

Philadelphia

1. Little is known about this city early. Its reason for being seems a combination of its location along vital roads in this area of Asia Minor and its proximity to fields made fertile by volcanic activity in the region. The city was sometimes called “the gateway to the east”. The city suffered regularly from earthquakes due to its proximity to live volcanos in the region. It suffered along with Sardis and Laodicea the effects of the devastating quake in 17AD and was one of the cities reconstructed by the emperor Tiberius. It seems that due to the regular seismic activity and the construction practices of the time many chose to live on farms in the region rather than in the city and many also took to living outside when there were tremors.
2. The volcanic soils had been ideal for the production of vineyards and wine. In 92 AD the emperor Domitian decreed that half of all vineyards in the provinces be cut down and not replanted. The political cover for this was to have more acreage devoted to corn production for food, but others believe he was trying to protect Italian wine production in Italy. Wine had been overproduced throughout the empire so prices had likely been poor. This edict was devastating to the small city of Philadelphia which was already heavily dependent upon wine production and its soil not particularly suitable for corn. In all likelihood the city suffered.
3. The ties of this introduction are meager compared to some of the other letters.
4. The “key of David” and what follows are taken from Isaiah 22:22.
 - a. This is from a passage in Isaiah when the “prime minister”, the chief steward of the king is denounced for spending time and resources on building an elaborate tomb for himself instead of tending property to the people of his charge. The oracle declares that he would be demoted from his position and it would be given to another who will fulfil it properly.
 - b. It is clear later on in the passage that the conflict this church is gripped with is with the threat of Judaism and pressure from the synagogue. That makes this particular quote very apt. “keys” and “doors” are all about access. If Jewish Christians had been kicked out of the synagogue, what they are being threatened with is being “cut off” from access to the Father.
 - c. Use of this passage then fits very nicely. Jesus is the “servant” of the king. Jesus is the one who either opens access or closes access to the father.
5. “I know your works”
 - a. Remember the discussion we’ve had about “works”
 - b. John interrupts himself with a parenthetical statement which brings us back to the door metaphor. See also Isaiah 45. He uses this remark to set up the remark about their weakness.
 - c. “Guard/cherish/keep” my word
 - d. The word here “deny” is what is used of Peter in his denial. In Hebrews 11:24 Moses denied to be called the son of Pharaoh. Luke 12:9 those who deny Jesus will be denied before God.

6. Synagogue of Satan

- a. Once again we see that in this case the opposition to the church is coming from Jews who have not converted to Christianity. The question between the two religions continues to be the meaning of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus asserts that the promise of God flows through his work as being the fulfilment of the Old Testament work. Again, this is not necessarily an ethnic conflict. There were likely Jews in the Christian church making the conflict all the more difficult.
- b. The image here is not forced worship but voluntary worship. It relates to Romans 11 where Paul understand the Gentile gathering as being instrumental in the gathering of the Jews into God's kingdom. This too continues to relate to Isaiah 45 and Isaiah 60 where the nations now worship God and offer him their gifts.
- c. There is in this a note of vindication. It is a reversal of fortunes, again see Isaiah 60.