

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON SIXTEEN = *The Church in Philadelphia*

Bible Class Series by Ray Reynolds (4/17/11)

Introduction: Each of the congregations in the New Testament had unique features and characteristics. They all had qualities we can learn from and use to better our own congregations today. In this lesson we are going to consider the church in Philadelphia. Let's study together

Discussion:

I. *The Geography of Philadelphia*

The city is located at the foot of Mount Tmolus (Boz Dag) not far from Sardis. It is a town and district of the Manisa Province in the Aegean region of Turkey. The city is situated in the valley of the Kuzuçay (Cogamus in antiquity). It stands on elevated ground and in fertile plain of the Gediz River, but has unstable terrain. There are several mineral springs that flow freely around this area.

II. *The History of Philadelphia*

Philadelphia is literally named the "city of brotherly love" (now called Alasehir). Philadelphia was established in 189 BC by King Eumenes II of Pergamon (197-160 BC), who named the city for the love of his brother, who would be his successor, Attalus II (159-138 BC). Attalus II did not have an heir to succeed him so he bequeathed his kingdom to Rome (133 BC). Rome established the province of Asia by combining Ionia and the former Kingdom of Pergamum. Philadelphia was in the administrative district of Sardis (28 miles southeast of Sardis).

- * In AD 17, the city suffered an earthquake, so emperor Tiberius relieved it from paying taxes.
- * Because of their reverence for the Roman throne, the city was blessed by the Empire.
- * Evidence from coinage reveals that Caligula, Vespasian, and Caracalla also blessed the city.

Philadelphia was a prosperous Byzantine city, called the "little Athens" in the 6th century AD.

- * It was known for its festivals and temples.
- * The city had a very large Christian population, but wasn't entirely converted to Christianity.
- * It was famous for Ammia (the Montanist prophetess) and the Basilica of St. John.

Philadelphia has a rich history throughout the crusades as the last Byzantine stronghold.

- * When it was finally captured by Timur, he built a wall with the corpses of his prisoners.

III. *The Beginning of the Church in Philadelphia*

There was a small Jewish population in this region.

- * The Jewish influence would have been valuable to the early Christians.

We are unsure who founded this congregation and when, but there are theories.

- * The church could have been established after Pentecost (**Acts 2:5-12**).
- * The church could have been established after great persecution of Saul (**Acts 8:1-4**).
- * The church could have been established by Paul or those at the School of Tyrannus in Ephesus where Paul worked during his third missionary journey (**Acts 19:10**).
- * The church could have been established by the apostle John (**Revelation**).

They were strong in the first century but founded during a difficult time in Christian history.

IV. The Work of the Church in Philadelphia

The church in Philadelphia had an open door from the Lord.
The church in Philadelphia was known for its faith.
The church in Philadelphia was known for fearing God, not the people.
The church in Philadelphia was known for its love.
The church in Philadelphia was known for its steadfastness.

V. The Letter to the Church in Philadelphia

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, 'He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens': I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 3:7-13 - NKJV)

VI. The Dilemmas of the Church in Philadelphia

They were becoming weak.
They were being persecuted by the Jews (**Revelation 3:9, 2:9**).
They were unstable and unsure of their future.
They were ready for some encouragement.

VII The Maturity of the Church in Philadelphia

The congregation benefited from John's correspondence.
Jesus saw that the church could have a future.

* What Did Jesus Say?

Commendation: They persevered in the faith.

Criticism: None.

Command: Keep the faith.

Compensation: They would have a place in God's presence, they would have a new name, and see the New Jerusalem.

* They needed to focus on stability and great rewards for faithfulness.

The congregation had love and strength to survive.

Conclusion: God clearly blessed the church in Philadelphia. We can see that history shows the wisdom and providence of God throughout the New Testament. We should trust Him to provide direction for the church today. It is my prayer that by studying about these wonderful congregations of the Lord's people that we will see our place in the kingdom. Next week we will begin our study of Laodicea.