

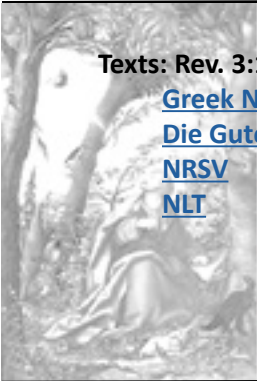


THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study Day 4

Text: Rev. 3:1-13

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Smyrna & Philadelphia

Greek NT

3.1 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψων·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας· οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ. 2 γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὐρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. 3 μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἶληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποῖαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοι εἰσιν.

5 Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ. 6 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

7 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψων·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυὶδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς

Gute Nachricht Bibel

3.1 »Schreibe an den Engel* der Gemeinde in Sardes:

So spricht Er, dem die sieben Geister* Gottes dienen und der die sieben Sterne in der Hand hält: Ich kenne euer Tun. Ich weiß, dass ihr in dem Ruf steht, eine lebendige Gemeinde zu sein; aber in Wirklichkeit seid ihr tot. 2 Werdet wach und stärkt den Rest, der noch Leben hat, bevor er vollends stirbt. Was ich bei euch an Taten vorgefunden habe, kann in den Augen meines Gottes nicht bestehen. 3 Erinnert euch daran, wie ihr die Botschaft anfangs gehört und aufgenommen habt! Richtet euch nach ihr und lebt wieder wie damals! Wenn ihr nicht aufwacht und wach bleibt, werde ich euch wie ein Dieb überraschen; ihr werdet nicht wissen, in welcher Stunde ich über euch komme. 4 Aber einige von euch in Sardes haben sich nicht beschmutzt. Sie werden weiße Kleider tragen und immer bei mir sein; denn sie sind es wert.

5 Alle, die durchhalten und den Sieg erringen, werden solch ein weißes Kleid tragen. Ich will ihren Namen nicht aus dem Buch des Lebens streichen. Vor meinem Vater und seinen Engeln werde ich mich offen zu ihnen bekennen. 6 Wer Ohren hat, soll hören, was der Geist* den Gemeinden sagt!«

7 »Schreibe an den Engel der Gemeinde in Philadelphia:

So spricht Er, der heilig

NRSV

3.1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. 6 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut,

NLT

3.1 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis.

This is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars: "I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive -- but you are dead. 2 Now wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is at the point of death. Your deeds are far from right in the sight of God. 3 Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly and turn to me again. Unless you do, I will come upon you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief. 4 "Yet even in Sardis there are some who have not soiled their garments with evil deeds. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

5 All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine. 6 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

7 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia. This is the message from the one who is holy and

κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδείς ἀνοίγει· 8 οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδείς δύναται κλείσαι αὐτήν, ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου. 9 ἰδοὺ διδώ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε. 10 ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. 11 ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου.

12 Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλὴμ ἢ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν. 13 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

ist und Treue hält, Er, der den Schlüssel Davids hat – wo Er öffnet, kann niemand zuschließen, und wo Er zuschließt, kann niemand öffnen –, Er lässt euch sagen: 8 Ich kenne euer Tun. Ich habe euch eine Tür geöffnet, die niemand zuschließen kann. Eure Kraft ist nur klein. Trotzdem habt ihr euch nach meinem Wort gerichtet und das Bekenntnis zu mir nicht widerrufen. 9 Hört zu! Ich werde Menschen zu euch schicken, die zur Synagoge des Satans gehören. Sie behaupten, dass sie zum Volk Gottes zählen; das stimmt aber nicht, sie lügen. Ich werde dafür sorgen, dass sie sich vor euch niederwerfen und anerkennen, dass ich euch erwählt habe und liebe. 10 Ihr habt mein Wort beherzigt, mit dem ich euch zum Durchhalten aufrief. Darum werde ich euch in der Zeit der Versuchung bewahren, die demnächst über die ganze Erde kommen und alle Menschen auf die Probe stellen wird. 11 Ich komme bald! Haltet fest, was ihr habt, damit euch niemand den Siegeskranz* streitig macht!

12 Alle, die durchhalten und den Sieg erringen, werde ich zu einer Säule im Tempel meines Gottes machen, und sie werden immer darin bleiben. Ich werde den Namen meines Gottes auf sie schreiben und den Namen der Stadt meines Gottes. Diese Stadt ist das neue Jerusalem, das von meinem Gott aus dem Himmel herabkommen wird. Ich werde auch meinen eigenen neuen Namen auf sie schreiben. 13 Wer Ohren hat, soll hören, was der Geist* den Gemeinden sagt!«

who shuts and no one opens: 8 “I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. 11 I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

12 If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. 13 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

true. He is the one who has the key of David. He opens doors, and no one can shut them; he shuts doors, and no one can open them. 8 “I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can shut. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me. 9 Look! I will force those who belong to Satan -- those liars who say they are Jews but are not -- to come and bow down at your feet. They will acknowledge that you are the ones I love. 10 “Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world. 11 Look, I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown.

12 All who are victorious will become pillars in the Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it. And I will write my God’s name on them, and they will be citizens in the city of my God -- the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from my God. And they will have my new name inscribed upon them. 13 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

INTRODUCTION

As in all the previous messages the same structural framework provides the organizational pattern for the content of both messages in this study.

- Adscriptio with the command to write**, that introduces each message.
- The Τάδε λέγει, these things says...**, formula begins the second section in every message.
- The Narratio section** begins the defining of the demonstrative pronoun Τάδε.
- The Dispositio segment** contains both praise for the good qualities in each church, and stern warnings to change the bad traits existing in each church.

- The Command to Listen** segment begins the last two elements of each message. Here is a formula statement that is identical in all seven messages: Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, *The one having ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.*
- The Victory Promise** formula is the final segment in each letter.

The following lists the specific texts for both messages:

	Sardis:	Philadelphia:
a)	3:1a	3:7a
b)	3:1b	3:7b
c)	3:1c	3:8



- | | | |
|----|-------|--------|
| d) | 3:2-4 | 3:9-11 |
| e) | 3:6 | 3:13 |
| f) | 3:5 | 3:12 |

Again the Command to Listen and the Victory Promise are reversed in sequence as found in three messages. As beginning in the fourth message to Thyatira the content of the Victory Promise is more detailed than in the first three messages. This will hold true for the fourth through the seventh messages. It is also important to remember that the Victory Promise is the promise of entrance into Heaven for the one who overcomes. This is consistently true through all seven messages.

These messages contain a limited Narratio section but a longer Dispositio section. With Sardis the Narratio evaluation is the simple declaration of having a reputation of being spiritually alive but in reality being a spiritually dead congregation. The broad but damning assessment lays the foundation for a detailed warning to the church to 'wake up' for face extinction. With Philadelphia, however, the Narratio contains a short word of praise for the congregation. The Dispositio contains words of promise to take vengeance on

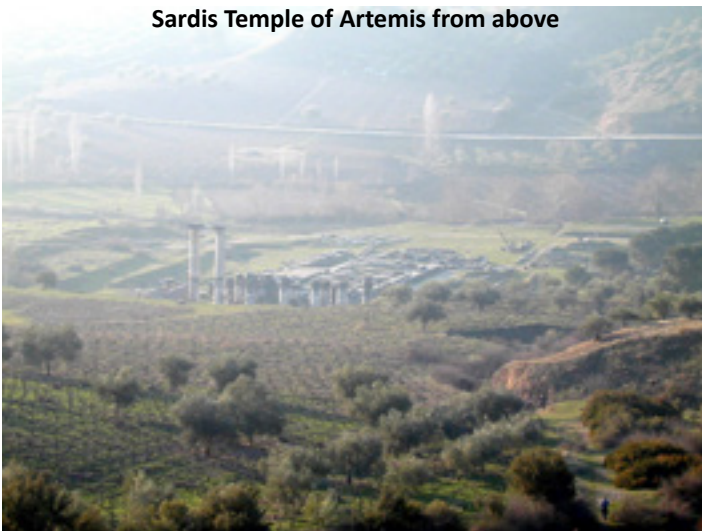
the Jewish synagogue and to protect the congregation during its coming trials. Thus the two main segments of each message -- the Narratio and the Dispositio -- give us a study in contrasts between criticism and praise and how the thrust in the Narratio determines the direction of the Dispositio. Criticism leads to warning, while praise leads to promise.

The two Victory Promises then build off the themes of each message in both the Narratio and Dispositio sections.

Hopefully, by this point in our studies some patterns are beginning to clearly emerge from these messages. The repeated formal structure seems somewhat strange to a modern reader, but if one had lived in any of these cities at the end of the first century this pattern would have seemed quite normal and natural. All kinds of echoes structurally sound forth of the imperial edicts issued on occasion by either the provincial governor or the Roman emperor. Upon hearing these read either in the market place center of the city or in the theater the civic meeting place for the city provided an established communication form for receiving a hugely authoritative message from a powerful ruler. Then hearing this form echoed in the messages of Revelation as this document was read to each of the congregations communicated the same tone of an important message from the most powerful of all rulers, Christ Himself.

The Narratio section in each letter got right to the heart of what was going on in each congregation. Nothing was hidden, and these seven messages enclosed in a single document exposed each church's condition to the entire Christian world. Additionally the Dispositio section spelled out stern warnings and promises from Christ. Other churches would know exactly what Christ wanted done, and should the same problem exist in their church they heard the same message. And the same thing is true for us as modern readers of these messages. We need to hear and heed what Christ has to say!

Sardis Temple of Artemis from above



Philadelphia view to the south from the acropolis





THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 10

Text: Rev. 3:1-6
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1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι, λέγων· Ἔρχεται ἡ σήμερον, καὶ ἡ ἀποκάλυψις τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου. 2 Ἐπιτύρῃσεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀκούσκων καὶ οἱ ἃ ἔγραψα ἐπιτελεῖν ταῦτα ἐν αὐτῷ βιβλίῳ, ἵνα ἡ γειραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

QUICK LINKS

1. What the text meant.

Historical Aspects:

External History

Internal History

Literary Aspects:

Genre

Literary Setting

Literary Structure

Exegesis of the Text:

A. Command to write, v. 1a

B. Situation of the church, vv. 1b-4

C. Admonition and promise, vv. 5-6

2. What the text means.

MESSAGE TO SARDIS

Greek NT

3 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψων·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας· οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ. 2 γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὔρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. 3 μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἶληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. ἔαν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποῖαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

5 Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ. 6 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

1 »Schreibe an den Engel* der Gemeinde in Sardes:

So spricht Er, dem die sieben Geister* Gottes dienen und der die sieben Sterne in der Hand hält:

Ich kenne euer Tun. Ich weiß, dass ihr in dem Ruf steht, eine lebendige Gemeinde zu sein; aber in Wirklichkeit seid ihr tot.† 2 Werdet wach und stärkt den Rest, der noch Leben hat, bevor er vollends stirbt. Was ich bei euch an Taten vorgefunden habe, kann in den Augen meines Gottes nicht bestehen. 3 Erinnerst euch daran, wie ihr die Botschaft anfangs gehört und aufgenommen habt! Richtet euch nach ihr und lebt wieder wie damals! Wenn ihr nicht aufwacht und wach bleibt, werde ich euch wie ein Dieb überraschen; ihr werdet nicht wissen, in welcher Stunde ich über euch komme.† 4 Aber einige von euch in Sardes haben sich nicht beschmutzt. Sie werden weiße Kleider tragen und immer bei mir sein; denn sie sind es wert.†

5 Alle, die durchhalten und den Sieg erringen, werden solch ein weißes Kleid tragen. Ich will ihren Namen nicht aus dem Buch des Lebens streichen. Vor meinem Vater und seinen Engeln* werde ich mich offen zu ihnen bekennen.† 6 Wer Ohren hat, soll hören, was der Geist* den Gemeinden sagt!«

NRSV

3 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. 6 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

NLT

1 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis.

This is the message from the one who has the seven-fold Spirit of God and the seven stars:

I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive -- but you are dead. 2 Now wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is at the point of death. Your deeds are far from right in the sight of God. 3 Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly and turn to me again. Unless you do, I will come upon you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief. 4 "Yet even in Sardis there are some who have not soiled their garments with evil deeds. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

5 All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine. 6 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

INTRODUCTION

With the message to Sardis we come to the fifth of these seven messages to the churches. For some unclear reason the last three messages were placed in a separate chapter when the chapter and verse markings were added in the seventeenth century. Evidently, this shift was motivated by realizing that the message to Sardis is almost identical to the one to Ephesus in 2:1-7.

The city of Sardis itself enjoyed a long history of prosperity during the early Christian era after suffering a catastrophic earthquake in AD 17.¹ The Christian church in the city existed along side one of the largest Jewish synagogues in the ancient world. The combination of great affluence and religious toleration very likely contributed mightily to the problems identified by Christ in the church that prompted His stern rebuke to them.

Consequently, we who live in a similar cultural climate have a lot to learn from Christ's message to this ancient Christian congregation.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

As is always the case, the historical and literary background issues play an important role in legitimate

¹“Sardis or Sardes (Lydian: *Sfard*; Greek: Σάρδεις, Sardeis; Persian: دراس, Sārd) was an ancient city at the location of modern Sart (Sartmahmut before 19 October 2005) in Turkey's Manisa Province. Sardis was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia,¹ one of the important cities of the Persian Empire, the seat of proconsul under the Roman Empire, and the metropolis of the province Lydia in later Roman and Byzantine times. As one of the Seven churches of Asia, it was addressed by the author of the Book of Revelation in terms which seem to imply that its population was notoriously soft and fainthearted. Its importance was due, first to its military strength, secondly to its situation on an important highway leading from the interior to the Aegean coast, and thirdly to its commanding the wide and fertile plain of the Hermus.” [“Sardis,” *wikipedia.org*]



interpretation of the scripture text. Rev. 3:1-7 is no exception.

Historical Aspects:

Here both the external and internal histories are important to examine.

External History. In the hand copying of 3:1-6 over the first eight or so Christian centuries, several variations of wording surface among the now existing manuscripts containing this passage.

The editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) considered on one of them as having enough impact on translation in order to include it in the text apparatus of this printed Greek New Testament. This is the adverb οὕτως, *thus*, in verse five.² A few manuscripts read οὗτος, *this one*, or αὐτός, *himself*. But the overwhelming weight of evidence favors the adverb οὕτως.³

In the text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.), one will find seventeen places where variations in wording appear in known manuscripts of these six verses.⁴ Again, careful examination of

²{B} οὕτως κ* A C 1006 2329 2344 2351 it^{ar}, g^{ig}, t¹ vg syr^{ph}, h cop^{sa}, bo arm eth Primasius // οὗτος κ² 205 209 1611 1841 1854 205³ Byz [P 046] Andrew // αὐτός 2050.

³“Instead of οὕτως, the *Textus Receptus*, in agreement with a few uncials and most minuscules, reads οὗτος (this one), referring to ‘the one who conquers’ (ὁ νικῶν). The reading οὕτως has superior manuscript support. In addition, οὕτως seems to be unnecessary and may have therefore been corrected by copyists to οὗτος. The sense of the reading in the text is that the one who conquers will be dressed in white in the same manner as the few people in Sardis who shall walk with Christ in white (v. 4). Compare NRSV1: ‘If you conquer, you will be clothed like them [οὗτος] in white robes.’ It is also possible that οὕτως refers primarily to the preceding ὁ νικῶν (the one who conquers) ‘in which case it would emphasize only the idea of overcoming itself: ‘the one overcoming—by overcoming’—will inherit the following promises’ (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 278).²” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 529-30.]

Offenbarung 3,1

* τω 046 sy^h (τῆς is replaced by τῷ)

* κυριος 172 (κύριος is inserted before ὁ ἔχων)

* 181. 2015 pc (ἑπτὰ is omitted)

* και 1006. 1611. 1841. 2344 M^K (ὅτι is replaced by καὶ)

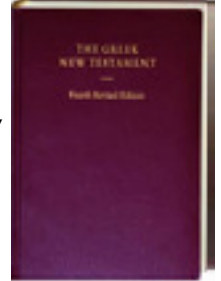
Offenbarung 3,2

* τηρησον 1611. 2344 pc sy^h (στήρισον is replaced by τήρισον)

* ημελλες αποβαλλειν 1006. (1611). 1841 M^K (sy^{ph}, bo) (ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν is replaced by ἡμελλες ἀποθανεῖν)

| txt κ A C 1854. 2050. 2053. 2329. (2351) M^A latt sy^h sa

* † A C pc (τὰ is omitted)



each of these variants reveals no substantive change in meaning. They mostly reflect efforts at stylistic improvement; a few reflect careless copying methods.

Consequently, we can exegete the adopted reading of the passage in full confidence that it reflects the original wording of this passage.

Internal History. The major time and place marker inside the passage that relates to a background historical issue is the designation of the city of Σάρδεσιν, *Sardis*.

The city had a long and rich history, somewhat dotted with tragic events over the centuries.⁵ It was crushed by the Persians in sixth century BCE, and destroyed by an earthquake in AD 17. The city was noted for its wealth from the time of Croesus, king of Lydia from 560 to 546 BCE. Even after the Muslim occu-

pation of the city in AD 716, the Christian community continued to grow and remained prominent inside Christianity across the Mediterranean world. A Melito (died c. 180 AD) who was the spiritual leader in Sardis during much of the second century became famous in Christian circles and wrote extensively against the rival Jewish synagogue in the city. In the OT, it was known as *Gog* (cf. Ezek. 38-39) from the Assyrian *Gugu* or *Gyges*.

The Jewish synagogue, a portion of which still stands, is one of the largest in the ancient world, and reflects a cultural accommodation to surrounding attitudes that possibly suggests some of the background for the problems found in the Christian church.⁶



Numerous references in 3:1-6 will play off of various aspects of the city's history and culture. These will be noted in the exegesis portion of the study.

Literary Aspects:

The literary aspects continue to play the dominant role in proper interpretation of each of these messages, and the one to Sardis is no exception. Additionally, the literary patterns remain essentially the same as with the previous letters. And in particular a closer parallel to the message to the Ephesians in 2:1-7 emerges. This evidently provided the basis for the chapter division in the post middle ages.

Genre: As noted in the first study of these messages, the general pattern of all seven messages is more of an imperial decree issued by the King of Kings to each of the churches. The component elements remain exactly the same as with all the other message. It is in the content of each sub-form where

⁶Hemer argued that Jews lived in Sardis in the 4th cent. bce. They came for commercial reasons. Josephus writes that Antiochus III resettled 2,000 Jewish families there (*Ant.* 12.149). Jewish persons became integral members of society politically and financially. They built a large synagogue as well as a GYMNASIUM for the education of their sons. An unusual feature of the synagogue is the presence of Lydian religious reliefs. This type of assimilation of religious traditions, as well as the Greek-style education of their sons, indicates a level of accommodation by some Jews with their surrounding community." [Thomas Slatter, "Sardis," *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, online at *Ministry Matters*.]

| txt & M

*¹ M^A sy^{ph} sa^{ms}; Prim (μου is omitted)

Offenbarung 3,3

* & 69. 2329 gig t sy^{ph}; Prim (οὖν is omitted)

* 1006. 1841 M^K (καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει is omitted)

* μετανοησῆς &*; Prim (γρηγορήσῃς is replaced by μετανοήσῃς μηδὲ γρηγορήσῃς)

| μετ. μηδε γρηγ. 2050 t bo

* ἐπι σε & 1006. 1841. 2050. 2344 M^K it vg^{cl} sy sa^{ms}; Bea (ἐπι σε is inserted before ὡς κλέπτῃς)

* γνώσῃ & 1006. 1841. (2050). 2329. 2344. 2351 M^K (γνώσῃς is replaced by γνώσῃ)

| txt A C 1611. 1854. 2053 M^A

Offenbarung 3,4

* 1006. 1841 M^K (The sequence of ἔχεις ὀλίγα is reversed)

* οἱ M (ἃ is replaced by οἱ)

Offenbarung 3,5

* οὗτος &¹ M (οὗτος is replaced with either οὗτος or αὐτός)

| αὐτος 2050

| txt &* A C 1006. 2329. 2344. 2351 al latt sy co

* ἐμπροσθεν & 1611 (ἐνώπιον is replaced with ἐμπροσθεν)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 637-38].

⁵“Sardis (sahr’dis), the regional capital of Lydia in the province of Asia Minor and one of the seven churches addressed in Revelation (Rev. 1:11; 3:1, 4). The city was founded in Seleucid times (third century B.C.) and Greek was as widely used as the native dialect. The Lydian kings revered the Greek gods, were benefactors of Hellenic sanctuaries, and consulted the oracle at Delphi.

“In the sixth century B.C. the Lydians controlled most of the coast of Asia Minor and the islands offshore. Its wealth, especially that of Croesus, was legendary. The influence of Lydian dress, turbans and soft leather boots, and musical innovations based on the seven-stringed lyre could be seen in Athens at the end of the sixth century. However, Croesus challenged the might of the Persian Empire and was defeated. Sardis was made the center of the regional satrapy.

“In Roman times Sardis was the center of the imperial cult in the region. The cult was administered by a provincial council. See also Revelation to John, the.”

[Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 907.]

3.4
 97 But
you have a few names
 in Sardis
 that have not stained their clothes,
 and
 98 **they will walk**
 with me,
 in white
 because they are worthy.

3.5
 99 **The one overcoming will so be clothed**
 in white garments
 and
 100 **I will not ever blot out his name**
 from the book of life
 and
 101 **I will confess his name**
 before My Father
 and
 before His angels.

3.6
 102 The one having an ear
let him hear
 what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure:

The Adscriptio (#86) follows the standard form. It is followed by the Τάδε λέγει section (#87) with the portrait of Christ in chapter one supplying the title that is the verb subject.

The οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα (#88) introduces first the narratio (#s 88 - 91) and then the dispositio (#s 92- 98). This is followed by the victory formula (#s 99-101), and the hearing command (#102).

The thought progression remains the same from the previous letters. Instructions are given to John to write down the words supplied by Christ. This begins with an affirmation that Christ fully understands the situation at Sardis (#s 87-91). On that basis demands are made with warning in the Dispositio (#s 92-98). The message ends first with the promise of victory (#s 99-101) and then the command to hear (#102).

Exegesis of the Text:

The most natural outline of the text for exegetical purposes comes from the above rhetorical analysis. It will serve as the organizing foundation of our exegesis of the passage.

A. Command to write, v. 1a

Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψων·
 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

This message is directed to the Christian community in the ancient city of Sardis.⁷ Its famous history as

⁷A city in Asia Minor located some 100 kms (38°28'N; 28°03'E) inland from Smyrna and Ephesus, most famous in antiquity as the capital of the Lydian empire (ca. 680–ca. 547 b.c.) and for the legendary king Croesus (ca. 560–ca. 547 b.c.). Following

the capital of the Lydian empire centuries before the beginning of the Christian era produced a sense of pride and elitism that combined with its enormous wealth with the consequence of generating an atmosphere of complacency and toleration that proved deadly to the church in the city. More moderate estimates



Melito of Sardis

of population place the number of residents between 60,000 and 100,000 people.⁸ The later history of Christianity in the city begins with the well known Melito who served as spiritual leader in the city during the second century (165-175 AD).⁹ After Constantine in the 300s

the Lydian empire, the city served in turn as the seat of a Persian satrap, as an administrative center for the Seleucids, and as a leading city of the Roman province of Asia. Its only explicit reference in the Bible is in the book of Revelation (Rev 1:11; 3:1, 4).” [The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary, SV. “Sardis.”]

⁸“While earlier over-generous estimates put the population of Sardis at ca. 200,000 (D. Magie, *Roman Rule* 1:585), a more realistic estimate is probably somewhere between 60,000 and 100,000.” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 219]

⁹“A well-known bishop of Sardis in the 2d century is Melito, who substantiates accounts of the persecution of Christians recorded in a letter from Antoninus Pius to the council of Asia in a.d. 161 (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 4.13. 1–8). A prolific writer, Melito produced tracts, treatises, and homilies, of which the *Homily on the Passion* is the only one to survive almost in its entirety (Kraabel

church buildings began to be constructed in the city, a major one on the ruins of the temple to Artemis.¹⁰ Thus from every indication Christianity continued to make gains from the end of the first century onward.

B. Situation of the church, vv. 1b-4

1b Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας· οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ. 2 γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἐμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὕρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. 3 μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτῃς, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποῖαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

1b I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας, these things says He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars (v. 1b): With the standard introduction of authority Christ begins to speak by giving His title. The tone is authoritative and imperial.

The two elements used here come from

1:20. τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων οὐς εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῖς· οἱ ἑπτὰ

1971:76–85; Bonner 1940). Melito was a Quartodeciman, i.e., he celebrated Easter on the same day as Jews celebrated Passover, on whatever day of the week Passover fell. In spite of this ‘Judaizing’ practice, later pronounced a heresy by the Church, Melito attacked the Jews vigorously as being responsible for the death of Christ; almost a third of the text of the *Homily on the Passion* is preoccupied with the condemnation of ‘Israel.’ Yet Melito was faced not only with a prosperous and large Jewish community in the city, but also by other Christian sects and pagan survivals; it is in this context of the struggle for adherents that his outbursts may be explained.” [The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary, SV. “Sardis.”]

¹⁰“Churches began to be constructed as the Christianization of the city gathered pace following the conversion of Constantine. In the middle years of the 4th century, a large basilican complex was built outside the city walls to the W, and a small chapel was constructed against the SE corner of the Temple of Artemis before a.d. 400. The latter was evidently thought of as hallowing the sanctuary of Artemis and providing a chapel for the large cemetery nearby (Hanfmann et al. 1983:195). The remains of a huge domed basilican structure, unexcavated, lie to the E of the gymnasium-synagogue complex; this is thought to be of Justinianic date and to have been the cathedral of the city.” [The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary, SV. “Sardis.”]

ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαὶ αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσίν.

As for the mystery of **the seven stars** that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: **the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches**, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

1:4b. χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and **from the seven spirits who are before his throne**,

One interpretive issue here is whether two distinct entities are intended or whether two ways of referring to one entity is the point of this double expression.¹¹ Some indication seems to point to a ‘two sides of the same coin’ perspective, but the evidence is not substantial. Christ as the authority figure speaking here to the church possesses control over the churches and also is linked to the Spirit of God in powerful connection. Consequently His words take on a level of authority that the church dare not neglect or ignore. The appropriateness of this image of the risen Christ to the message will become clearer with the exegesis of that message.

Narratio:

οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ (v. 1c): The initial affirmation of Christ knowing exactly what the church at Sardis is doing comes at the same point in the message as does this identical phrase in all seven messages. But the defined content of what Christ knows is spelled out in greater detail in the ὅτι-clause that stands in apposition to σου τὰ ἔργα.

The focus of His knowledge is two fold. The church is known in Christian circles as being an ‘alive congregation’ (ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς). But in actuality it is spiritually lifeless (καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ). Exactly what Christ means by this second accusation is spelled out further in subsequent statements.¹² This is a serious charge against

¹¹“Thus says the one who has the seven spirits of God, namely the seven stars.’ Here καί, ‘namely,’ can be understood exegetically, since the seven spirits of God constitute a heavenly reality, while the seven stars are a symbol of a heavenly reality. Thus the seven stars are angels, just as the seven spirits are angels (see Comment on 1:4). The ‘seven spirits which are before the throne’ were mentioned in the epistolary prescript in 1:4. These seven angels are probably understood by John as identical with the seven archangels who stand in the presence of God (see 8:2). The seven stars have already been mentioned in 1:16, where they are seen by John in the right hand of the exalted Jesus, and in 1:20, where they are identified as “the angels of the seven churches.” Thus the seven spirits of God are indirectly identified by John as the angels of the seven churches (a possibility mentioned by Andreas of Caesarea on Rev 3:1; Schmid, Studien 1/1, 36). The mention of the seven stars is an intentional allusion to 1:16.” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a, Revelation 1-5, p. 219]

¹²1) τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἐμελλον ἀποθανεῖν (v. 2), **the remaining things**

the congregation.

The picture is of a church with a good reputation in larger Christian circles, but with a reputation not reflecting what was the actual spiritual condition present in the life of the church. Had you asked Christians at Ephesus about the church at Sardis, they would have praised the church is doing well. The same image was present among the other churches.

But the perception of Christ was radically different! His saw lack of life rather than life present at Sardis. What was the basis for this negative critique? The following assessments and warnings provide some insight into the deficiencies at Sardis.

γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, *Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death* (v. 2a): The first two emphases call for a spiritual inventory to occur among the church members. How these ideas are set up is both fascinating and puzzling to modern commentators. The present paraphrastic imperative construction γίνου γρηγορῶν stresses ongoing responsibility, while the Aorist imperative στήρισον stresses punctiliar completed action.¹³ The second person singular spelling of both verbs issues the commands to τῷ ἀγγέλῳ in v. 1 as representing the entire body of believers in the city.

Very crucial in this mixture is what τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν refers to in this context. Normally the neuter plural is taken to refer to aspects of the Christian faith, namely the level of commitment to Christ, that have weakened to a point of nearly passing away. A very real alternative meaning is that this refers to the remaining folks in the church.¹⁴ If so, then the

at the point of death.

2) οὐ γὰρ εὑρήκᾳ σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. (v. 3), *I have not found your works complete before my God.*

3) μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει (v. 3), *remember then how you received and heard, and obey.*

¹³In the background mostly likely stands an interesting history of the city of Sardis. “Some have speculated that this injunction to be vigilant, together with the threat of an unexpected day of reckoning in v 3b, reflects the Croesus tradition (Ramsay, *Letters*, 357–59; Hemer, *Letters*, 131–33). After an initial battle with Cyrus, Croesus withdrew to the supposedly impregnable citadel at Sardis, not suspecting that Cyrus would march against Sardis (Herodotus 1.76–77). Cyrus, however, marched to Sardis quickly and unobserved (1.79). Sardis was captured after a two-week siege (Herodotus 1.76–84). The moral lessons derived from this series of events (one must avoid pride, arrogance, and over-confidence and be prepared for unexpected reversals of fortune) became a topos for later historians and moralists (Hemer, *NTS* 19 [1972–73] 94–97).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 220].

¹⁴“The neut. pl. phrase τὰ λοιπὰ refers here to people rather than things (i.e., the assumption that neut. adjs indicate only non-living things is incorrect; cf. 1 Cor 1:27–28; Heb 7:7; Demosthenes, *Or* 8.41); see 2:24, where τοῖς λοιποῖς can be masc. or neut. and is similarly following by a defining relative clause (BDR § 138.1; Mussies, *Morphology*, 124; Delebecque, 172).” [*Word Bib-*

charge to the church is to address the weakened faith of those in the church who are seriously spiritually deficient. In either case, serious issues of failed Christian commitment was calling into question the salvation of such individuals.¹⁵

What is then called for is for the church to both wake up to these dangers and also to stay awake to them. Constant vigilance is absolutely essential. Then within such a framework of alertness to what is developing, the church must do all that is possible to correct these deficiencies, whether generally within the congregation or else focused in a small percentage of the congregation.

οὐ γὰρ εὑρήκᾳ σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου (v. 2b): This causal clause provides both the basis and the motivation to take action. Clearly the language used here is judicial and implies divine judgment, especially at the last day. The perfect tense verb εὑρήκᾳ stresses an ongoing evaluation that has led to the conclusion of σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα. That is, their initial commitment and enthusiasm for Christ has grown lethargic and they have not followed through on it.¹⁶ Evidently the social pressures of the city led to a compromising of that commitment so that these believers were not living out their Christian faith, especially in ways that presented the Gospel to their pagan neighbors.

That indictment has a very modern ring to it, doesn't it?

Dipositio:

μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον (v. 3a): The conjunction οὖν

lical Commentary, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 217].

¹⁵“Possibly these professing Christians are in danger of losing their salvation, to which they are barely hanging on. However, it is preferable to see them as analogous to the people ‘who say they are Jews, and are not, but lie’ (3:9; cf. 2:9). These false Jews prove they are not genuine, faithful Jews by their ungodly lifestyle (e.g., by persecuting the church). Likewise the so-called Christians of Sardis are living in such a way as to call into question whether or not they possess true, living faith in Christ. Does the name Christian genuinely apply to them? The church in Ephesus was in the very same danger (see above on 2:4).” [*The New International Greek Testament Commentary, The Book of Revelation*, p. 274]

¹⁶“Certainly the language of this phrase is based on the juridical metaphor of standing in the presence of God and having one's works finally evaluated (cf. a similar metaphor in 3:5). Here εὑρίσκειν is based on juridical language, i.e., ‘finding’ someone guilty or innocent, frequently in the passive voice (Sir 44:17, 20; Theod Dan 5:27; Acts 5:39; 23:9; 1 Cor 15:15; 2 Cor 5:3; 1 Pet 1:7; 2 Pet 3:14; cf. Rev 2:2: ‘you found them [i.e., the so-called apostles] false,’ and Theod Dan 5:27: θεκελ, ἐστάθη ἐν ζυγῷ καὶ εὐρέθη ὑστεροῦσα, ‘Thekel, it was weighed in a scale and was found wanting’).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 221].

picks up on perceived implications from what Christ has just stated. Even though some admonitions have been inserted into the Narratio section (γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον), now the thrust shifts to three demands made upon the entire church in rapid succession: μνημόνευε...καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον (*remember, keep, and repent*). The first two are present tense imperatives signaling ongoing responsibility, but the third one is an Aorist imperative calling for a decisive action of repentance. The sequence of these three commands is somewhat challenging, especially the second and third ones which we would logically expect in reverse order (repent ==> keep). But this is a western logical expectation that falsely assumes that a first century mind works like a modern western mind.

First, the church (note 2nd singular commands) must get into a ‘remembering mode.’ But remembering what? πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας. Usually this is translated as “*what you received and heard.*” But the interrogative adverb πῶς is manner and not information oriented.¹⁷ What Christ demanded that the folks remember was not just that they made a commitment to Christ in their conversion. But equally important was to remember all the circumstances and emotions connected to the making of that commitment. This idea is very similar to the recapturing of the ‘first love’ by the Ephesians (cf. 2:4-5).

Second, the church was not just to recalled those beginning days of Christian commitment, but they also were to obey it. There needed to be the institution of ongoing obedience to that professed commitment: τήρει. Professed commitment without follow through is no conversion! Consistency of commitment is what matters to Christ.

Third, how could the church do this? It would not be possible without a decisive action of repentance: μετανόησον. The emphasis of this verb is a turning around of one’s mind and thinking. That is, the church needed to get serious about genuine commitment to Christ that is lived out consistently day by day.

ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσης, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποίαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ (v. 3b): Again we encounter the co-ordinate inferential conjunction οὖν that makes clear perceived implications from the preceding statements.

Here we see Christ issuing a stern warning to the church. It is couched on the possible situation of ἐὰν μὴ γρηγορήσης, *if you do not become alert*. The third class conditional protasis here assumes that failure to

¹⁷“Interrog. reference to manner or way, in what way? how?” [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Third Edition, p. 901]

The idea of ‘what’ was expressed in ancient Greek by one of the following: τί, ὅ τι, ὅ. In indirect questions such as here the most appropriate form would have been τί.

heed the demand to become watchful is possible, but it is not assumed that the church will ignore Christ’s demand. What He presents is the possible scenario of them not waking up to what was happening. The use of γρηγορήσης and not τηρήσης as might be expected focuses attention on the broader responsibility put forth in γίνου γρηγορῶν (v. 2). Obedience must grow out of a heightened awareness of the larger picture of spiritual danger.

The threat of Christ is centered in ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, *I will come like a thief*. The threat or the promise of Christ’s coming is frequent in these seven letters (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11), and can be either a promise (2:25; 3:11) or a warning (2:5, 16; 3:3). A close parallel exists in Rev. 16:15 in an allusion to the Parousia of Christ.¹⁸ But here the emphasis is not on the end of times return of Christ, but instead on a temporal judgment against the church for failure to heed His warning.¹⁹ The image of a thief

¹⁸Rev. 16:15. Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης. μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῆ καὶ βλέψωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ.

(“*See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, a not going about naked and exposed to shame.*”)

¹⁹“The motif of the coming of Christ occurs several times in the proclamations to the seven churches (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11), using two synonymous verbs for coming, ἔρχεσθαι and ἦκειν. However, there appear to be two types of ‘coming’ involved, a coming in judgment, which has negative connotations (2:5, 16; 3:3), which is apparently distinct from the return of Christ, which has positive connotations (2:25; 3:11). This saying has a close parallel in Rev 16:15: Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης, ‘Behold I come as a thief,’ and indicates that the metaphor of an unexpected nocturnal break-in by a robber, used of the Parousia or second coming of Christ, could be applied to Christ’s ‘coming’ in other ways. In 1 Thess 5:2, the unexpectedness of the coming of the Day of the Lord is compared to the unexpected arrival of a thief: ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτης ἐν νυκτὶ οὕτως ἔρχεται, ‘the Day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night.’ The same phrase occurs in 2 Pet 3:10: ἦξει δὲ ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτης, ‘But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief.’ In both these passages, which share a common tradition (i.e., the latter is presumably dependent on the former), the Day of the Lord, not Christ, is compared to the unexpected coming of a burglar. In the parable of the Watchful Householder from Q (Matt 24:42–44 = Luke 12:39–40; see Stroker, Extracanonial, 111–12), the necessity of the householder to be watchful in case a thief comes unexpectedly is interpreted as an exhortation to watchfulness for the unexpected coming of the Son of Man. The reference to the Son of Man is widely (and correctly) regarded as a secondary addition to the tradition (Lindars, *Son of Man*, 97–98; Jeremias, *Parables*, 48–49; Fitzmyer, *Luke* 2:985; Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q* 149; Koester, *Gospels*, 153; Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 250–51); i.e., it is probable that an earlier version of Q lacked the application of the unexpected coming of the thief with the unexpected Parousia of the Son of Man. In Gos. Thom. 21, no christological application is found (Jeremias, *Parables*, 49): ‘Therefore I say: If the lord of the house knows that the thief is coming, he will stay awake before he comes and will not let him dig through into his house of his kingdom to carry away his goods.’ A parallel saying occurs in Gos.

is heightened further with καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποίαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. The church absolutely could not predict when Christ would take judgment action against the church, and thus do a ‘quick fix’ just before He came. In light of such uncertainty, the best thing was for it to take His demands to correct the problem immediately rather than later. Again, in the background is the past history of the city with being over confident in its ability to ward off enemy attacks. The church must not fall into the same disaster that the city had many years before.

ἀλλ’ ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν (v. 4a): In sharp contrast to some members being so spiritually sick that their salvation was in question, others in the church receive a strong commendation from Christ. The phrase ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν alludes to these members of the church at Sardis.

These folks had not followed the other path by ‘soiling their garments’: ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν. This OT terminology of dirty clothes from texts such as Zech. 3:1-5 alludes to one’s moral and spiritual condition.²⁰ See also Rev. 7:13-14 and 22:14. The concept of defiling one’s garments, ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, has implications of not only immoral compromises with paganism but religious defilement by participation in pagan temples.²¹

Thom. 103: ‘Blessed is the man who knows in which part of the night the robbers will come, so that he will rise and collect his [] and gird up his loins before they come in.’ A comparison of these texts indicates the hermeneutical interest in interpreting the metaphors used in the sayings of Jesus and makes it probable that the identification of the thief with the Son of Man (Matt 18:44; Luke 12:40) is a later development of the Q tradition, which has in turn influenced the formulation of the ‘I’ sayings in Rev 3:3 and 16:15, though the insertion of the Son of Man saying was unknown to our author.” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a, Revelation 1-5, p. 222].

²⁰“Here ‘clothes’ is a metaphor for an individual’s moral and spiritual condition (see also 7:13–14; 22:14). In Zech 3:1–5, Zechariah is depicted as wearing dirty clothes while standing before the angel of the Lord, a metaphor for the sins of both the priest and the people (the removal of these dirty clothes explicitly represents the removal of guilt; cf. Zech 3:4). In 1 Apoc. Jas. 28.16–17, James says to Jesus, referring to his teflon-like clothing (tr. J. M. Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 263): ‘You walked in mud, and your garments were not soiled.’ Again in Great Pow. 44.25–26, which is part of an apocalyptic scenario, it is said of the archon of the west that ‘the defilement of his garments is great’; i.e., he is a wicked person. Similarly, Teach. Silv. 105.13–16 (tr. J. M. Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 389) exhorts the reader to ‘strip off the old garment of fornication’.” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a, Revelation 1-5, p. 222].

²¹“As already mentioned in regard to the letters to Pergamum and Thyatira, these Christians were probably succumbing to the temptation not only of maintaining a low profile as Christians in such contexts, but also of paying token acknowledgment to the pagan gods (whether to Caesar or the patron gods of the guilds). As also in the other churches, the motive for this was probably fear of persecution, especially economic ostracism.” [New International

καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοι εἰσιν (v. 4b): Christ’s promise to these folks ‘wearing clean clothes’ is that they will “walk with me.” The image is that of close fellowship with Christ, most likely in this life as well as in the life to come.²² The reason is ὅτι ἄξιοι εἰσιν, *because they are worthy*. Although elsewhere in Revelation ‘worthiness’ pertains only to God or Christ (cf. 4:11; 5:2, 4, 9, 12), elsewhere in the NT ἄξιος and cognates are found stressing a consistent commitment to Christ in obedience to His will (cf. Jhn. 12:35; 1 Jhn. 1:6-7; 2:6, 11).

C. Admonition and promise, vv. 5-6

5 Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ. 6 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. 6 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Victory Promise: Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ. Here the image of white garments is clearly eschatological: περιβαλεῖται. The adverb of manner οὕτως extends the previous mention of ἐν λευκοῖς (v. 4) to a future getting dressed for eternity. As with all the

Greek Testament Commentary, The Book of Revelation, p. 277.]

²²“The notion of ‘walking’ with the exalted Christ while wearing white garments means to enjoy a close relationship to him. The specific manner and place in which the author thought that this promise would be fulfilled is difficult to imagine. There is a parallel in Rev 14:4 that refers to the 144,000 following the Lamb wherever he goes, utilizing the language of discipleship. The verb περιπατεῖν is frequently used in the NT with the meaning ‘behave,’ and occasionally one finds the parallel expression περιπατεῖν ἀξίως, ‘to behave worthily,’ e.g., 1 Thess 2:12: περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ, ‘to behave in a manner worthy of God’ (see Col 1:10; Eph 4:1; Pol. Phil. 5:1). Elsewhere in Revelation the notion of ‘worthiness’ is attributed only to God or Christ. Normally the adjective ἄξιος is used in Revelation only of God or Christ, but in other early Christian literature ἄξιος and cognates occur more frequently, particularly in Ignatius (e.g., Eph. 4:1; Magn. 2:1; 12:1). Further, περιπατεῖν can be used as a synonym for ‘discipleship,’ as in John 8:12: ‘the one who follows [ἀκολουθῶν] me will not walk [περιπατήσει] in darkness but will have the light of life’ (see John 12:35; 1 John 1:6–7; 2:6, 11). The language of Rev 3:4 is very possibly influenced by Gen 5:22 and 6:9 (both P Document) where it is said of both Enoch and Noah that they ‘walked with God’ (which the LXX renders weakly by ‘pleased God,’ using the verb εὐαρεστέω), which similarly appears to mean that they enjoyed an unmediated relationship to God. Similarly, Abraham is commanded to ‘walk before’ God (Gen 17:1).” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a, Revelation 1-5, p. 223].

other victory promises, Ὁ νικῶν refers to salvation as reflected in consistent commitment to Christ lived out in daily life. The term ἱματίοις λευκοῖς, *white garments*, can signify a range of ideas connected to purity and acceptableness.²³ Here the image centers on being granted eternal life with God.

The second promise is καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς, *and I will not blot your name out of the book of life*. In the background here is both the Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions of a ‘citizen registry’ maintained in both cultures.²⁴ In the an-

²³“White garments symbolize a range of positive meanings that center on the concept of ritual and moral purity (see *Hermas Vis.* 4.3.5). Heavenly messengers are frequently described as wearing white garments (2 Macc 11:8; Matt 28:3 = Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; Rev 4:4; 19:14; *Hermas Vis.* 4.2.1; T. Levi 8:2; Lucian *Philops.* 25), and in Dan 7:9; 1 Enoch 14:20, God is described as wearing white (just as deities in the Greco-Roman world were thought to wear white). Priests in the ancient world often wore white (Exod 28:4; Lev 16:4; Jos. Ant. 11.327, 331; 20.216–18; J. W. 2.123, 137 [Essenes habitually wore white; see Hippolytus Ref. 9.19]; Lucian *Alex.* 11; Ps.-Lucian *De dea Syria* 42), as did worshippers who participated in sacrifices and processions (Acts John 38). By the first century a.d., the dead were buried in white in Judaism (see Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie* 1:550 n. 212; Ps.-Philo Bib. Ant. 64.6), a practice found in the Greco-Roman world (Plutarch *Quaest. Rom.* 26.270D–F), and perhaps based on this custom the notion developed that white garments will be awarded to the righteous after judgment as a heavenly reward (b. Šabb. 114a; Rev 6:11; 7:9, 13; *Hermas Sim.* 8.2.3; see Lucian *Peregr.* 40 [Peregrinus is seen wearing white garments after his suicide]). The term ‘garment’ was used as a metaphor for the physical body (2 Cor 5:2–4; Asc. Isa. 10.35), often implied with the use of ‘put off’ and ‘put on’ language (Col 2:11; 2 Pet 1:14; 4 Ezra 2:45) and perhaps by extension as a metaphor for a heavenly reward (Rev 3:4, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13; Asc. Isa. 8.14–15; 9.24–26; 10.40) and a symbol of salvation or immortality (Acts of Paul 38; Apoc. Thom. [NTA 2:802], which speaks of the garment of eternal life, i.e., the garment that is eternal life; 5 Ezra 2:39; Dial. Sav. 143.11–15). In the story of the Transfiguration, Jesus’ garments suddenly become bright white (Mark 9:2 = Matt 17:2 = Luke 9:29).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 223].

²⁴“This may be an allusion to Exod 32:32 (where Moses intercedes for Israel): ‘But now if you will forgive their sin—and if not, blot me out of the book which you have written.’ The motif of a Book of Life in which the names of the saved are written and the motif of the erasure of a person’s name from such a Book are extremely widespread in the OT and early Judaism, sometimes used together and sometimes separately. The possibility of having one’s name erased from the Book of Life suggests that fidelity to God rather than any type of predestinarian system is the reason for having one’s name inscribed in the Book of Life in the first place (see Rev 17:8). The traditional character of this pronouncement in Rev 3:5 is evident in the close parallel to vv 5a and 5b in Odes Sol. 9:11, where the two motifs of conquering and of having one’s name inscribed in a heavenly book are combined in a positive formulation (tr. Charlesworth, OTP): ‘Put on the crown in the true covenant of the Lord, And all those who have conquered will be inscribed in His book.’ In Judaism and early Christianity, the primary setting of the Book of Life motif was the judgment scene in which God is seated upon his throne surrounded by heavenly courtiers

in the literature.²⁵ In Rev. 20:12, the Books of Deeds and the Book of Life²⁶ are distinguished from one another. The promise of Christ here is that there is no possible way that He will remove Ὁ νικῶν from this book of life.

The third promise to Ὁ νικῶν is καὶ ὁμολογήσω (Dan 7:9–10; Rev 20:12–15; 1 Enoch 47:3; 90:20). The origin of this metaphor is certainly that of the ancient Near Eastern royal court, where records were made available to the king for dispensing justice (Ezra 4:15; Esth 6:1), though the idea itself goes back to Sumerian and Akkadian literature (Paul, JANESCU 5 [1973] 345–53).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 224].

²⁵“There is a small ‘library’ of at least three types of heavenly books referred to in the OT and in early Jewish and early Christian literature:

“(1) The Book of Life functioned as a heavenly record of those who were considered righteous or worthy (1 Enoch 108:3; Jub. 30:22; T. Jacob 7:27–28; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27; 1 Clem 53:4 [quotation of Exod 32:32]; *Hermas Vis.* 1.3.2; Man. 8.6; Sim. 2.9; Apoc. Pet. 17 [Hennecke-Schneemelcher, NTA 2:683]; Clementine Hom. 9.22; Gos. Truth 21.3–5; Koep, *Himmliche Buch*, 68–89; H. Balz, “βιβλίον,” EWNT 1:512–24).

“(2) The Book of Deeds serves as a record of the good and bad deeds a person had performed (1 Enoch 89:61–64; 90:17; 104:7; 108:7; 2 Enoch 19:3–5 [Rec. J and A]; 53:2 [Rec. J and A]; Jub. 5:12–13; 23:30–32; 30:20–23; 32:21–22; Asc. Isa. 9.21–23; see Koep, *Himmliche Buch*, 46–68). In Judaism this is often conceived of as two books, one for the deeds of the righteous and the other for the deeds of the wicked (Jub. 30:22; 36:10; b. Ta’an 11a; Lev. Rab. 26 [on 21:1]; Gen. Rab. 81 [on 35:1]).

“(3) The Book of Destiny, or the ‘heavenly tablets,’ records the history of the world (4Q180= 4QAgnes of Creation frag. 1, line 3) and/or the destinies of people before they are born (Ps 56:8; 139:16; Jub. 5:12–19; 16:9; 23:32; 1 Enoch 81:2; 93:1–3; 106:19; 107:1; 2 Enoch 22:12 [Rec J and A]; 53:2 [Rec. J]; T. Asher 2:10; 7:5; T. Levi 5:4; see the Prayer of Joseph [Origen Comm in Gen.; PG XII.73B]: ‘I have read in the heavenly tablets everything that will come to pass upon you and your sons’; 4Q537= 4QApocryphon of Jacob frag. 1, lines 3–4 [tr. García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 265]: ‘[And I took the tablets and read. There were written all my privations] and all my troubles and all that was to happen to me.’). Access to this book signifies a knowledge of hidden teaching or future events (*Hermas Vis.* 1.3.3–4; Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 6.38).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 225].

²⁶“The motif of having one’s name erased from, or blotted out of, the Book of Life is a metaphor for judgment (Exod 32:32–33; Ps 69:27–28; 1 Enoch 108:3; Jub. 30:22), based on the notion of expulsion or disenfranchisement from the record of citizenship. Originally, however, to be blotted out of the Book of Life meant ‘to die’ (Exod 32:32–33; Ps 69:27–28; Isa 4:3). The phrase ‘Book of Life’ occurs six times in Revelation in two forms: (1) ἡ βιβλος τῆς ζωῆς, ‘the book of life,’ occurs twice in Revelation (3:5; 20:15 [var. lect. τὸ βιβλίον Byzantine]), and (2) a synonymous phrase, τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς, ‘the book of life,’ using the faded diminutive τὸ βιβλίον, is found four times in Revelation (13:8 [var. lect. βιβλος; see Notes on 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27 [var. lect. ἡ βιβλος fam 16112050 Andreas h-2302 Andreas 1]). The textual evidence suggests that the author used both forms interchangeably (for the special problems in Rev 10, see Notes on 10:2, 8, 9, 10).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 225].

τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. This is the only use of ὁμολογήσω in Revelation, and it reflects an earlier Jesus tradition found in Luke 12:8 and Matthew 10:32.

Luke 12:8-9. 8 Λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν, πᾶς ὃς ἂν ὁμολογήσῃ ἐν ἔμοι ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, **καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁμολογήσει ἐν αὐτῷ ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ θεοῦ.** 9 ὁ δὲ ἀρνησάμενός με ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρνηθήσεται ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ θεοῦ.

8 “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, **the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God;** 9 but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.

Matthew 10:32-33. 32 Πᾶς οὖν ὅστις ὁμολογήσῃ ἐν ἔμοι ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, **ὁμολογήσω καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν [τοῖς] οὐρανοῖς.** 33 ὅστις δ’ ἂν ἀρνήσῃται με ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀρνήσομαι καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν [τοῖς] οὐρανοῖς.

32 “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, **I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven;** 33 but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Clearly John feels the liberty to reshape the tradition for his own purposes, but does draw from that teaching of Jesus.

The eschatological nature of this confession by Christ is obvious from the context. In final judgment, Ὁ νικῶν will be clothed with white garments, affirmed to have his name in the Book of Life, and be confessed to the Heavenly Father. All of these stand as assurances of eternal life.

Hearing Command: Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Thus the message ends in the typical manner of the others. Every person in all of the seven churches needs to hear and heed what the Holy Spirit is trying to say through this message to the church at Sardis.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

Is there a lesson for us today in this message? Clearly the answer is yes. Christ controls the life and destiny of every congregation. He stands between us and the ministry of the Holy Spirit enabling the Spirit's presence and ministry to His churches.

We need to be extremely cautious in measuring spiritual life in our church. We can have a reputation of being a really dynamic congregation in the eyes of other Christians, and even non Christians. But, at the same time we face the danger of being spiritually dead in Christ's eyes. Measuring instruments such as emotional excitement about church, attendance numbers etc. don't really reveal anything about genuine spirituality in the congregation. What reflects the positive sit-

uation that Christ sees comes from fidelity to our initial commitment of surrender to Christ. Only a life lived out daily in surrender to Christ matters ultimately.

We face serious repercussions from Christ when we drift from this unconditional surrender to Him. He promises to come against us like a thief with no warning. No congregation wants Christ to ‘come against it’ for such action spells trouble and not blessing.

To Ὁ νικῶν comes the threefold eschatological promise of eternal life described as being dressed in white robes, having one's name affirmed in the Book of Life, and being publicly confessed by Christ to the Father. Wow! That's some promise! But additionally, comes Christ's promise to walk with us daily as we are already dressed in white now by the quality of our obedience.

Sardis sends us a wonderful message of hope along with a warning to never grow lax in our commitment to our Lord.



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 11

Text: Rev. 3:7-13

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1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἀποστόλου τοῦ ἡσυχαστοῦ ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γένησθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἃ δεῖ γένησθαι καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀρνήσεται. 2 Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἀπέβλεψεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἀποστόλου τοῦ ἡσυχαστοῦ ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀκούσκων καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οἱ ἀκούοντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

QUICK LINKS

1. What the text meant.

Historical Aspects:

External History

Internal History

Literary Aspects:

Genre

Literary Setting

Literary Structure

Exegesis of the Text:

A. Command to write, v. 7a

B. Situation of the church, vv. 7b-11

C. Promise and Admonition, vv. 12-13

2. What the text means.

Message to Philadelphia

Greek NT

7 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυὶδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει·

8 οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλεῖσαι αὐτήν, ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου. 9 ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνώσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε. 10 ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. 11 ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου.

12 Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ

Gute Nachricht Bibel

7 »Schreibe an den Engel der Gemeinde in Philadelphia:

So spricht Er, der heilig ist und Treue hält, Er, der den Schlüssel Davids hat – wo Er öffnet, kann niemand zuschließen, und wo Er zuschließt, kann niemand öffnen –, Er lässt euch sagen:

8 Ich kenne euer Tun. Ich habe euch eine Tür geöffnet, die niemand zuschließen kann. Eure Kraft ist nur klein. Trotzdem habt ihr euch nach meinem Wort gerichtet und das Bekenntnis zu mir nicht widerrufen. 9 Hört zu! Ich werde Menschen zu euch schicken, die zur Synagoge des Satans* gehören. Sie behaupten, dass sie zum Volk Gottes zählen; das stimmt aber nicht, sie lügen. Ich werde dafür sorgen, dass sie sich vor euch niederwerfen und anerkennen, dass ich euch erwählt habe und liebe.

10 Ihr habt mein Wort beherzigt, mit dem ich euch zum Durchhalten aufrief. Darum werde ich euch in der Zeit der Versuchung bewahren, die demnächst über die ganze Erde kommen und alle Menschen auf die Probe stellen wird. 11 Ich komme bald! Haltet fest, was ihr habt, damit euch niemand den Siegesk-

NRSV

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens:

8 I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. 11 I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

12 If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God

NLT

7 Write this letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia.

This is the message from the one who is holy and true. He is the one who has the key of David. He opens doors, and no one can shut them; he shuts doors, and no one can open them.

8 I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can shut. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me. 9 Look! I will force those who belong to Satan -- those liars who say they are Jews but are not -- to come and bow down at your feet. They will acknowledge that you are the ones I love. 10 "Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world. 11 Look, I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown.

12 All who are victorious will become pillars in the Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it.

μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἢ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν. 13 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

ranz* streitig macht!
 12 Alle, die durchhalten und den Sieg erringen, werde ich zu einer Säule im Tempel meines Gottes machen, und sie werden immer darin bleiben. Ich werde den Namen meines Gottes auf sie schreiben und den Namen der Stadt meines Gottes. Diese Stadt ist das neue Jerusalem, das von meinem Gott aus dem Himmel herabkommen wird. Ich werde auch meinen eigenen neuen Namen auf sie schreiben. 13 Wer Ohren hat, soll hören, was der Geist* den Gemeinden sagt!«

out of heaven, and my own new name. 13 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

And I will write my God's name on them, and they will be citizens in the city of my God -- the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God. And they will have my new name inscribed upon them. 13 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches.



INTRODUCTION

This sixth message of the seven continues the same literary pattern and some of the same themes we have seen in the first five messages. The message is the longest of the seven thus far. Several new emphases will also surface in this message. This is the second of two messages where Christ does not criticize problems existing in the church.

The city of Philadelphia¹ had a long history, some of which was filled with disaster and trouble.² Several

¹The name of the city was Φιλαδέλφεια. A resident of the city was called Φιλαδελφεύς. The abstract idea of brotherly love is φιλαδελφία, with the adjective form being φιλάδελφος, -ov.

²“Located in ancient Lydia, in the W of what is today Asiatic Turkey, Philadelphia was founded by Eumenes II, King of Pergamum (197–159 b.c.) or possibly his brother, Attalus II (159–138 b.c.), whose loyalty had earned for him the epithet ‘Philadelphus,’ hence the city’s name. It is located near the upper end of the very fertile plateau in the Cogamus River (today Koca Çay) valley, a tributary of the Hermus River, E of Sardis and on the route into the interior from Smyrna on the coast (38°22’N; 28°32’E). It is in the midst of a very prosperous agricultural region, though it was (and is) notoriously subject to frequent earthquakes. A severe one in a.d. 17 destroyed the city, and this was followed by a series of intermittent shocks which led the people to continue living outside the city for some years because of the structural instability of many of the city buildings and walls (Strabo, Geog. 12.8.18; 13.4.10; cf. Hemer 1986: 156–57). This disaster made an indelible impact on the contemporary world as the greatest in human history (Pliny HN 2.86.200). The nearby city of Sardis was equally badly hurt (Tacitus Ann. 2.47.3–4), but Philadelphia was among the cities whose tribute was remitted for five years to allow the people to have the resources to rebuild. Hemer (1986: 157) finds an historical allusion to this situation in the promise of Rev 3:12a: ‘He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it ...’ The citizens of Philadelphia subsequently expressed warm gratitude on inscriptions and coins to the emperor Tiberius for his assistance in the process of rebuilding their city, and they later took the name ‘Neocaesarea.’ Still later, under Vespasian, it took another imperial name, Flavia (BMC, 60 and 60 of Vespasian; 62 of Domitian). Hemer suggests that this adoption of the name of the divine emperor is referenced and contrasted with the offer of



of these aspects most likely stand behind some statements in the message to the church there. The establishment of the Christian community is not known with certainty, but probably traces back to Paul’s lengthy Ephesian ministry in the early 50s on the third missionary journey. The subsequent Christian history of the church is referenced by several events and personal-

a better and more lasting name in Rev 3:12b: ‘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 my God out of heaven.’” [The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary, 5:30]

ities beginning in the second century AD.³ Mostly it is the history of martyrs being executed for their Christian faith in the city. The spiritual leader of Antioch in Syria, Ignatius (98 - 117 AD) wrote a letter to the church at Philadelphia within two decades of the writing of the book of Revelation.⁴ The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (150-160 AD) in 19:1 mentions Christians from Philadelphia suffering martyrdom in Smyrna along with Polycarp from Smyrna, around 155 AD.⁵ Some are also convinced that the Christian teaching of Montanism had its origin at Philadelphia in the middle of the second century, but this is not clear from the available data.

We can learn from Christ's words to this ancient congregation, as well as from the example that He commends in the life of the church there.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

This natural beginning point raises some questions from both the historical and the literary aspects that need answering if we are to gain the fuller under-

³Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch on the Orontes, visited the city on his way to his martyrdom in Rome (a.d. 107) and also sent a letter from Troas to the church at Philadelphia. Some of the members of the church of this city were martyred ca. a.d. 155 along with Polycarp (Mart. Polyc. 1). Philadelphia was a center of prophecy in the post-apostolic age, a place where Christians tended to be fearless and aggressive in their witness for the faith, and possibly the birthplace of Montanism (Calder 1923: 309-54; cf. Hemer 1986: 170-74). Today, the Hellenistic and Roman remains are located underneath the modern Turkish town of Alaşehir. There is an ancient acropolis with a few minor excavations, an ancient church (with traces of 11th century frescoes), and a rather extensive portion of the city wall from Byzantine times. Finds from Philadelphia are located in the Manisa museum, some distance away." [*The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:30]

⁴In the online English translations of Ignatius' *Letter to the Philadelphians*, the much later fully developed hierarchical ecclesiology is assumed in the translations which is not mandated by the Greek text. If one ignores this eisogizing of the Greek original by translation, the letter does contain helpful insights into the emerging perspectives on Christianity in the decades following the writing of Revelation. To be sure, a developing centralized ecclesiology at the local church level is reflected in the writings of the apostolic fathers. But it is an extension of the model found in Acts 15 where James serves as the leader of the πρεσβύτεροι who are leaders of the many house church groups scattered across Jerusalem. By Ignatius, the concept of πρεσβύτεροι is being sub-grouped into the ἐπίσκοπος as the local leader with the rest of the πρεσβύτεροι divided into πρεσβύτεροι and διάκονοι. Ignatius focuses his words on loyalty to the ἐπίσκοπος by the members of the various house church groups at Philadelphia. Nothing is spelled out about the distinction of responsibilities between the πρεσβύτεροι and διάκονοι.

⁵MP 19:1. Such were the things that happened to the blessed Polycarp, who together with those from Philadelphia was the twelfth who suffered martyrdom in Smyrna; but he alone is held in memory by all, so that he is spoken of in every place even by the Gentiles; not only being a distinguished teacher, but also an eminent martyr, whose testimony we desire to imitate, since it happened according to the Gospel of Christ.

standing of the biblical text. The issues treated here set a backdrop for grasping what Christ is seeking to say through this text.

Historical Aspects:

External History. In the history of the hand copying of this text across the centuries after it was first composed, some variations of wording surface in the existing manuscript copies. But in the text apparatus of the UBS Greek New Testament (4th rev. ed.) none were considered to be of sufficient importance to impact the translation of the passage. Thus no variations are listed for 3:7-13.

In the more complete listing system of the Novum Testamentum Graece (27th rev. ed), some 24 places where variation occur are listed in their text apparatus.⁶ But careful ex-



⁶Offenbarung 3,7

* 3 4 1 2 κ A (different sequencing of ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός shows up in various manuscripts)

| 1 2 2050
| ο ἀγγελος ἀληθ. 2351
| txt C M latt sy co

* του Δ. κ M; Or (the article τοῦ is added before Δαβίδ)
| του αδου 2050 pc

| txt A C 1611. 1854. 2053. 2329 pc

* κλειει 1611. 1854. 2053 M^A latt; Prim (variations with κλείσει are found in some manuscripts)

| κλεισει αυτην ει μη ο ανοιγων 046. 1006. 1841 M^K
| κλεισει αυτην 2351
| txt κ A C P 2050. 2329 al co; Ir^{lat} Or Tyc

* A pc vg^{wv} sa^{mss}; Ir^{lat} Tyc Apr (καὶ is omitted after κλείσει)

*1 κλειει C^{*vid} pc lat (κλειών is replaced by one of the following two spellings)

| κλεισει Ir^{lat}

*2 ανοιξει κ 046. 1006. 1841. 2050. 2329. 2344 M^K co; Ir^{lat} Or (ἀνοίγει is replaced by one of two variations)

| ανοιγη ει μη ο ανοιγων και ουδεις ανοιξει 2351
| txt A C 1611. 1854. 2053 M^A latt

Offenbarung 3,8

* και 1611 pc (ἦν is replaced with και)

* κ 1006c pc (αὐτήν is omitted)

* εχει 1 pc sy^{hmg} (ἔχεις is replaced by ἔχει)

Offenbarung 3,9

* διδομι M (διδῶ is replaced with either δίδωμι or δέδωκα)

| δεδωκα κ sa
| txt A C

* και M^A ar (ἰδοῦ is replaced with και)

*1 bis -ωσιν 046. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2344. 2351 pm (ἤξουσιν is replaced with ἤξωσιν; the same for προσκυνήσουσιν)

| txt κ A C P 1006. 2050. (2053). 2329 pm

*2 γνωση κ 69. (2351) pc sa; Prim (γνώσιν is replaced by either γνώση, γνώσονται, or γνώσωσιν)

amination of these variations reveals the correctness of the UBS editors' evaluation that none of them significantly alters the way the text should be translated.

Thus we can exegete the adopted reading of the text in the full confidence that it represents the original wording of the text.

Internal History. The internal place and time markers in the text mostly relate to exegetical concerns more than background concerns. But more needs to be said about the city of Philadelphia.

Most of the ruins of the ancient city remain hidden today underneath the modern Turkish city of Alaşehir. The history of the city prior to the writing of Revelation is a mixture between economic development largely of grape vineyards built on volcanic ash fields and frequent earthquakes coming out of the same situation.⁷ A severe earthquake destroyed the



city in 17 AD but was gradually rebuilt with the help of the Romans.⁸ Thus the citizens of the city lived with uncertainty about the future. Interestingly, this uncertainty cut through the economic heart of the region in 92 AD when emperor Domitian issued an edict banning the planting of new vineyards and calling for the destruction of half of the existing ones because of the desire to protect the wine producers of Italy.⁹

Literary Aspects:

Genre: As has been noted in the previous five messages in chapters two and three, the literary form of the passage centers on the inclusive pattern of an imperial edict issued by the King of Kings. Not an ancient letter, but instead a written decree laying down authoritative demands from Christ that take precedence over any edict coming out of the imperial capital of Rome. The positive tone of commendation of the

phia.]
⁸“A severe one in a.d. 17 destroyed the city, and this was followed by a series of intermittent shocks which led the people to continue living outside the city for some years because of the structural instability of many of the city buildings and walls (Strabo, Geog. 12.8.18; 13.4.10; cf. Hemer 1986: 156–57). This disaster made an indelible impact on the contemporary world as the greatest in human history (Pliny HN 2.86.200). The nearby city of Sardis was equally badly hurt (Tacitus *Ann.* 2.47.3–4), but Philadelphia was among the cities whose tribute was remitted for five years to allow the people to have the resources to rebuild. Hemer (1986: 157) finds an historical allusion to this situation in the promise of Rev 3:12a: ‘He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it ...’ The citizens of Philadelphia subsequently expressed warm gratitude on inscriptions and coins to the emperor Tiberius for his assistance in the process of rebuilding their city, and they later took the name ‘Neocaesarea.’ Still later, under Vespasian, it took another imperial name, Flavia (BMC, 60 and 60 of Vespasian; 62 of Domitian). Hemer suggests that this adoption of the name of the divine emperor is referenced and contrasted with the offer of a better and more lasting name in Rev 3:12b: ‘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 my God out of heaven.’ [*The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:30]

⁹“Another negative event that burned itself upon the collective memory of the people of Philadelphia was an edict from the emperor Domitian in a.d. 92 (practically contemporary with the probable date of the Apocalypse). In the interest of protecting the vine growers of Italy (or perhaps to encourage the production of grain at the expense of grapes), Domitian required at least half the vineyards in the provinces to be cut down and no new ones planted (Suet. *Dom.* 7, 2; 14.2; Philostr. VA 6.42; VS 1.21). As can be imagined, this edict was bitterly unpopular in Asia and the source of severe hardship in a city like Philadelphia, which was so dependent on viticulture (cf. Rev 6:6) and where Dionysius was the chief deity. Thus the contrast between the character of Christ, who will never betray his people who have continued to confess his name even when they are weak and rejected (Rev 3:8, 10, 11), and that of the imperial god who had disappointed them so severely.” [*The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:30]

|-σονται 2050 pc
 |-σωσιν 1006
 * 1006. 1841. 2351 *M^K* vg^{ms}; Prim (ἐγὼ omitted)
Offenbarung 3,10
 * και A (2020 pc, 2344) (ὅτι is replaced by και)
 * κ sa^{ms} (τηρήσω is omitted in some mss)
Offenbarung 3,11
 * ιδου 2014 pc ar vgcl; Tyc Apr (ιδου is inserted before ἔρχομαι)
Offenbarung 3,12
 * αυτω κ* 1611. 1854. 2351 pc (αὐτὸν is replaced with αὐτῷ)
 * κ* (ἐν is omitted)
 *¹ 385 pc syph; Vic (μου is omitted)
 *² κ (ἔτι is omitted)
 * της -νουσης κ²; Tyc (ἡ καταβαίνουσα is replaced with either τῆς καταβαινούσης or ἡ καταβαίνει)
 | ἡ -νει 1006. 1841^{vid} *M^K*
 * απο 1006. 1841^{vid} *M^K* (ἐκ is replaced with ἀπὸ)
 *³ 1006. 1841. 1854. 2053 *M^K* bo^{ms} (μου is omitted)

Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 638.

⁷“PHILADELPHIA was a city of Lydia, 28 miles from Sardis, in the valley of the Cogamis, a tributary of the Hermus, and conveniently situated for receiving the trade between the great central plateau of Asia Minor and Smyrna. The district known as Katakekaumene (‘Burnt Region’), because of its volcanic character, rises immediately to the N.E. of Philadelphia, and this was a great vine-producing region.

“Philadelphia was founded and named by Attalus Philadelphus of Pergamus before b.c. 138. It was liable to serious earthquakes, but remained an important centre of the Roman province of Asia, receiving the name of Neo-Cæsarea from Tiberius, and, later on, the honour of the Neocorate (i.e. the wardenship of the temple for Emperor-worship).”

[James Hastings, ed., *Dictionary of the Bible*, S.V., “Philadel-

church in Philadelphia provides opportunity for some elaboration of details not found in the other messages.

The sub-genre elements found in the other messages also surface here as well. These include:

1) **Adscriptio** (v. 7a): Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδέλφειᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον.

2) **Τάδε λέγει** with title (v. 7b): Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυὶδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει.

3) **οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα** (v. 8a) introducing the *Narratio* (vv. 8-9) and the *Dispositio* (vv. 10-11).

4) **Victory promise** (v. 12): Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.

5) **Hearing Admonition** (v. 13): Ὁ ἔχων οὖς

103 ^{3.7} **to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:**

104 **These things says the Holy One,**
the True One
the One possessing the keys of David
the One who opens and no one shuts
and
who closes and no one opens,

105 ^{3.8} **I know your works,**

Indeed,
106 **I have put a door before you,**
open
which no one can close
because you have some power
and
you have kept my word
and
you have not denied My name.

^{3.9} Indeed
107 **I will make. . . of those calling themselves Jews**
from the synagogue of Satan

and
108 **they are not**
but
109 **they are lying.**

Indeed,
110 **I will make them**
that they come
and
they bow down
before your feet
and
they will know
that I have loved you.

ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

The one missing element found in most of the other messages is the ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ... criticism of the church with allegations of failure at some point of commitment. Only the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia contain just commendation and encouragement.

Literary Setting: As has been the case consistently the sequential listing of this message as the sixth decree is not due to theological concerns. Rather, it is born of geography where Philadelphia would have come sixth in a circuit trip beginning with Ephesus and traveling northward and then southward with the return to Ephesus from Laodicea, the final city on the circuit.

Literary Structure: As is made clearer visually by the block diagram below, the internal arrangement of core ideas within the passage highlight the organizing sub-genre elements described above in the **Genre** section.

3.10 Because you have kept my word of patient endurance
111 I also will keep you
 from the hour of testing
 that is going to come
 upon all the inhabitants
 to test those dwelling
 upon the earth.

3.11 **112 I am coming quickly;**
113 strengthen
 what you have
 so that no one may take your crown.

3.12 The one overcoming
114 I will make him a pillar
 in the temple of My God
 and
115 he will never ever leave it
 and
116 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

3:13 The one having an ear
117 let him hear
 what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Rhetorical Analysis of Structure

The above diagram highlights the literary forms contained in this passage in the following breakdown.

Adscriptio: # 103

Τάδε λέγει with title: # 104

οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα: # 105

Narratio: #s 106-110

Dispositio: #s 111-113

Victory Promise: #s 114-116

Hearing Admonition: # 117

These segments follow the nature thought flow in the text.

Exegesis of the Text:

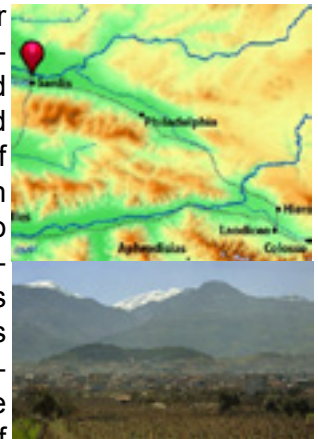
The above literary structure thus serves as the organizing outline for the exegesis of the passage below.

A. Command to write, v. 7a

7 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·
 7 **And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:**

As has been the case in all of the previous letters the command to John is to direct the message to the “angel of the church.” This apocalyptic image symbolizes the historical congregation in the ancient Asian city of Philadelphia. The image of ἄγγελος highlights

the role of divine messenger for the church in the proclamation of the Gospel to the world around the church. Located some thirty miles southeast of Sardis, the city was situated on the main road leading east into Phrygia. The god of wine, Dionysus, Διόνυσος (= Bacchus in the Roman tradition), was one of the primary Greek deities worshiped in the city, due to the substantial production of wine in the region. Located in the Roman administrative district of Sardis, a part of the province of Asia, the city enjoyed commercial prosperity and trade success during this period of time.



B. Situation of the church, vv. 7b-11

7b Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυῖδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει· 8 οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλεῖσαι αὐτήν, ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου. 9 ἰδοὺ

διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεῦδοι. Ἴδου ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε. 10 ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. 11 ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὁ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου.

These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens:

8 I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying — I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. 11 I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

This section of the message contains the standard sub-genre elements, although somewhat expanded in comparison to the other messages.

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυίδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει (v. 7b). The standard *Τάδε λέγει, these things says...*, introduces this section as an official proclamation to the church in Philadelphia. This set formula introduces the material at this same place in the message to each of the seven churches.

The point of variation comes with the identification of the One speaking. Here we find the longest title identification of the speaker in all of the letters. Also it has the least direct ties to the portrait of Christ in chapter one, although some connection does exist.

ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, *the Holy One, the True One*. These two Greek adjectives are here used as nouns and as formal titles -- something very uncommon for the New Testament.¹⁰ Only in 6:10 are these two adjectives found again in Revelation, and in reference to God: ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, *Sovereign Lord holy and true*. Isaiah 65:16 stands in the background of the 6:10 reference.¹¹ Inside the NT generally these two

¹⁰For this reason several variant readings of the text surface here:

Variants: (1) ὁ ἅλιος, ὁ ἀληθινός] C Andreas Byzantine latt syr cop Eriphanus. (2) ὁ ἀληθινός ὁ ἅγιος,] κ A. (3) ὁ ἅγιος] fam 1611²⁰⁵⁰ Oecumenius²⁰⁵³. (4) ὁ ἄγγελος ἀληθινός] 2351. [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 229]

¹¹**Isa. 65:16.** Then whoever invokes a blessing in the land shall bless by *the God of faithfulness*, and whoever takes an oath in the land shall swear by *the God of faithfulness*; because the former

terms are not commonly used in reference to Christ.¹² Perhaps part of the incentive for using these two terms as titles came from the use of ἅγιος in reference to the Roman emperor. The second term ἀληθινός in the sense of trustworthy may very well come out of the gouging of the people of Philadelphia by the emperor Domitian in 92 AD in regard to the wine production in the region. In contrast to his lack to consistent action and untrustworthiness toward the city stands Christ as the very epitome of these virtues.

ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυίδ, *the One possessing the key of David*. Quite clearly this depends on Isaiah 22:22.¹³

troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my sight.

ὁ εὐλογηθήσεται ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· εὐλογήσουσιν γὰρ τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἀληθινόν, καὶ οἱ ὀμνούντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὀμνούνται τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἀληθινόν· ἐπιλήσονται γὰρ τὴν θλίψιν αὐτῶν τὴν πρώτην, καὶ οὐκ ἀναθήσεται αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὴν καρδίαν.

¹²“The phrase ‘holy and true’ is used elsewhere in Revelation only once in an imprecatory prayer addressed to God in 6:10 in an asyndetic form ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ‘the holy, the true,’ though the terms are not used together elsewhere in early Jewish or early Christian literature as titles or attributes of God (on the separate occurrence of these two titles as attributes of God, see Comment on 6:10). The substantivized adjective ἅγιος, ‘holy,’ is only used occasionally of Jesus (Mark 1:24 = Luke 4:34 John 6:69; Acts 3:14; 4:27, 30; 1 Clem 23:5 [allusions to LXX Isa 13:22 and Mal 3:1 in which ἅγιος is substituted for ἄγγελος]; Diogn. 9.2; Justin Dial. 116.1; Clement of Alex. Paed. 1.7; cf. Luke 1:35; 1 John 2:20). The term ‘holy’ was an epithet used in the cult of the Roman emperor (Sauter, *Kaiserkult*, 105–16). The adjectives ἀληθινός and ἀληθής are only occasionally used of Jesus (Mark 12:14 = Matt 22:16; John 7:18), and in Rev 19:11 ἀληθινός is used as the name of the alder on the white horse.” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 236]

¹³**Isa. 22:20–25.** 20 On that day I will call my servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah, 21 and will clothe him with your robe and bind your sash on him. I will commit your authority to his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 *I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open.* 23 I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his ancestral house. 24 And they will hang on him the whole weight of his ancestral house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons. 25 On that day, says the Lord of hosts, the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way; it will be cut down and fall, and the load that was on it will perish, for the Lord has spoken.

20 καὶ ἔσται ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ καλέσω τὸν παῖδά μου Ελιακίμ τὸν τοῦ Χελκίου† 21 καὶ ἐνδύσω αὐτὸν τὴν στολὴν σου καὶ τὸν στέφανόν σου δώσω αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ κράτος καὶ τὴν οἰκονομίαν σου δώσω εἰς τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσται ὡς πατὴρ τοῖς ἐνοικοῦσιν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ τοῖς ἐνοικοῦσιν ἐν Ἰουδα.† 22 *καὶ δώσω τὴν δόξαν Δαυὶδ αὐτῷ, καὶ ἄρξει, καὶ οὐκ ἔσται ὁ ἀντιλέγων.*† 23 καὶ στήσω αὐτὸν ἄρχοντα ἐν τόπῳ πιστῷ, καὶ ἔσται εἰς θρόνον δόξης τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ.† 24 καὶ ἔσται πεποιθὸς ἐπ’ αὐτὸν πᾶς ἐνδοξος ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ μικροῦ ἕως μεγάλου καὶ ἔσονται ἐπικρεμάμενοι αὐτῷ.† 25 ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ — τάδε λέγει κύριος σαβαωθ — κινηθήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἐστηριγμένος ἐν τόπῳ πιστῷ καὶ πεσεῖται, καὶ ἀφαιρεθήσεται ἡ δόξα ἡ ἐπ’ αὐτὸν, ὅτι κύριος ἐλάλησεν.†

Additionally it reaches back to Rev. 1:18c, *καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου*, and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. This is a symbol of authority and power granted to the holder by God.¹⁴ Thus in His ascension to Heaven Christ has been granted the highest authority of Heaven.¹⁵

ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει.¹⁶ This modifying participle phrase merely am-

¹⁴“The reference to the key of David is a clear allusion to Isa 22:22: ‘And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open.’ In the context of Isa 22:22, the key, the robe, and the sash (v 21) are symbols of the authority and power of the royal vizier or steward, in this case of Eliashib, who will take the place of the disgraced and exiled Shebna (vv 15–20; see 2 Kgs 18:18 = Isa 36:3). Tg. Isa. 22:22 (Chilton, Isaiah Tatum 44–45) expands on the promise to Eliakim: ‘And I will place the key of the sanctuary and the authority of the house of David in his hand; and he will open, and none shall shut; and he will shut, and none shall open.’ However, this promise is reversed in Tg. Isa. 22:25. Chilton argues that the promise to Eliakim was understood as permanent in an earlier form of the targumic tradition, much like the formulation in Rev 3:7; Matt 16:19 (B. Chilton, ‘Shebna, Eliakim, and the Promise to Peter,’ in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism*, ed. J. Neusner et al. [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988] 322–24). This does not mean the key to the heavenly kingdom, as in Matt 16:19 (contra Hadorn, 60; Bousset [1906] 226). Matt 16:19 also alludes to Isa 22:22 (J. A. Emerton, ‘Binding and Loosing—Forgiving and Retaining,’ *JTS* 13 [1962] 325–31). The indeclinable Δαυὶδ is an objective genitive, and the phrase refers to the key to the Davidic or messianic kingdom, i.e., to the true Israel (Horst, Proskynein, 254). A relatively close parallel is found in a Coptic magical exorcism (Kropp, *Koptische Zaubertexte* 2:151–52); ‘Davithē with the golden hair, whose eyes are lightning, you are the one in whose hand is the key of deity; when you shut, no one can open again, and when you open, no man can shut again.’ The fact that this papyrus very probably dates from the fifth century a.d. (see V. Stegemann, *Die Gestalt Christi in den koptischen Zaubertexten [Heidelberg: Bilabel, 1934] 19–20) suggests that the author is dependent on Revelation.’ [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a, page 236]*

¹⁵“The point of the quotation is that Jesus holds the power over salvation and judgment. In 1:18 the stress is on his sovereignty over death and judgment, while in 3:7 the emphasis is on his authority over those entering the kingdom. John compares the historical situation of Eliakim in relation to Israel with that of Christ in relation to the church in order to help the readers better understand the position that Christ now holds as head of the true Israel and how this affects them. The quotation could be a polemic against the local synagogue, which claimed that only those worshipping within their doors could be considered God’s true people and which may even have excommunicated Christian Jews.¹⁹² In this respect, the Targumic paraphrase of Isa. 22:22 rendered the quotation even more appropriately to the situation of the church: ‘I will place the key of the sanctuary and the authority of the house of David in his hand.’ Ethnic Israel, which was claiming to be the divine agent wielding the power of salvation and judgment, no longer held this position. Christ’s followers could be assured that the doors to the true synagogue were open to them, whereas the doors remained closed to those who rejected Christ.¹⁹³” [The New International Greek Testament Commentary, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 285]

¹⁶“Some find ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει ... unusual and

plifies the exclusive authority granted to the key holder. He alone possesses authority to open and close the door of access to the king. It was added in all likelihood because of its inclusion in a similar construction in the Isa. 22:22 text from which this idea is taken.

The strong emphasis on Christ’s authority being both sacred and dependable very possibility comes out of the context of Domitian proving himself to not do what is right by the Philadelphians with his decree against wine production in the region. This came around the time of the writing of Revelation, if not just before, and caused substantial economic hardship on the region. The Roman emperor had proven himself to be just the opposite of Christ, the true King of Kings. The believers should look to Christ for the right kind of leadership in their lives.

Narratio:

οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα (v. 8a), I know your actions. Found in all of the messages (e.g., 2:2, 3, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15), the οἶδά statements affirm Christ’s supernatural knowledge of the details of the situation that believers were facing in Philadelphia. This kind of beyond human understanding is emphasized in the fourth gospel about Jesus as well: Jhn. 1:47–48; 2:25; 4:16–19; 6:61, 64; 18:4; 21:17.

The direct object σου τὰ ἔργα, your deeds, covers both actions of Christian service and ethical behavior as well. It is all encompassing in its reference.

ἰδοὺ δέδωκα¹⁷ ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλείσαι αὐτήν (v. 8b), indeed I have placed before you an open door which no one is able to shut. The image of an ‘open door’ inside the NT reflects two distinctly different meanings: 1) opportunity for evangelization and 2) entrance into eschatological salvation.¹⁸

classify it as a Semitism, but sentences in which finite verbs follow participles occur elsewhere in Revelation (e.g., see on 1:5; 3:9), the NT, and classical writings.¹⁹⁵ Here the construction may due to the fact that the LXX (B) of Isa. 22:22 has finite verbs followed by periphrastic futures composed of forms of εἶμι (‘be’) followed by participles.” [The New International Greek Testament Commentary, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 285]

¹⁷“In the LXX, διδόναι is often used as a synonym of τιθέναι, since Heb. נתן *nātan* can mean both ‘to give’ and ‘to place, set’ (Thackeray, Grammar, 39; Robertson, Grammar, 95; Black, Aramaic Approach, 132–33; id., ‘Some Greek Words,’ 145–46). According to Louw-Nida, § 85.32 (τίθημι) and 85.33 (δίδωμι) belong to the same semantic subdomain.” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a, page 230]

¹⁸“There are essentially two possible meanings: (1) opportunities for effective evangelization (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12; Col 4:3; see Ramsay, Letters, 404; Charles, 1:87), especially the conversion of the Jews; see v 9 (Caird, 51); (2) guaranteed access to eschatological salvation (see Luke 13:24), i.e., entrance into the messianic kingdom, i.e., the New Jerusalem; see Isa 26:2 interpreted eschatologically (Beckwith, 480; Bousset [1906] 227; Lohmeyer, 35; Page 235

Clearly as an extension of the οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα and also of ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυὶδ, the second meaning is the preferred one here.¹⁹ This is further signaled by the perfect tense verb δέδωκα. The door as a symbol of access to God through Christ is ἡνεωγμένην, open. Christ has opened up access to God and as the relative clause ἦν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλείσαι αὐτήν affirms, absolutely no one can close off this access to Almighty God.

ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου (v. 8c), **because you have limited strength and have not denied my name.** This ὅτι clause provides the basis of the οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, **I know your actions, core statement.**²⁰ The first

Kraft, 81; Lohse, 33; Roloff, 61). The metaphor of the ‘open door’ is found twice in the undisputed letters of Paul (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12) and also occurs in Col 4:3; Acts 14:27 (on the metaphorical use of θύρα in early Christian literature, see LPGL, 658). In all these contexts (except Acts 14:27), it means that opportunities to proclaim the gospel have been made possible, and for this reason Louw-Nida (§ 71.9) understand ἀνοίγω θύραν as an idiom meaning ‘to make it possible.’ It is therefore probable that the metaphor has a fixed meaning among Christians and refers to opportunities for evangelization (Ramsay, Letters, 404); however, the fact that missionary activity is never mentioned elsewhere in Revelation and also that such an emphasis does not fit the context makes this meaning doubtful. In Acts 14:27 the door is open to the hearers, not the proclaimers. In Barn. 16:9, a person ‘opens the door’ by repenting, a usage with a parallel in John 10:7–9, and with an even closer parallel in Midr. Cant. 5:2. In Isa 45:1, the Lord promises to ‘open doors’ before Cyrus, i.e., to allow him victories in his campaigns of conquest; i.e., he will be able to break down the gates of besieged cities. There are no parallels in early Jewish literature outside the NT within the first century or earlier, which suggests the Hellenistic origin of this figure of speech (Deissmann, *Light*, 303), though the metaphor is used in various ways in later rabbinic literature (Str-B 3:484–85). Epictetus frequently uses the phrase ἢ θύρα ἤνοικται with the meaning ‘I am free to go anywhere’ (e.g., 1.9.20; 3.8.6), but it can also refer to the ultimate freedom to commit suicide (3.13.14; see 3.22.34).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 237]

¹⁹“As a result, he has set before the church an ‘open door’ (3:8). It is unlikely that the expression refers to a missionary opportunity (cf. 2 Cor 2:12); Revelation shows little interest in such matters. More likely is that the expression has to do with access to God. The same expression is used in 4:1, where John, seeing an open door in heaven, is caught up (presumably through that door) into heaven. The other use of ‘door’ in Revelation is in 3:20, where Jesus refers to a door through which he will enter to eat with ‘any one’ who opens it. The church at Philadelphia has little power; hence, Jesus himself has opened the door that enables its members to fellowship with God. Since he has the key of David, no one is able to shut the door (3:7–8).” [*Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, p. 48]

²⁰“This understanding of v 8 means that the introductory οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα (‘I know your works’) is intentionally interrupted by a parenthetical statement (ἰδοὺ ... [‘behold ...’]) and is picked up again and continued in v 8b with a declarative ὅτι: ‘I know your deeds (behold, I have put before you an open door, which no one can shut), that you have a little power, have kept my word, and have not denied my name.’ This syntactical analysis (so KJV, UBS3) is supported by the use of the same introductory clause οἶδά

main expression, μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν, could imply minimum spiritual strength, but more likely suggests a small Christian community in the city, which itself was not a large city.²¹ The tendency toward frequent earthquakes discouraged much building inside the city.²² Yet their smallness did not lead to neglect by Christ. He gave them the open door to salvation.

The second main clause, καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον, underscores their faithful adherence to the Word of Christ. The concept of ‘keeping the Word’ is found frequently inside the NT, and with some frequency inside Revelation as well. Several Greek expressions get **at the idea, and have a Jewish origin.**²³ **The essential** σου τὰ ἔργα (‘I know your works’) in 3:2, which in 3:15 is directly followed by a statement of the content of the ‘works’ introduced by a declarative ὅτι (‘that’). The same phenomenon is observable in 2:2 and 2:9, though without the ὅτι. Another alternative is to take the first four words of 3:8 (‘I know your works’) as one sentence and the remainder of the verse as a second sentence (so RSV). This would imply that Christ’s giving of ‘an open door’ is the ultimate basis for the church’s works.” [*The New International Greek Testament Commentary, The Book of Revelation*, p. 286]

²¹“This ὅτι clause concludes the sentence begun in v 8ab and provides the reason that the exalted Christ has placed an open door before the Philadelphian Christians. They have limited strength and are not able to open such metaphorical doors with their own resources. This statement suggests that the Christian community was relatively small, and indeed we know from the report of Strabo that the population of Philadelphia itself was relatively small since many chose to live outside the city on farms (12.8.18; 13.4.10).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 237]

²²“In Philadelphia, the city near it, not even the walls are safe, but in a sense are shaken and caused to crack every day. And the inhabitants are continually attentive to the disturbances in the earth and plan all structures with a view to their occurrence.” [Strabo, *Geography*, 12.8.18]

“After the Lydians come the Mysians; and the city Philadelphia, ever subject to earthquakes. Incessantly the walls of the houses are cracked, different parts of the city being thus affected at different times. For this reason few people live in the city, and most of them spend their lives as farmers in the country, since they have a fertile soil. Yet one may be surprised at the few, that they are so fond of the place when their dwellings so insecure; and one might marvel still more at those who founded the city.” [Strabo, *Geography*, 13.4.10]

²³“The phrase τηρεῖν τὸν λόγον, ‘to keep the word,’ is repeated in v 10, and is found with a plural object in 22:7, 9: τηρεῖν τοὺς λόγους (see John 8:51, 52, 55; 14:23, 24; 15:20; 17:6; 1 John 2:5; cf. Luke 11:28: φυλάσσειν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ; 1 Kgdm 15:11). In 1 John 2:3–5, the phrases τηρεῖν τὰς ἐντολάς and τηρεῖν τὸν λόγον have the same meaning (Spicq, *Lexicographie* 1:252). In Hebrew the term דָּבָר *dābār* can mean ‘word’ as well as ‘commandment’ (1QS 1:13, where the phrase דָּבָרֵי *dibrē.ēl* means ‘commands of God’), and the Decalogue is called ‘the ten words’ (see Excurus 12B: The Commandments of God and the Torah). The parallel phrase τηρεῖν τὰς ἐντολάς, ‘to keep the commandments,’ occurs in Rev 12:17; 14:12 (see Matt 19:17; John 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 Tim 6:14; 1 John 2:3, 4; 3:22, 24; 5:3). In John and 1 John, the phrases are therefore used interchangeably, just as they are in Revelation.” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 238]

idea is an affirmation of the obedience of the Philadelphian Christians to the commands of Christ.

The third main clause, *καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου*, stands in antithetical parallel²⁴ to the previous core expression, *καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον*. Thus Christ stresses their obedience with a denial of any disobedience on their part.

Despite its small size this Christian community stood tall among the seven churches by its strict adherence to the teachings of Christ.²⁵ This compares favorably to some of the other affirmations:

Ephesus (2:2a): οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, *I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance.*

Pergamum (2:13): οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπάς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ. *I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives.*

Thyatira (2:19): οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων. *I know your works — your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first.*

ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται (v. 9a). The ἰδοὺ adds heightened importance to the subsequent statement (cf. also ἰδοὺ in vv. 8b, 9b).²⁶ It is very common to NT usage generally, with this meaning.



What is stressed is the declaration made concerning the Jewish synagogue at Philadelphia. First comes a denial of authentic Jewishness by these peo-

²⁴Ancient Jewish antithetical parallelism was a literary device of emphasis on one central point, usually stated in the first strophe. By immediately following the positive affirmation in the first strophe with a denial of its opposite in the second strophe, the initial point was re-enforced.

²⁵One intriguing implication comes out of a comparative study of the seven churches. The two smallest churches of the seven, Smyrna and Philadelphia, are the only two which do not receive criticism and have only commendation by Christ. Is there a possible correlation between church size and levels of spirituality?

²⁶ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλειῖσαι αὐτήν (v. 8b)

ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. (v. 9a)

ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνώσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε. (v. 9b)

ple. Christ labels them as non-Jews! This is virtually the same accusation leveled against the synagogue in Smyrna (2:9):

οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχεῖαν, ἀλλὰ πλοῦσιος εἶ, *καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ.*

I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Perhaps the small size of both towns created much greater interaction between the Christians and the Jews which led to hostility from the synagogue. The Jewish origins of Christianity, as well as some local Jews having converted to Christianity, caused the believers to be perceived as a real threat to the synagogue communities.

The Greek construction here in v. 9a is a bit puzzling to modern language translators, because it begins an idea but doesn't complete it.²⁷ The completed sentence in 9b finishes the idea introduced in 9a.²⁸ What comes initially in v. 9a is an identification of who is meant by αὐτοὺς, *them*, in v. 9b.

Who is Christ referring to then? First they come ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ, *from the synagogue of Satan*. Although claiming to be the true followers of the God of Abraham, in reality they are serving Satan rather than God. Very likely this implies persecution of Christians in the city.²⁹ Second, τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους

²⁷“ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται, ‘Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan who call themselves Jews (but are not; they are lying)—.’ This statement, with the exception of the last word, is verbally identical with the statement made in 2:9 (see Comment there). This is not a complete sentence since διδῶ has the partitive genitive as an object but lacks an infinitive. In this use of δίδοναι with the meaning ‘to cause,’ the result of the action of the verb would normally be indicated by an accusative (here the partitive genitive is equivalent to the accusative αὐτοὺς) and an infinitive (or, in the style of Revelation, a ἵνα clause). In the next clause, the author resumes the thought begun in v 9a by switching to a verb with nearly the same meaning, ποιήσω, ‘to cause’ (Louw-Nida, § 13.9, mistakenly separate the causal meaning of ποιεῖν from the causal meaning of δίδοναι, Louw-Nida, § 90.51), and then provides a more explicit object than that found in v 9a, αὐτοὺς, ‘them,’ followed by a ἵνα clause, which indicates the result of the action. This is an instance of a participle followed not by two more participles, as one might expect, but by two finite verbs; here εἶναι in ordinary Greek would be expressed through the present participle ὄντων, while ψεύδονται would be written as ψευδόμενων. For other examples of this Semitic syntactical phenomenon see 1:5–6, 17–18; 2:2, 9, 20, 23; 7:14; 12:2; 13:11; 14:2–3; 15:2–3; 20:4 (Schmid, Studien 2:242–43; Mussies, Morphology, 326–28).” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a, page 238]

²⁸The verbs διδῶ (v. 9a) and ποιήσω (v. 9b) are interchangeable in meaning, both here and elsewhere in ancient Greek usage.

²⁹In the second century, Ignatius in his *Letter to the Philadel-* Page 237

εἶναι, *they are calling themselves Jews*. Even though ethnic Jews, Christ does not accept this as the basis for authentic Jewishness, as His subsequent words make clear: καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται, *and they are not but are lying*. Interestingly, the Jewish Talmud some time later comes close to making the same statement about Jews in this region.³⁰ Because they do not believe in Christ, they are proclaimed here non-Jews by the Lord. One's Jewishness is a spiritual issue and not an ethnic issue from Christ's point of view.

ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνώσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε (v. 9c). This sentence completes what was introduced in v. 9b. It has an intense ironical force to it against the backdrop of Jewish apocalyptic expectation. In that tradition Jews expected the Gentile world to grovel at the feet of the Jews with the coming of the expected Messiah. This was based on texts such as Isa. 60:14 and 49:23. But Christ here proclaims that these Jews will have to grovel at the feet of a largely Gentile Christian community in humiliated acknowledgment that the believing community represent the true people of God, rather than them.³¹ It is the believing

phians (6.1-6) alludes to Jewish persecution of Christians:

"But if anyone expounds Judaism to you, do not listen to him. For it is better to hear about Christianity from a man who is circumcised than about Judaism from one who is not. But if either of them fail to speak about Jesus Christ, I look on them as tombstones and graves of the dead, upon which only the names of men are inscribed. (2) Flee, therefore, the evil tricks and traps of the ruler of this age, lest you be worn out by his schemes and grow weak in love. Instead gather together, all of you, with an undivided heart. (3) Now I give thanks to my God that I have a clear conscience in my dealings with you, and that no one can boast, either privately or publicly, that I was a burden to anyone in any respect, small or great. Moreover, I pray that all those to whom I spoke will not cause what I said to become a witness against them."

³⁰"The economic prosperity of the Jews of this region (see below) suggests that they may have compromised their Judaism to some degree by accommodating to the religious practices of the trade guilds and even imperial religion, which itself had become mixed with local pagan worship (in this respect see further on 2:9). The Talmud (*b. Shabbat* 147b) asserts that 'the wines and the baths of Phrygia have separated the ten tribes from Israel,' which comes close to the pronouncement here that the 'Jews' in Philadelphia are 'not' true Jews but liars.²⁰²" [*The New International Greek Testament Commentary, The Book of Revelation*, p. 287]

³¹"ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου 'behold, I will force them to come and grovel at your feet.' This is an allusion to Isa 60:14, 'all who despised you shall bow down at your feet,' and perhaps also to Isa 49:23, 'They shall bow down before you and lick the dust of your feet' (see Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 133–35). This same motif occurs in IQM 19:6 with a doublet in 12:14–15 (tr. García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 115): 'Their kings shall wait on you, [all your oppressors] lie prone before you, and they shall lick the dust of your feet.' The ironical use of this motif is clear: in all these passages the Gentiles are expected to grovel before Israel, while in Rev 3:9 it is the Jews who are expected to grovel before the feet of this (largely gentile)

community who stands as the object of Christ's love: ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε.

Dispositio:

ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου (v. 10a), *Because you have kept my word to endure*. This causal clause sets up the basis of the promise expressed in the main clause below. The pre-field position of the dependent clause is unusual for ancient Greek.³² What is described here is largely repeating ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου, *you have kept my Word and have not denied My name* (v. 8b).³³ The additional modifier of τῆς ὑπομονῆς, *to endure*, emphasizes consistency, and probably in the face of persecution from the synagogue community. The Philadelphian believers have remained steadfast in their commitment to Christ in the face of opposition, and Christ commends them for this. In fact it become the basis for His promise to them.

κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (v. 10b), *and I will keep you from the hour that is going to come upon all the inhabited world in order to test those dwelling upon the earth*. The precise meaning of this statement depends on careful understanding of at least three component elements.

1) κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ..., *and I will keep you from....* Note first the play on the verb τηρέω. It is used twice but with separate meanings: ἐτήρησας (*you have obeyed*)... τηρήσω (*I will keep*). Such is not unusual in

Christian community." [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 239]

³²"The ὅτι clause that begins this sentence is in an unusual position, since in the vast majority of instances dependent clauses follow the main clause (other examples of ὅτι clauses in the pre-position are found in Rev 3:16; 18:7; see Turner, *Syntax*, 345)." [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 231]

³³"The phrase τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου is problematic. Though the position of μου after τῆς ὑπομονῆς might suggest that it modifies only that substantive (Buttmann, *Grammar*, 155), it is more probable that μου should be taken with the idea expressed by the entire noun cluster (e.g., Heb 1:3; Col 1:13; Winer, *Grammar*, 297); see Rev 13:3: ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, 'his mortal wound.' This is made virtually certain by v 8, where ὁ λόγός μου, 'my word,' is identical with the phrase ὁ λόγος τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου in this verse. If the substantive in the gen. is construed as an obj gen., then the phrase can be rendered "my word [i.e., 'command'] concerning endurance" (this understanding is reflected in the translation above). Charles takes μου with τῆς ὑπομονῆς and understands the entire clause τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου mean 'the Gospel of the endurance practised by Christ' (1:89). The rsv and nrsv take μου with the entire noun cluster: 'my word of patient endurance.' The reb and niv also take μου with the entire noun cluster but understand τῆς ὑπομονῆς as an obj gen.; reb: 'my command to stand firm' (see neb: 'you have kept my command and stood fast'); niv: 'my command to endure patiently.'" [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 232]

ancient Greek, and is found often in Revelation.³⁴ The believers keep Christ's word in the sense of obey it, while Christ keeps the believers in the sense of preserving them through a time of trouble. The signal of a shift in meaning comes with the impersonal object τὸν λόγον (the word) first and then the personal object σε (you). Keeping commands means obeying commands; keeping persons means preserving them in times of trouble.

The second use here, however, is τηρήσω ἐκ, I will keep from. Only one other such use is found in the NT, and it is in John 17:15, οὐκ ἐρωτῶ ἵνα ἄρῃς αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, ἀλλ' ἵνα τηρήσῃς αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ, I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. The general sense is to preserve them from the harmful consequences of what lies ahead, rather than to separate them out so as to not have to go through this time of testing.

2) ἐκ τῆς ὥρας..., from the hour (of testing)... What is the 'hour'? The concept existed in ancient apocalyptic Judaism as "a period of great distress and suffering that early Judaism (Dan 12:1; T. Mos. 8:1; Jub. 23:11–21; 2 Apoc. Bar. 27:1–15; see Volz, Eschatologie, 147–63). . . expected would immediately precede the eschatological victory of God."³⁵ Early Christianity picked up this idea and modified it somewhat as reflected in Mt. 24:15–31; Mk. 13:7–10; Rev. 7:14. Another designation for this is "the woes of the Messiah" as indicated in Hos. 13:13; Isa. 26:16–19; Mic. 4:9–10; Hag. 2:6; Mk. 13:8; Mt. 24:8.

But if τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ refers to the tribulation (θλίψις) referenced in Rev. 6 - 19 (6:2–17; 8:6–9:21; 12:13–17; 13:7; 16:1–21; 17:6), then Christians will experience the sufferings with Christ 'preserving them through it' rather than exempting them from suffering it.

By definition τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ refers to every event of suffering that believers undergo until the coming of Christ.

3) τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, of testing that is going to come upon the entire world in order to test those who dwell upon the earth. The participle phrase modifier of τοῦ πειρασμοῦ sets up some tension here. By NT definition, πειρασμός refers to an event posing a test of one's faith commitment to Christ.³⁶ How such a test can be applied to the unbeliev-

³⁴The two uses of the verb τηρεῖν in vv 10a and 10b are examples of paronomasia, in which each usage has a different meaning; τηρεῖν in v 10a means 'obey' (Louw-Nida, § 36.19), while in v 10b it means 'keep, preserve, cause to continue' (Louw-Nida, § 13.32); for other examples of paronomasia in Revelation, see 2:2[2x], 22; 11:18; 14:8; 18:6[3x]. 20, 21; 22:18, 19; cf. BDF §488.1; Turner, *Syntax*, 148." [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a, page 232]

³⁵Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a, page 240.

³⁶1. Πειράζω and ἐκπειράζω occur 38 and 4 times respectively in the NT, πειρασμός 21 times. The distribution varies: The terms do not occur in Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians,

ing world, rather than just to Christians, is not spelled out by John here.³⁷ Explaining this tension becomes then a matter of pure speculation with no established biblical framework to guide the conclusions.

Additional noting needs to be made. The noun πειρασμός only occurs here (3:10) in Revelation and the verb is found only in 2:2, 10; 3:10. The concept of testing is -- for Revelation -- limited to chapters two and three, and interestingly confined to the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia.³⁸ Further, such testing for

2 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 1-3 John, or Jude, and hardly at all in John; they occur most frequently in the Synoptics, Acts, 1 Corinthians 10, Hebrews 2–4, James 1, Revelation 2–3.

"2. The fundamental meaning of the stem πειρα- corresponds to a large extent to that of English test and try and Heb. *nsh* (G. Gerleman, THAT II, 69–71): *put to some sort of test*. This testing is accompanied by burdening, risk, uncertainty, and even danger and mistrust. Depending on the intention at hand, the test can be, positively, a test in which one proves oneself or, negatively, an enticement to failure. Since persons are virtually the only object of such testing in the NT, trust, faithfulness, and obedience usually play a role as well. Εκπειράζω, on the other hand, means challenge, and is always in the NT directed toward God or Christ. The spectrum of meaning of πειράζω is wider: 1) examine with sincere intentions; 2) test critically with less than serious intentions; 3) threaten, burden, tempt; 4) mislead, seduce; 5) challenge, doubt, mistrust; 6) arrange for or plan something. The nuances can, of course, overlap.

"Πειρασμός, rare in secular Greek, exhibits less extensive variations in meaning. It largely refers to some burden or threat by humans or other powers (affliction, persecution, snares, etc.), i.e., an expressly human experience (only in Heb 3:8 possibly God). Objectively the πειρασμός (only 4 occurrences are pl.) is some danger threatening to cause a person to depart from the correct path. Subjectively this threat is perceived in part as the occasion for worry (God's help is necessary, petition for protection), and in part as a stimulus (opportunity for proving oneself)."

[The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, S.V., πειρασμός, οὐ, ὁ]

³⁷This verse has been a crux for the modern argument between the Pretribulation and Posttribulation views on when Christ will return (see Gundry, *Tribulation*, and the responses by Townsend, *BSac* 137 [1980] 252–66; Edgar, *GTJ* 3 [1982] 19–49; and Winfrey, *GTJ* 3 [1982] 3–18). Unfortunately, both sides of the debate have ignored the fact that the promise made here pertains to Philadelphian Christians only and cannot be generalized to include Christians in the other churches of Asia, much less all Christians in all places and times. Furthermore, to be 'preserved from the hour of tribulation' means not that they will be physically absent but rather that they will not be touched by that which touches others." [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a, page 240.]

³⁸Rev. 2:2. οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνῃ βαστάσαι κακοὺς, καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς,

I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false.

Rev. 2:10. μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε

the believers at Smyrna (2:10) is linked to ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν (what you are going to suffer) and θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα (ten days of affliction), which the believers were going to experience. Here in Philadelphia the promise of Christ in σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ is to preserve the believers from the harmful impact of the testing. This clearly signals that for the unbelieving world, they would experience the negative consequences of this testing.

But clearly with this language Christ is speaking of two experiences of suffering and testing exclusively for those at Smyrna and Philadelphia. The extensive experience defined by ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, from the hour of testing that is going to come upon all inhabitants in order to test those dwelling upon the earth, links this experience to that of the Philadelphian believers in their day. Whether this implies the eschatological tribulation (cf. 7:14) or not remains very doubtful.

What is specifically meant by τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, those dwelling on the earth, along with τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης, all the inhabited world, must be understood within the framework of first century Jewish and Christian thinking. Commonly inside Revelation the reference is to the unbelieving world as persecutors of Christians (cf. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 [2x]; 13:8, 14 [2x]; 17:8).³⁹ What God is about to do is to πειράσαι θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison *so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction.* Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Rev. 3:10. ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, καὶ γὰρ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

Because *you have kept my word of patient endurance,* I will keep you from *the hour of trial* that is coming on the whole world *to test the inhabitants of the earth.*

Note: one should give close attention to what is described at Ephesus over against that at Smyrna and Philadelphia. The Ephesian believers did the testing of some within the Christian community (active voice form of the verb), while the passive voice verb (to be put to a test) concept is applied to Smyrna and Philadelphia. They were objects of testing.

³⁹“The phrase οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ‘those who dwell on the earth,’ is a favorite of the author’s and occurs eight more times in Revelation (6:10; 8:13; 11:10[2x]; 13:8, 14[2x]; 17:8) and three additional times with varied phraseology (13:12; 14:6; 17:2), always in the negative sense of non-Christian persecutors of Christians. The phrase ‘inhabitants of the earth’ (יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ *yōšēb hā-āreṣ* or יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ *yōšēbē hā-āreṣ*) occurs with some frequency in the OT, though in the Pentateuch it usually means ‘native Palestinians’ (Lam 4:12; Isa 24:6, 17; 26:9, 18, 21; Jer 1:14; 25:29, 30; 38:11; Ezek 7:7; Dan 4:35[2x]; Zeph 1:18). The phrase also occurs frequently in early Jewish literature reflecting an awareness of the nations of the world, often in a universalistic eschatology in early Jewish apocalyptic, where it also has a predominantly negative

τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, to test those dwelling on the earth, in the sense of afflicting them with some kind of undefined temporal judgment. Given the historical backdrop of the region around Philadelphia toward hugely destructive earthquakes happening very frequently, one doesn’t have to imagine much in order to sense what Christ may well be saying here. Those persecutors of the Philadelphian believers will bear the full brunt of divine punishment for their treatment of God’s people. This will ‘push the envelope’ of these pagans to the very limit. The exempting of believers from these devastating consequences will draw a line clearly between those who are God’s people and those who are not. This is Christ’s promise to the believers at Philadelphia.⁴⁰

ἔρχομαι ταχύ (v. 11a). Viewed in its context, this promise of coming quickly should be taken to mean that Christ will very soon impose this devastating punishment upon the persecutors of believers at Philadelphia. One should note that the immanent coming of Christ is limited to Revelation chapters one through three and chapter twenty-two: 2:5, 16; 22:7, 12, 20. The prediction of His coming, ἔρχομαι, without the qualifier ταχύ, shows up in 1:7; 2:25; 16:15; 22:20. Additional to His coming signaling the launching of divine judgments on unbelievers is the fact that this coming will be an encouragement to believers to hang fast to their Christian commitment in the face of persecution.⁴¹

κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου (v. 11b), hold fast to what you have, so that no one may

connotation (1 Enoch 37:2, 5; 40:6, 7; 48:5; 53:1; 54:6; 55:1, 2; 60:5; 62:1; 65:6, 10, 12; 66:1; 67:7, 8; 70:1; 4 Ezra 3:12, 34, 35; 4:21, 39; 5:1, 6; 6:18, 24, 26; 7:72, 74; 10:59; 11:5, 32, 34; 12:24; 13:29, 30; 2 Apoc. Bar. 25:1; 48:32, 40; 54:1; 55:2; 70:2, 10; T. Abr. [Rec. A] 3:12; [Rec. B] 6:6; Ps.-Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 3.3, 9, 12; 4.16; CDa 10:9).” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a, page 240]

⁴⁰“It is unlikely that Rev. 3:10 is referring to a protection of believers’ physical lives, since the preceding letters have focused only on spiritual perseverance, even at the cost of one’s physical life (e.g., 2:8–11; 2:13). If 3:10 is referring to a promise of physical preservation before the final resurrection, then it is the only text in the whole book that does so.” [The New International Greek Testament Commentary, The Book of Revelation, p. 291]

⁴¹“Consequently, the ‘coming’ referred to in this verse is the increased presence of Christ that will protect these believers when they pass through tribulation, as has just been mentioned in v 10.225 Therefore, the promise of v 10 is not that they will escape the coming trial, but that they will be able to endure through it because of his sustaining power.226 Such endurance will indicate that they have not been prevented from successfully completing their pilgrimage of salvation. The forces of evil have not succeeded in ‘taking their crown’ (see 2 Esdr. 2:43–47 [cf. on 3:5 above]). Reference to believers receiving a crown may develop further the Isa. 22:22 context, where God promises to take away evil Shebna’s crown and give it to faithful Eliakim (Isa. 22:17, 21).” [The New International Greek Testament Commentary, The Book of Revelation, p. 291]

take your crown. Literally, the command is to continue holding fast, with ὁ ἔχεις referencing ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου (and you have kept my word and have not denied my name, 3:8c) and ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου (you have kept my word to endure, 3:10a). Most likely the idea of a crown here originates from the Isa. 22:22 image where in vv. 17 and 21 God indicates His intention to take evil Shebna's crown and give it to Eliakim as acknowledgment of Eliakim's faithful service to the king.⁴² The ancient non-religious meaning of having a crown removed is that of being disqualified from participating in a contest. With the strong repeated emphasis on consistency of faith commitment to Christ as the center piece of authentic Christianity, the meaning of the image is clear. Remain faithful to the end as a demonstration of the genuineness of your faith commitment. Anything less disqualifies you from the 'contest' of salvation.

C. Promise and Admonition, vv. 12-13

12 Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν. 13 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

12 If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. 13 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

What comes last in the message are the two standard forms of victory and hearing. The sequencing of these two elements varies,⁴³ but both are uniformly included in all seven messages.

Victory Promise:

Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι (v. 12a). As has been the case consistently the prerequisite for the promise is stated in the participle Ὁ νικῶν: 2:11; 2:26 (+ καὶ ὁ τηρῶν); 3:5; 3:12; 3:21; (alternatively Τῷ νικῶντι in 2:7; 2:17). Uniformly the participle stands as antecedent to αὐτῷ / αὐτὸν functioning as the object of the future

⁴²Isa. 22:21. καὶ ἐνδύσω αὐτὸν τὴν στολὴν σου καὶ τὸν στέφανόν σου δώσω αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ κράτος καὶ τὴν οἰκονομίαν σου δώσω εἰς τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσται ὡς πατὴρ τοῖς ἐνοικοῦσιν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ τοῖς ἐνοικοῦσιν ἐν Ἰουδα.

21 and will clothe him with your robe and bind your sash on him. I will commit your authority to his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.

⁴³Hear command followed by victory promise: Ephesus (2:7); Smyrna (2:11); Pergamon (2:17).

Victory promise followed by hear command: Thyatira (2:26-29); Sardis (3:5-6); Philadelphia (3:12-13); Laodicea (3:21-22).

tense verb specifying the promise made by Christ. This grammar construction heightens the importance of the required condition for the blessing. The idea of overcoming, νικῶν, sums up the core emphasis upon faithful commitment to Christ as the essence of genuine faith surrender to Christ in conversion. Thus not what we say with our mouth, but what we do with our life is the unquestionable signal of true faith or not.

The victory promise to the overcomer here consists of four declarations. These should not be taken as four separate promises. Rather they reflect four perspectives on the one promise of eternal life.⁴⁴

The first declaration is ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God and he will never ever depart from it. A στῦλος was a pillar in some building that was a permanent part of the structure. The promise to the Philadelphians is that they will be incorporated into a permanent part of God's eternal temple in Heaven.⁴⁵ Consequently, no earthquake, like those that

⁴⁴As in 2:17, the four elements of the promise are not to be interpreted as four distinct promises but as different aspects of the same promise concerning end-time fellowship and identification with Christ. That is, never denying Christ's 'name' now (3:8; cf. v 10) and persevering through tribulation (vv 10-11) are the basis for inheriting the reward of everlasting identification with Christ's "new name" after death." [*The New International Greek Testament Commentary, The Book of Revelation*, p. 292]

⁴⁵For the emphasis on the 'pillars' in a description of the eschatological Jerusalem, see 1 Enoch 90:28-29, where the phrases 'old house' and 'new house' symbolize the earthly and the eschatological Jerusalem, respectively, which includes the temple though it is not specifically mentioned (Black, *Enoch*, 278). The term στῦλοι, 'pillars,' is used by Paul as a metaphor for leaders in the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:9), and Peter and Paul are referred to as στῦλοι, 'pillars,' in 1 Clem 5:2 (cf. Ep. Lugd 1.6, 17); in 1 Tim 3:15, the church is described as στῦλος καὶ ἐδραῖωμα τῆς ἀληθείας, 'the pillar and foundation of the truth.' The metaphor of an individual as a pillar, i.e., a person of central importance for a particular community, is found often in the Greco Roman world (Euripides *Iph. Taur.* 57; Pindar *Olymp.* 2.81-82; Lycophron *Alex.* 281; Vita *Aesopi* G 106 [B. E. Perry, *Aesopica: Studies in Text History of Life and Fables of Aesop: Vol. 1. Greek and Latin Texts* [Urbana: University of Illinois, 1952] 1:68]). This notion also appears in Philo; cf. *Quaest. in Ex.* 1.21 (tr. LCL; this sentence survives in a Greek fragment as well as in an Armenian translation): 'For good men are the pillars of whole communities [κίονες ἐστὶν δήμων ὅλων], and they support cities and city-governments as if they were great houses' (cf. Philo *De Abr.* 124). The metaphor of the temple is occasionally used in early Christian literature for the church (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-10). Nevertheless, despite the claim of U. Wilckens (TDNT 7:734-35), there is no apparent connection between the reference in Gal 2:9 and the notion of the church as a spiritual temple (Betz, *Galatians*, 99 n. 404). 'Pillar' is used in a metaphorical sense in Prov 9:1, though the imagery is probably drawn not from temple architecture but from that of a banqueting hall; the "house" of wisdom is the world, and the 'pillars' are the 'pillars of heaven' (see Job 26:11). Here in v 12, the phrase ἐν τῷ ναῷ, 'in the temple,' excludes any

shook and sometimes destroyed the pagan temples in Philadelphia, would ever force anyone to abandon this heavenly temple. This temple is eternal and a perfect refuge from the sinfulness of this world.

καὶ γράψω ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου (v. 12b). Adding further security to the overcomer is the pledge by Christ to write God’s name across the forehead of the believer. This metaphor affirms divine ownership by God as well as dedication of the individual to God.⁴⁶ The believer belongs exclusively to God so that no one, namely the Devil, can make any claim to this person.

καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλήμ⁴⁷ ἢ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου (v. 12c). Against the Hellenistic background of citizenship in a particular city as the key determinant of value and identity in the ancient world, Christ promises a citizenship “id” in the most important city of them all, the Heavenly Jerusalem. The Heavenly Jerusalem is mentioned only three times in Revelation: 3:12; 21:2, 10, with the adjective ‘new’ (καινῆς) found only in 3:12 and 21:2. This eternal city belongs to God who stands as its head and ruler. The image of a city moving downward, ἢ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, signals the extension of God’s presence to include these overcomers at Philadelphia into the eternal divine presence.

καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν (v. 12d). This fourth

allusion to the external freestanding pillars of the Solomonic temple, Jachin and Boaz (1 Kgs 7:15–21; 2 Chr 3:15–15; Josephus Ant. 8.77–78), or to pillars in the peristyle of other ancient temples. Yet there is evidence of freestanding pillars within ancient temples, such as the pair of pillars, one of gold and the other of emerald, that Herodotus saw in the temple of Melkart-Herakles (Herodotus 2.44).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 242]

⁴⁶“This is perhaps an allusion to Exod 28:36–38, where instructions are given for writing the inscription ‘Holy to the Lord’ on a gold plate to be mounted on the front of Aaron’s high priestly headdress, on his forehead. In Philo, *Mos.* 2.114–15 reflects the apparently traditional idea (not supported by the Hebrew Bible or the LXX) that the Tetragrammaton יהוה YHWH was inscribed on this gold plate (the same idea is found in Jos. *J. W.* 5.235; *Ant.* 3.178; *Ep. Arist.* 98; Origen *Frag.* in Ps. 2.2). However, in *De Abr.* 103, Philo gets it right, observing that the gold plate has ἁγίασμα κυρίου, ‘holy to the Lord,’ inscribed on it. Isa 43:7 refers to ‘everyone who is called by my name.’ According to b. B. Bat. 75b: ‘Three are called by the name of the Holy One blessed be He, and they are the following: the righteous, the Messiah, and Jerusalem’ (Str-B 3:795–96). It is significant that the motifs of the inscription of a divine name and a pillar in the sanctuary are combined in PGM VIII.40–41: ‘Your true name is inscribed on the sacred pillar [τῆ ἱερᾶ στήλῃ] in the innermost sanctuary at Hermopolis.’” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 243]

⁴⁷We begin noticing again some of the ‘crazy’ Greek of John with the modifying participle phrase ἢ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου set up in the nominative case ἢ καταβαίνουσα rather than the required genitive case τῆς καταβαίνουσῆς... in order to properly link it back to τῆς καινῆς Ἰερουσαλήμ.

promise is of a third name written on the overcomer’s forehead: that of Christ Himself. But Christ’s name now is a new name. This emphasis on a new name being given stands against the backdrop of the city of Philadelphia being renamed twice, with the second time coming just a decade or so before the writing of Revelation.⁴⁸

What that new name will be is not spelled out. And ultimately it is irrelevant. What matters is that it is the identifying name given to the overcomer by Christ Himself and identifies the overcomer as belonging exclusively to the Lord.

Thus the overcomer on that eschatological day will be given three new names: of God, of the city Jerusalem, and of Christ. And yet all three are but one name signifying that he belongs completely to the eternal God and will spend eternity with his God.

Hearing Admonition:

Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις (v. 13). The climax of the message is thus reached with the command to pay attention to this message. The assumption is that both the reader and the hearer of this message have enough sense to understand the ideas of the message. But just recognizing the content of the message is not enough. Ultimately more important is how that message applies. And providing this understanding is the work of the Holy Spirit.

But the Spirit provides applicational understanding not just to the overcomer in Philadelphia. His work is to make this message relevant to all seven churches, and

⁴⁸“The bestowal of a ‘new name’ (mentioned in 2:17) in biblical tradition ordinarily means a change of status or function for a city or nation (Isa 1:26; Isa 60:14; 65:15; Jer 3:17; 23:6; 33:16; Ezek 48:35; Zech 8:3) or a change in the character, conduct, or status of an individual (Gen 17:5, 17; 32:27–28; 41:45; Dan 1:7; Mark 3:17; John 1:42). Speaking of the future glory of restored Israel, Isa 62:2 reads ‘you shall be called by a new name [LXX τὸ ὄνομα σου τὰ καινόν, which the mouth of the Lord will give,’ while 65:15 speaks of the righteous: ‘but his servants he will call by a different name [LXX ὄνομα καινόν].’ In early Christianity, the ‘new name’ of Isa 62:2; 65:15 was thought to be the name ‘Christian’ (Cyprian *Ad Quirinum* 1.22; Eusebius *Demonstr. evang.* 2.3.80; *Hist. Eccl.* 1.4.3–4; Ignatius *Magn.* 10 [longer version; Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers* 2/3, 175]; see Ignatius *Magn.* 10:1; Clement *Alex. Paed.* 1.5; *Apost. Const.* 3.15). In *T. Levi* 8:14 (in what is very probably an interpolation, though probably not of Christian origin; see Ulrichsen, *Grundschrift*, 194–95), it is said of the offspring of Levi, ‘he will be called with a new name [ὄνομα καινόν].’ Ramsay suggested that the theme of the new name would have been meaningful to the Philadelphian Christians since the name of their city had been renamed twice. The first new name was ‘Neokaisareia’ (after Tiberius or Germanicus), given to the city after the earthquake of a.d. 17, while the second, ‘Flavia,’ the family name of the emperor Vespasian, was given during his reign, i.e., a.d. 70–79 (Ramsay, *Letters*, 397–98, 409–12).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 53a, page 245]

ultimately then to all believers who hear this message. And that includes us today!

2. What does the text mean to us today?

Does this message speak to believers today? Clearly, the answer is yes, it speaks volumes! It comes to us as words of ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, the Holy One, the Trustworthy One. Christ stands as the ultimate of holiness and the One whose promises are absolutely reliable. In this world powerful figures such as politicians constantly make promise but can seldom ever be counted upon to keep those promises. Such promises come from individuals neither holy nor trustworthy. But in contrast the promises and declarations in the message to the Philadelphians originate from He who is perfect holiness and absolute trustworthiness.

Thus when He declares His exclusive power to open and close the door of eternal salvation which no one can alter, we can know with certainty what our eternal destiny will be. For the Philadelphians, and for us as well, the door is opened to us to enter into the eternal salvation provided by God.

But how? Christ's answer is simply: ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου, *you have obeyed my word and have not denied my name*. Further, ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, *you have kept my word to endure*. Entering through the door of eschatological salvation then comes about through a life of obedience to Christ's word. A definite decision begins the journey, but patient continuing of the journey to the end is the ultimate bottom line of entering the door at the end of the journey. Without such perseverance no open door awaits us at the end of the journey.

The journey requires such faith surrender to Christ, since it will bring us into opposition and hostility. We may not face those from the synagogue of Satan who call themselves God's people, as did the Philadelphian believers. But there will be opposition and temptation trying to push us off the path to the open door. At times we may have little strength as did the Philadelphians. That is, we may be small in number and greatly outnumbered by our enemies.

But the promises of Christ to us remain unaltered. To the overcomer there will be the blessed privilege of becoming a permanent part of God's eternal temple in Heaven. Three divine names will be inscribed across our foreheads signifying that we belong exclusively to Almighty God and thus no one can touch us or harm us. And this is forever!

Our response? Let us then hear closely what the Spirit is saying to the churches!

