

Stability

Long Beach Alliance Church • October 28th, 2012 • Pastor Chris Lankford

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; 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 out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

~Revelation 3:12 (NASB)

1) The Unstable City Of Philadelphia

- A) Philadelphia was located on the main Roman postal road through Asia Minor, a perfect location for commerce. The city was known as “the gateway to the east.”
- B) Philadelphia was located near a line of active volcanoes, resulting in highly fertile soil for growing grapes, which caused the viticulture industry of the city (grape and wine production) to be very lucrative in the entire region.
- C) Philadelphia was built near active volcanoes. This instability produced devastating earthquakes in both 17 & 23 A.D., destroying the city. People lived out in the open countryside rather risk their lives in the crumbling city.
- D) Rome’s Emperor Tiberius rebuilt Philadelphia after one major earthquake and the city was renamed Neo Caesarea for a short time. However, in 92 A.D. (close to the time John wrote Revelation), Emperor Domitian issued an edict which crushed the viticulture economy in Philadelphia, severely weakening the city and its people.

2) The Powerless Church Of Philadelphia

- A) The city and church in Philadelphia were powerless in the face of Rome. Into this context, Jesus notes that He is the One who has real power, not Rome (cf. Isaiah 22:22).
- B) The symbol of a key (cf. Revelation 1:18) and a permanently open door (3:7) asserts Jesus' authority over both the physical world (Domitian), and throughout the spiritual/heavenly realm. Jesus, and no one else, is truly powerful.
- C) The Philadelphian church has been faithful in both Word and in deed to Jesus, and Jesus assures them that His door of promise will always be kept open for them (3:7).
- D) Once again, the local Jews are pictured as a "synagogue of Satan" (cf. 2:9) because they call Jesus a false Messiah and His followers false Israelites. For those who reject the Messiah, the door is closed (cf. Isaiah 22:22-25), with now the church being included as true Israel (cf. Isaiah 60:14).
- E) The picture in Philadelphia is one of reversal. The weak become strong, the authorities become the subjects, those who think they are secure are not, and those who are receiving rejection will actually receive reception, this "time of testing" on earth clarifies true perseverance (3:10).

3) I Am Coming Quickly!

- A) To the shaky and weak church of Philadelphia, Jesus states that He is coming quickly, a compassionate assurance toward faithful living (3:11) with Heavenly rewards in mind!
- B) For the weak church (the weak and weary), God reminds that He will make His church the very pillars of the Heavenly temple, secure and marked by the name of the Lamb (Jesus), with a new and redeemed future (3:12-13).
- C) The urgency of "I am coming quickly," leads each of us into an anticipatory way of living, keeping our eyes on the prize! Note that the prize is not found in all the "benefits," but in the overcomer's stable relationship with Jesus!

maps & pictures of philadelphia



Just outside of Philadelphia was a fertile volcanic plain suitable for agriculture, especially grapes; Philadelphia was well known for its viticulture. In 92 A.D., Emperor Domitian issued an edict demanding that half the vines be cut down and grain be planted instead. This seriously hampered the Philadelphian economy, since the volcanic soil was not well suited for grain. Domitian's edict caused outrage toward Rome, and proved disastrous for the region (consider also Revelation 3:7 & 12).



Map of the seven churches of Revelation (2:1-3:22). The book of Revelation was written by John, probably shortly after his exile on the island of Patmos (small island on the map to which John was exiled, just to the left of this note) to seven churches which may have been under John's previous leadership. Philadelphia (circled on the map), was founded in 189 B.C. by Eumenes II, king of Pergamum, the city was probably named after his brother, Attalus Philadelphus. Eumenes and Attalus were two of four brothers who were deeply loyal to their mother, Apollonis. There are several references to the unity of the two brothers, and coins from the region celebrated their "brotherly love" for many centuries into the future (coins with two brothers in an alliance, two brothers being suckled together, etc.). Two foundational incidents give the basis for the love between the two brothers. First, when a false rumor of Eumenes' assassination reached Pergamum, Attalus assumed the role of king. When Eumenes returned, he forgave his brother and Attalus resumed his secondary role willingly. Second, Attalus was presented with the opportunity of supplanting his brother with Roman help during a time when Eumenes was suspected of corresponding with the enemy (Perseus). Attalus, however, refused to turn against his brother, revealing his deep loyalty. The *Philadelphus Games*, which celebrated fraternal affection, were held into the late 3rd century in memory of the brothers. Attalus did eventually become king upon his brother's death in 159 B.C. (Various sources, esp. *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, by Colin J. Hemer, pages 153-177).



Philadelphia was located in a region plagued by many earthquakes, which severely damaged the city in 17 and 23 A.D. To encourage rebuilding of the city, the emperor Tiberius suspended the city's payment of tribute for five years. Out of gratitude to Emperor Tiberius for his help in rebuilding Philadelphia, the city took on the name Neo Caesarea. Since the region was plagued by earthquakes, there have been few meaningful excavations (since most finds would be rubble).



Growth Group Homework



Powering Up

1. What observations from this weekend's message on "Stability" did you find to be the most interesting or challenging? Share your answer.
2. **What Are Four Interesting Things (Your FIT List) About You?** Each person writes down their "FIT List" on one index card containing their: 1) Favorite Season of the Year, 2) Favorite Food, 3) Favorite Vacation Spot, and 4) Favorite Dream In Life. The cards are then shuffled and redistributed. Each person reads aloud the card they picked up and each person guesses in writing (on their own separate index card) who wrote it. Once everyone has written down their guess, the next card is read. Once all the FIT Lists are read and all the guesses are written, go around the room (in the same order), reveal your guess, and the author should reveal themselves as well. See who guessed the most correct responses. Have fun ☺!



Digging In

Have someone in your group read the short letter to Philadelphia found in Revelation 3:7-13, and answer the following questions.

1. Read Isaiah 22:22-25, in at least two versions (preferably NASB **or** KJV and ESV **or** NIV). The more literal translations (NASB/KJV/NKJV) can be a bit obtuse (a little hard to understand) in these verses, and the more dynamic translations (ESV/NIV) can be a bit general (lacking in specificity), but taken together, you can more easily get the point of the figurative language. Here's the question: Can you draw parallel relationships between the Isaiah verses and the Revelation verses? Why are these two passages intentionally connected to one another? In other words, the choice of connecting the OT Isaiah verses to the NT church of Philadelphia in Revelation is not simply to have a nice Scriptural "echo." There is meaning and purpose in the connection. This is not a trick question ☺, don't go too deep, but why does Jesus the Christ draw this connection?



Stability (The Church at Philadelphia ~ Revelation 3:7-13)
Week of October 28th – November 2nd, 2012

2. Revelation 3:11 notes that Jesus is “coming quickly.” Revelation was written roughly 1,900 years ago, and we are still waiting for Jesus’ return. 1,900 years doesn’t seem very quick, even by glacial measures. What is the purpose of “coming quickly” in Revelation, and what does it mean? Is there any immediate fulfillment of the phrase to be understood? Or is the phrase simply understood to be fulfilled in the future?
3. What is the “word of My perseverance” in Revelation 3:10? What is the “test” of Revelation 3:10, and why is the world being “tested?” What is the purpose of this test?



Connecting To Life

1. Do you feel you are being tested in your life? Relationships? Vocation? Character? Spiritually? With every test, there is also temptation to take a path of lesser resistance. It’s easy to focus on temptation (the possible negative impacts) rather than on a test from Jesus (the possible positive impacts). What could result from your current test? How can your Growth Group pray for a “grade A” result regarding your test?
2. Jesus emphasizes His power in Revelation 3:7-8 (symbol of open door), and then of great stability in Revelation 3:12. These would have been both an inspiration and encouragement for the church in Philadelphia, because of their weakness and oppression from the local Jewish population. Are there areas of your walk with Jesus Christ in which you feel weak? Areas of your life where you feel too weak to accomplish what is required? What is Jesus saying to you about your own weaknesses, and what difference does it make in your journey with Him?