IN THE WORLD, THE HIGHWAY THAT LED FROM EUROPE TO THE EAST. PHILADELPHIA WAS SITUATED ON THE EDGE OF AN ACTIVE VOLCANIC AREA. THIS WAS BOTH A BLESSING AND A CURSE. ON THE ONE HAND IT MEANT ACCESS TO RICH, FERTILE SOIL AND TO HOT SPRINGS. BUT ON THE OTHER HAND IT MEANT CONSTANT DANGER FROM EARTHQUAKES.. TREMORS, STRONG AND JOLTING, WERE FREQUENT. (DARRELL, W. JOHNSON, "DISCIPLESHIP ON THE EDGE," PAGE 112, 107)

IN THE YEAR 17 AD THE CITY WAS DESTROYED BY A MAJOR EARTHQUAKE. FOR THE DECADES THAT FOLLOWED, THE CITY WAS AFFLICTED BY CONTINUAL EARTHQUAKES. EVENTUALLY THE EMPEROR TIBERIUS FUNDED THE REBUILDING OF THE CITY. AS A RESULT, THE CITY WAS CEREMONIOUSLY GIVEN THE NEW NAME OF "NEOCAESAREA" (NEW CITY OF CAESAR).

V. 7 - DESCRIPTION OF JESUS: HOLY, TRUE, WITH KEY OF DAVID, WHO OPENS AND NO ONE WILL SHUT, WHO SHUTS AND NO ONE OPENS

IN ISAIAH 22 WE READ ABOUT A TIME WHEN THE PEOPLE OF GOD WERE IN DISOBEDIENCE TO HIM. THROUGH ISAIAH, GOD HAD CALLED FOR REPENTANCE BUT THEY CONTINUED TO LIVE IN SIN AND SELFISHNESS. PART OF ISAIAH'S REBUKE IN CHAPTER 22 WAS DIRECTED AT THE NATIONAL LEADERS. ONE OFFICIAL IN PARTICULAR WAS A MAN NAMED SHEBNA WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD (22:15). SHEBNA HAD NOT BEEN FAITHFUL AND WAS SELF-SEEKING IN HIS POSITION.

ISAIAH 22:15-19 (NLT) - THIS IS WHAT THE LORD, THE LORD OF HEAVEN'S ARMIES, SAID TO ME: "CONFRONT SHEBNA, THE PALACE ADMINISTRATOR, AND GIVE HIM THIS MESSAGE: 16 "WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE, AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, BUILDING A BEAUTIFUL TOMB FOR YOURSELF-- A MONUMENT HIGH UP IN THE ROCK? 17 FOR THE LORD IS ABOUT TO HURL YOU AWAY, MIGHTY MAN. HE IS GOING TO GRAB YOU, 18 CRUMPLE YOU INTO A BALL, AND TOSS YOU AWAY INTO A DISTANT, BARREN LAND. THERE YOU WILL DIE, AND YOUR GLORIOUS CHARIOTS WILL BE BROKEN AND USELESS. YOU ARE A DISGRACE TO YOUR MASTER! 19 "YES, I WILL DRIVE YOU OUT OF OFFICE," SAYS THE LORD. "I WILL PULL YOU DOWN FROM YOUR HIGH POSITION.

SHEBNA WAS SUPPOSED TO CARE FOR THE ROYAL FAMILY AND KEEP WATCH OVER THEIR AFFAIRS BUT INSTEAD WAS UNFAITHFUL & SELF-SERVING. AS A RESULT, THE LORD IS REMOVING HIM AND REPLACING HIM WITH A FAITHFUL SERVANT NAMED ELIAKIM, OF WHOM THE FOLLOWING WAS SAID:

ISAIAH 22:20-24 (NLT) - AND THEN I WILL CALL MY SERVANT ELIAKIM SON OF HILKIAH TO REPLACE YOU. 21 I WILL DRESS HIM IN YOUR ROYAL ROBES AND WILL GIVE HIM YOUR TITLE AND YOUR AUTHORITY. AND HE WILL BE A FATHER TO THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM AND JUDAH. 22 I WILL GIVE HIM THE KEY TO THE HOUSE OF DAVID-- THE HIGHEST POSITION IN THE ROYAL COURT. WHEN HE OPENS DOORS, NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO CLOSE THEM; WHEN HE CLOSES DOORS, NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO OPEN THEM. 23 HE WILL BRING HONOR TO HIS FAMILY NAME, FOR I WILL DRIVE HIM FIRMLY IN PLACE LIKE A NAIL IN THE WALL. 24 THEY WILL GIVE HIM GREAT RESPONSIBILITY, AND HE WILL BRING HONOR TO EVEN THE LOWLIEST MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY."

THIS POSITION OF AUTHORITY ALONG WITH THE "KEY OF DAVID" WAS A ROLE WITH GREAT POWER. WHAT ELIAKIM OPENED, STAYED OPEN UNTIL HE CLOSED IT. IF HE LOCKED A DOOR, NO ONE ELSE HAD THE POWER TO OPEN IT. THINK OF A SUPREME LEADER WHO HAD THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE DECREES WHICH NO ONE ELSE COULD THWART. WITH THIS OT BACKGROUND IN MIND, WE GET CLARITY ON JESUS' OWN CLAIM TO BE A SUPREME LEADER AND AUTHORITY WHO HAD THE "KEY OF DAVID." WHAT HE DOES, NO ONE CAN STOP. WHAT HE DOESN'T DO, NO ONE CAN FORCE TO HAPPEN. THIS AUTHORITY IS NOT JUST OVER GOD'S PEOPLE OR A PALACE IN JERUSALEM BUT OVER THE NATIONS. FOR WE KNOW AT THIS POINT IN THE STORY THAT "ALL AUTHORITY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO (HIM) IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH. (MATTHEW 28:18)"

V. 8 - I KNOW YOUR DEEDS

JESUS COMMENDS THE PHILADELPHIANS FOR KEEPING HIS WORD, EVEN THOUGH THEY HAVE LITTLE POWER AND HAVE NOT DENIED HIS NAME, PRESUMABLY DURING A TIME OF GREAT PRESSURE TO DO THAT. AND NOW IMMEDIATELY AFTER DECLARING TO HAVE THE KEY OF DAVID, JESUS SAYS TO THE PHILADELPHIAN CHURCH THAT HE HAS OPENED A DOOR FOR THEM THAT NO ONE CAN SHUT.

Q - WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS MEANS FOR THE CHURCH?

THERE ARE A FEW IDEAS ABOUT WHAT DOOR JESUS HAS OPENED FOR THE CHURCH: PERHAPS THIS "OPEN DOOR" MEANS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CHRISTIANS TO BRING THE GOSPEL TO THE REGION (CP. ACTS 14:27). PERHAPS IT IS REFERENCING THE NEXT PLACE JESUS WANTS TO LEAD THEM IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM. PERHAPS IT IS REFERENCING THEIR INVITATION TO ETERNAL LIFE.

V. 9 - SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN (THOSE WHO SAY THAT THEY ARE JEWS AND ARE NOT...).

THIS IS THE SECOND REFERENCE TO THE "SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN" IN THESE LETTERS AFTER IT FIRST APPEARED IN SMYRNA. HERE'S WHAT WE SAID AT THE TIME ABOUT THIS PHRASE:

"THOUGH AT THE TIME OF THE WRITING OF REVELATION, ROME IS A PRIMARY PROSECUTOR OF THE CHURCH, THE BOOK OF ACTS RECORDS, THE EARLY CHRISTIANS STRUGGLED LESS AT THE HANDS OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL OFFICIALS AND MORE AT THE HANDS OF JEWISH OFFICIALS. THE JEWS RESISTED THE APOSTLES PREACHING OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIM AS MESSIAH. THE REFERENCES HERE INDICATE THAT THE JEWISH PERSECUTION CONTINUED.

"JEWS THAT ARE NOT" IMPLIES THAT THESE INDIVIDUALS CLAIMED TO BE JEWS (AKA "THE CHOSEN PEOPLE/CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM") BUT IN FACT, BY THEIR DEEDS WERE ANYTHING BUT. RATHER THEY WERE WORKING FOR SATAN AGAINST THE PURPOSES OF THE TRUE GOD."

LIKE IN SMYRNA, PHILADELPHIAN CHRISTIANS ARE FACING PRESSURE AND PERSECUTION FROM JEWISH CITIZENS OF THE CITY. JESUS SAYS THAT THESE AREN'T REALLY GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE IF THEY ARE ACTING LIKE THIS. HOW SHOULD THE CHRISTIANS RESPOND? JESUS SAYS HE WILL HANDLE IT. "I WILL MAKE THEM COME AND BOW DOWN AT YOUR FEET AND MAKE THEM KNOW THAT I HAVE LOVED YOU (3:9B)."

THERE IS AN OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENT HERE. WHEN A FOREIGN ENEMY HAD OPPOSED ANOTHER NATION ONLY TO BE DEFEATED BY THE NATION THEY HAD OPPRESSED, THE DEFEATED NATION WOULD BOW BEFORE THE LEADERS OF THE VICTORIOUS. HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES:

ISAIAH 45:14 (NLT) - THIS IS WHAT THE LORD SAYS: "YOU WILL RULE THE EGYPTIANS, THE ETHIOPIANS, AND THE SABEANS. THEY WILL COME TO YOU WITH ALL THEIR MERCHANDISE, AND IT WILL ALL BE YOURS. THEY WILL FOLLOW YOU AS PRISONERS IN CHAINS. THEY WILL FALL TO THEIR KNEES IN FRONT OF YOU AND SAY, GOD IS WITH YOU, AND HE IS THE ONLY GOD. THERE IS NO OTHER. "

ISAIAH 49:23 (NLT) - KINGS AND QUEENS WILL SERVE YOU AND CARE FOR ALL YOUR NEEDS. THEY WILL BOW TO THE EARTH BEFORE YOU AND LICK THE DUST FROM YOUR FEET. THEN YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD. THOSE WHO TRUST IN ME WILL NEVER BE PUT TO SHAME."

ISAIAH 60:14 (NLT) - THE DESCENDANTS OF YOUR TORMENTORS WILL COME AND BOW BEFORE YOU. THOSE WHO DESPISED YOU WILL KISS YOUR FEET. THEY WILL CALL YOU THE CITY OF THE LORD, AND ZION OF THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL.

ALSO, IT'S HARD NOT TO THINK OF THE STORY OF JOSEPH. JOSEPH WAS SOLD INTO SLAVERY BY HIS BROTHERS, UNJUSTLY ACCUSED AND IMPRISONED IN EGYPT. AND YET JOSEPH REMAINED FAITHFUL TO YAHWEH ALL THE DAYS OF SUFFERING. HE SURELY HELD TO THE PROMISES THAT GOD HAD MADE TO HIM EXPRESSED IN THE DREAMS HE HAD AS A YOUNG MAN. AS THE STORY OF JOSEPH UNFOLDS, HE FINDS HIMSELF RULING IN EGYPT AND VINDICATED FOR HIS FAITHFULNESS TO GOD. AND IN THE DRAMATIC CLIMAX OF THE RECORD WE READ:

GENESIS 42:6 - NOW JOSEPH WAS THE RULER OVER THE LAND; HE WAS THE ONE WHO SOLD TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND. AND JOSEPH'S BROTHERS CAME AND BOWED DOWN TO HIM WITH THEIR FACES TO THE GROUND.

THE JEWISH TROUBLEMAKERS OF PHILADELPHIA ASSUMED THEY WERE THE "CHOSEN" ONES, THE LORD'S BELOVED. YET JESUS IS GOING TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT THE FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS OF THE CITY ARE IN FACT THE CHOSEN ONES HE LOVES (**3:98**).

NOTICE THAT THIS BOWING IS FORCED BY THE LORD MESSIAH NOT BY THE CHURCH. THE CHURCH IS NOT A BODY THAT SEEKS REVENGE OR HUMILIATION OF THEIR ENEMIES, BUT CHRIST, AS GOD'S AGENT VINDICATES AND BRINGS JUDGMENT UPON ENEMIES. THE CHURCH MAY ACTUALLY FEEL THAT THEY ARE DEFEATED, BUT IN THE END THE TRUTH WILL BE MADE CLEAR.

WHY IS JESUS GOING TO VINDICATE THE PHILIDELPHIANS? BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL TO HIM.

V. 10 - YOU HAVE KEPT THE WORD OF MY PERSEVERANCE - I WILL KEEP YOU

THE CHURCH HAS BEEN FAITHFUL UNDER TRIAL SO FAR AND JESUS INFORMS THE CHURCH THAT THERE ARE MORE TRIALS TO COME. IT WOULD BE EGO-CENTRIC FOR US TO THINK THIS ~~ONLY~~ MEANS THE "GREAT TRIBULATION" TO COME AT THE END OF THE AGE, FOR JESUS WOULD HAVE BEEN SOBERLY PREPARING THE PHILIDELPHIANS FOR SOMETHING THOUSANDS OF YEARS FROM THEIR LIFETIME. THERE IS GOING TO BE A TIME OF TROUBLE COMING SOON IN THEIR LIFETIME AND JESUS IS GETTING THEM READY.

FINAL DELIVERANCE COMES WHEN THE KING RETURNS. FOLLOWING JESUS IN THIS AGE MEANS SEASONS OF BLESSING AND JOY FOLLOWED BY TIMES OF SUFFERING. TROUBLE AND PERSECUTION -- DIVINE RESCUE -- AND NEW TRIALS. BECAUSE WE ARE CARED FOR AND BROUGHT THROUGH A TRIAL DOESN'T MEAN MORE TRIALS WILL NOT COME. AS WE HAVE ALREADY DISCUSSED, THIS SHOULDN'T SURPRISE US. IT IS GOOD NEWS TO KNOW THIS AHEAD OF TIME SO WE CAN ANTICIPATE DIFFICULTY AND NOT BE OVERTAKEN BY IT.

V. 11 - "I AM COMING QUICKLY. HOLD FAST WHAT YOU HAVE"

THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN A LIFE GIVING WORD FROM JESUS TO THOSE WHO WERE SUFFERING AND STRUGGLING. I'M COMING QUICKLY - HOLD FAST.

THE "CROWN" MENTIONED HERE IS "A WREATH CONSISTING EITHER OF FOLIAGE OR OF PRECIOUS METALS FORMED TO RESEMBLE FOLIAGE AND WORN AS A SYMBOL OF HONOR, VICTORY, OR AS A BADGE OF HIGH OFFICE" (NET BIBLE, REV. 3:11)

THEY HAVE ALREADY BEEN DECLARED WINNERS - DON'T GIVE UP AND FORFEIT THAT VICTORY.

V. 12-13 - REWARD/PROMISE TO THOSE WHO OVERCOMING

"PILLAR IN THE TEMPLE": A PILLAR IS AN IMPORTANT AND VISIBLE PART OF A TEMPLE IN THAT ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURE. A KEY PIECE HOLDING IT UP. YOU CAN'T REMOVE A PILLAR. THE WEAK CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA IS GOING TO BE MADE STRONG. IN THIS AGE THEY CAN'T EVEN HOLD A DOOR OPEN, IN THE AGE TO COME THEY WILL BE LIKE PILLARS IN THE TEMPLE OF GOD. RATHER THAN BARELY BEING ABLE TO ENTER THE PLACE WHERE GOD DWELLS, CHRIST ENSURES THAT IF THEY CONTINUE TO REMAIN FAITHFUL, THEY WILL NEVER HAVE TO LEAVE.

THEY ARE PROMISED A THREE FOLD BLESSING RELATING TO BELONGING TO GOD - MARKED WITH "THE NAME OF MY GOD, THE CITY OF MY GOD, AND MY NEW NAME." IN OTHER WORDS THEY WILL BE DIVINELY LABELED WITH "THIS PERSON BELONGS TO GOD" OR "GOD'S PROPERTY". ALSO, IN A TIME WHEN PILLARS WERE SOMETIMES LABELED IN DEDICATION TO A FAMOUS CITIZEN OR BENEFACTOR, THE PILLARS OF THE TEMPLE OF GOD WOULD MEMORIALIZE THE FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST.

AS WE LEARNED AT THE START OF THIS LETTER, PHILADELPHIA WAS ORIGINALLY AN ANCIENT GREEK CITY, REBUILT BY TIBERIUS CAESAR AND LITTERED WITH MARBLE PILLARED TEMPLES IN HONOR OF THE GODS OF THOSE CULTURES. WE ALSO LEARNED THAT PHILADELPHIA WAS THE SITE OF A MAJORLY DESTRUCTIVE SEISMIC EVENT IN 17AD AND LIVED UNDER CONSTANT THREAT OF TREMORS AND TECTONIC SHIFTS. AS A RESULT, SIMILAR TO A CITY LIKE LOS ANGELES, THE THRIVING CITY LIVED WITH THE ANXIETY THAT CAME FROM THE FACT THAT ANOTHER EARTHQUAKE COULD HAPPEN AT ANY TIME. DARRELL JOHNSON OBSERVES THAT:

"TREMORS, STRONG AND JOLTING, WERE FREQUENT. WHENEVER A QUAKE STRUCK, THE PEOPLE OF PHILADELPHIA WOULD FLEE THE CITY. WHEN THE AFTERSHOCKS SUBSIDED, THEY WOULD RETURN. THE PEOPLE OF PHILADELPHIA WERE, THEREFORE, 'ALWAYS GOING OUT AND COMING IN; THEY WERE ALWAYS FLEEING THE CITY AND RETURNING TO IT.' MANY PEOPLE, OUT OF FEAR, LEFT THE CITY EVERY NIGHT! THIS FRIGHTENED RHYTHM OF FLIGHT AND RETURN HAD BECOME PART OF THEIR LIVES." (JOHNSON, PAGE 107)

JESUS IS PROMISING HIS FAITHFUL PEOPLE THAT THE TIME IS COMING WHEN FEAR AND TERROR WILL CEASE. IN THE NEW JERUSALEM, THE CITY TO COME FROM GOD, THEY WILL NO LONGER NEED TO BE AFRAID OR PREPARE FOR PERSECUTION. NO MORE WEAKNESS, NO MORE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN, NO MORE TROUBLES, NO MORE TREMORS. NO MORE SPIRITUAL FOES NOR EARTHLY WOES. WHAT A PROMISE FOR THEM, AND FOR US!

LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN IN THE LATE FIRST CENTURY WAS NOT EASY. THEY WERE INCREASINGLY PERSECUTED AND DESPISED, DESPITE THEIR CHRISTIAN'S COMMITMENT TO LOVE AND SERVICE. THOSE WHO CONFESSED JESUS AS LORD DIDN'T FIND AN EASY INTEGRATION INTO ROMAN LIFE DOMINATED BY DEVOTION TO THE EMPEROR AND DEBAUCHERY. THOSE WHO CONFESSED JESUS AS MESSIAH WEREN'T WELCOMED IN THE SYNAGOGUE EITHER. THEY WERE STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS IN CITIES THEY MAY HAVE BEEN BORN AND RAISED IN. THEY DID NOT HAVE POWER OR INFLUENCE. THEY MOSTLY HAD POVERTY AND LIMITED RESOURCES. THEY DID NOT HAVE HOPES OF GAINING AUTHORITY OR A SEAT AT THE TABLE.

YET JESUS REMINDS THEM THAT HE HAS THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM - HE HAS OPENED THE DOOR THAT LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE AND INVITES THEM TO FOLLOW HIM THROUGH THE UNLOCKED GATES OF THE NEW JERUSALEM.

MOST OF US READING THEIR STORY DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN TO SYMPATHIZE WITH THEIR SITUATION. WE ARE NOT POOR OR MARGINALIZED OR PERSECUTED OR WITHOUT A PLACE IN SOCIETY. WE HAVE RESOURCES AND ACCESS. WE CAN RUN FOR POLITICAL OFFICE, PROTEST JUDICIAL DECISIONS, SHARE INFORMATION, DISAGREE WITH LEADERS WITHOUT FEAR OF SIGNIFICANT RETRIBUTION, BUILD CHURCH BUILDINGS, SEND OUR CHILDREN TO CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS OR CHOOSE TO TEACH THEM AT HOME. IT HAS NEVER BEEN LIKE THIS FOR CHRISTIANS IN PREVIOUS GENERATIONS - AND THIS REALITY CAN CONFUSE SOME OF US.

WE WOULD BE FOOLISH TO THINK THAT THE ACCESS THAT REALLY MATTERS IS IN THE STATEHOUSE OR THE BOARDROOM. ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WHAT PHILADELPHIA WAS LIVING FOR - AND THEIR DEVOTION WAS TO THE KEY-HOLDER OF THE *EVERLASTING* GATES. THEY COULD ENDURE PERSECUTION AND TRIBULATION BECAUSE THE HOLY AND TRUE KING KNEW THEIR DEEDS AND WOULD SHOW THE WORLD IN THE END THAT THEY WERE LOVED BY HIM.

THEIR FOCUS AND PERSPECTIVE WAS AN ETERNAL ONE AND THEY DID NOT GET LOST IN THE TEMPORAL TURBULENCE OF THE WORLD AROUND THEM. WHEN THEY FACED TROUBLE, IT IGNITED THEIR FAITH AND DESIRE TO HOLD FAST. WE DON'T HEAR OF THEM COMPLAINING ABOUT HOW BAD THE WORLD HAD GOTTEN OR HOW UNFAIR THINGS WERE FOR THEM. THEY WOULDN'T HAVE EVEN CONSIDERED THAT PHILADELPHIA WAS A "CHRISTIAN NATION" OR "CITY ON A HILL" THAT NEEDED TO BE MADE "GREAT AGAIN." HERE'S WHAT THEY DID BELIEVE: THEY WERE CHRISTIANS WHO HAPPENED TO LIVE IN PHILADELPHIA, WHO WERE THE LIGHTS OF THE WORLD, DEVOTED TO THEIR KING WHO WAS ETERNALLY GREAT.

PHILADELPHIA HAS "LITTLE POWER". THEY CAN'T OPEN THE DOOR TO WHERE THEY NEED TO BE WITH THE LIMITED STRENGTH THEY POSSESS. YET JESUS SAYS THAT HE WILL OPEN (AND HOLD) THE DOOR FOR THEM SO THEY CAN JOURNEY THROUGH IT. PAUL SAID THAT IN HIS WEAKNESS THE POWER OF CHRIST WAS MADE STRONG. JESUS TOLD HIM THAT STRENGTH WAS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS AND THAT HIS "GRACE WAS SUFFICIENT" (2 CORINTHIANS 12:9). IT SEEMS THAT THE GRACE AND STRENGTH OF THE RISEN CHRIST IS FOUND NOT ON THE MOUNTAINTOP BUT IN THE VALLEY, NOT IN THE SUNSHINE BUT IN THE SHADOWS.

WHEN ALL IS WELL WE ARE TOO OFTEN TEMPTED TO TAKE BACK THE REINS OF OUR LIFE. WE THINK WE NO LONGER NEED GOD BECAUSE THE CRISIS IS OVER. HE CAN GO BACK TO WHATEVER HE WAS DOING AND WE'LL SIT DOWN ON THE THRONE AGAIN. AND WE RULE AND REIGN IN GLORY UNTIL THE NEXT TRIAL COMES WHICH SHOCKINGLY REVEALS THAT WE ARE INCAPABLE OF COMMANDING THE WORLD. WE FIND AGAIN WE CAN BARELY EVEN OPEN A DOOR.

"THE TIME OF TRIAL IS COMING ON THE WHOLE EARTH, AND LIKE A POWERFUL SEARCHLIGHT IT WILL REVEAL WHO IS HOLDING ON TO JESUS AND HIS PROMISE OF A "CROWN" AND WHO ISN'T. THE PHILADELPHIAN CHRISTIANS ARE HOLDING ON AT THE MOMENT; THEY MUST GO ON DOING SO AND 'CONQUER' WHEN THE TIME COMES. SO MUST WE." NT WRIGHT, "REVELATION FOR EVERYONE" PAGES 35-36)

PERSECUTION HAS THE REMARKABLE ABILITY TO PURIFY AND PURGE. THOSE WHO ONLY HALF-HEARTEDLY FOLLOW CHRIST EITHER BECOME FULLY DEVOTED OR FLAKE AWAY WHEN TROUBLES ARRIVE. APPARENTLY PHILADELPHIA HAD STEPPED UP IN THE SEASON OF TRIAL AND CHRIST SAW IT. IN TURN, HE WAS GOING TO STAND UP FOR THEM.

PHILADELPHIA, THOUGH WEAK, IS FAITHFUL. THROUGH THIS 6TH LETTER FROM JESUS CHRIST, THE CHURCH RECEIVES COMMENDATION FROM THEIR LORD WITH AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO HOLD FAST. **THEY HEAR NO REBUKE OR CALL TO REPENT.** THROUGH GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS, WHETHER THE

WORLD WAS CALM OR THE EARTH WAS SHAKING - THEY HAD ALREADY MADE THEIR DECISION TO STAND FOR HIM. HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES.