

Study Eight: Revelation 3:7-13

7 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

What is this key of David? No one knows for sure but we can speculate without insisting that this is the certain interpretation. If the Bible does not explain what is meant by something obscure, then we must be careful not to impose our interpretation. You are always on safe ground when the Bible interprets itself.

A key opens and locks doors, and that is what Jesus is talking about here. He opens and shuts doors and no one can reverse what He has used the key to open.

What was David best known for? Music and worship, warfare, government, and providing for the building of the temple. Can you think of anything else?

These are the aspects that Jesus controls in His church: He draws men to worship Him; He is the Victor who has vanquished sin and the devil; He rules in the affairs of the Church; He builds the new Temple of His people, and lives in their midst.

This is another reminder of Jesus' supremacy in the Church. The Church is not about men and women, but always about Jesus. There are no leaders mentioned by name, for leaders come and go, but Jesus abides forever as the head of His church.

8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

We are reminded again that Jesus is well aware of all our deeds. You cannot hide from Him or deny what you have done. You can ask His forgiveness and that cancels the sin in His sight. It doesn't necessarily cancel the affects of the sin, but He no longer holds it against you.

When Jesus opens a door, consider it open! Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **"Because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me" (1 Corinthians 16:9 NIV).**

It seems that adversaries gather around open doors. In fact, the greater the opportunity for God, the more opposition you may incur. Opposition may serve as confirmation that you are doing the will of God!

This church had little strength. Yet they had kept Jesus' word and had not denied His name. They are one of the churches against which Jesus had nothing negative to say. Even though they had little strength, He was pleased with them.

- 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars-- I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.**

When will this happen? In this life or in the one to come? I tend to think it is in the one to come.

But the real lesson here is that Jesus has control over our enemies. He says, "I will make them come and fall down." Jesus is in control not only of the Church but of all things!

Colossians 3:3 states an interesting concept: **"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."** Your life is now hidden in Christ. For something to get **to** you, it must first get **through** Him.

Jesus is in charge of my life. He determines what honor or persecution I will receive. I trust Him, so that what gets to me has His approval. The Lord **is** my shepherd. He watches over my life.

It seems that all that call themselves a church (or synagogue) may not be a church of God. This verse seems to indicate that there are gatherings of the evil one.

Not all who claim to be Christians (or Jews) are worthy of that label. That is what confuses so many people.

- 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.**

My flesh doesn't want to endure a bad situation. I want to be free from suffering, pain and be in control of my reputation and circumstances. That is not possible if I am to be a Christian. Christ rules my life and brings what I need, whether I understand that I need it or not.

Suffering adds so much to my life that nothing else can. It teaches me faith in God, patience, and helps me to identify with others who are in pain.

Let's look at all the verses in the New Testament that instruct us to endure:

- 1. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it (1 Corinthians 4:12);**
- 2. We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life (2 Corinthians 1:8).**

3. **Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:3).**
4. **Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory (2 Tim 2:10).**
5. **if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us (2 Timothy 2:12);**
6. **But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Timothy 4:5).**
7. **Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? (Hebrews 12:7)**
8. **But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God (1 Peter 2:20).**

Jesus said, "You have obeyed my command" yet He never actually said to "endure patiently" in His earthly ministry. Instead, He "said" it though Peter and Paul, who were writing the word of God. So when they wrote the verses above, they were writing Jesus' commands. Jesus considers the New Testament His commands, whether He said them or inspired them to be written.

Jesus refers to an hour of trial coming upon the whole earth. Jesus is the God of history. There isn't a secular history that God isn't involved in, and a Church history in which He is involved.

The Old Testament prophets didn't just have a word for Israel; they often had a word for the other nations that weren't part of God's covenant Israel. Why? Because God rules over all.

We saw in study seven that God is able to preserve His people from the judgment that is around them. God will not save His people from tribulation, but will rather save them in or through tribulation.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Now I am going to get in trouble. The word soon means "soon." It doesn't mean 2,000 years from the time it was spoken. That isn't soon.

So what was Jesus saying here? We have already seen that 2 Peter 3:8 tells us that God doesn't view time as we do, for a day can be like a thousand years. Yet that is small consolation for someone who is having to endure the synagogue of Satan.

At this writing, I am almost 52 years old! The days and weeks are moving very quickly. Five years now doesn't seem as long as it used to be. I am also much closer to death than I was twenty years ago and that time has gone by quickly. But that still doesn't translate into soon.

Tribulation causes us to press into God in such a way that we are delivered from the urgency and pain of the situation. God can become so close that He has indeed delivered us without changing the circumstances. When we see that He is all in all, the pressure seems less difficult. He has transferred us in this life to a place where we see the reality that

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:1-6).

We are seated in heavenly places; that means we are above the fray. We are with Him. Every generation has thought they are the last. This one is no exception. But can God make Himself so close to us that we feel like His return is imminent? I think so. Therefore He does intervene "soon" and deliver us from the pressure of the day.

Do you agree or disagree?

12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

What in the world does this mean? I don't think we can know fully. I think we can come to a place that God is all and all. Everything else pales by comparison. We are given over to Him and He is with us in a new and lasting intimacy.

Consider Enoch in the book of Genesis: **"Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away (Genesis 5:24).** I am not suggesting we will all be taken like Enoch, but I think suffering and maturity can cause us to become so close to God that everything else pales by comparison. We walk with Him and He becomes our life.

Paul wrote to the Philippians: **"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).** He also wrote to the Galatians: **"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).**

If and when I get to that kind of relationship with Christ, the things of this world cannot affect me like they did. Christ has indeed delivered me in that situation.

Is this too mystical? I hope not, for I want to be joined to Christ in such a way that I live the truth that **“For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).**

When that happens, you are a pillar, unmovable and steadfast. You belong to God and are His servant in His church and nothing can change that, not even the failure of His servants or the imperfections of His church.

If you overcome, that means that you have come over some obstacles. There is no other way to be an overcomer.

13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

What is the Spirit saying to you? Are you honoring it by writing it down? You aren't sure? You can never be sure; that is where faith comes in. You must trust that you have heard from the Lord, without being weird about it. Some people say they've heard strange things and are not open to input that what they say they heard may not be from God. I may often say, "God spoke to me." Yet I would not be shocked if I was wrong or misheard or misinterpreted what I thought I heard.

So perhaps it would be better is I softened my insistence that I have "heard from God."

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9).