

## The Sardis Period

Sardis symbolizes the church of the Reformation. The Sardian period covers the sixteenth, seventeenth, and most of the eighteenth centuries in a special sense, but doubtless embraces the entire history of Protestantism to the end of the gospel dispensation. "Then came the Sardian period-the age of separation and return to the rule of Christ. The age of comparative freedom from Balaam and his doctrines, from the Nicolaitanes and their tenants, from Jezebel and her fornication. An age of many worthy names, but marked with deadness withal, and having much of which to repent; an age covering the spiritual lethargy of the Protestant countries before the great evangelical movements of the last hundred years, which brought us to the Philadelphian era." (Seiss, Page 143) The letter to Sardis pictures "the inauguration, development, corruption, and judgment of Protestantism." (McCarrell, Page 45.) It represents the glory of a past splendor in contrast with a present unabated spiritual decline, another "falling away," or apostasy.

To Sardis, Christ introduces Himself as the possessor of "the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." The seven Spirits represent the Holy Spirit in the fullness and completeness of His power and operation. To the church that was spiritually dead and whose lamp of faith was flickering and almost extinguished, Christ represents Himself as having the fullness of spiritual power and the completeness of spiritual gifts. The Spirit is sometimes called the "Giver of Life." With this gift there is hope even for a dead church.

"The seven stars" represent the human guides and teachers of the church, including "the angel of the church in Sardis." Here is shown the relation between Christ as the giver of the Holy Spirit and as the head of a ministry of human agents. The success of Christ's ministers depends upon the gift of the Holy Spirit. Here is positive proof that the seven Spirits and the seven angels are not the same, as some contend. It is the seven Spirits who make the seven stars shine. When ministers lose the gift of the Spirit they cease to shine in God's firmament, and become "wandering stars." (Jude 13.)

The Sardians had a name and reputation of life, but in reality they were dead. "Men say you are living, though you are dead," and "You are supposed to be alive but in reality you are dead," are other translations. Every professed Christian says by his very profession that he is alive and in possession of eternal life. By calling himself a Christian, he is living on the name of Christ. If he is dead spiritually, he is making a false claim and is under a terrible deception, likened to a corpse making a pretense of life. Like Samson of old the modern church is spiritually dead and "know not that the Lord was departed."

The church may have much organization and the most up-to-date machinery, so that it hums with activity, making every pretense of life and vitality. Swete speaks of Sardis as "the paradox of death under the name of life." (Page 48.) There is "a form of godliness" with a denial of "the power thereof." There is nothing wrong with a form of doctrine and service provided it is vitalized by the presence and power of Christ. Otherwise it is lifeless and therefore worthless. To God life is more important than all else. "With Him a name to live amounts to nothing when it happens to be fastened to a corpse." (McKnight, Page 227.)

One writer says: "The Reformers began well, but many of their successors were not so consecrated as they and so their works were not found perfect before God. They had a name to live and yet were dead, and the life of vital godliness which sprang from the great doctrines of the Reformers, gradually degenerated into lifeless formalism, until at the time of John Wesley the conditions were such that many of the ministers of the Established Churches of Europe were

drunkards and libertines and were among the lowest of the people. Men like the Wesleys, Whitfield, the Puritans and the Pietists began to protest against these things with such earnestness and unction of the Spirit of God that they succeeded in bringing about the modern revival and missionary period typified by the conditions at Philadelphia.” - SAMUEL H. TURNER, Outline Studies in the Book of Revelation, Page 13.

Speaking of this period of lifeless formalism, Matthew Arnold wrote:

“Its form still stood without a breach,  
When life and warmth were fled,  
And still it spoke its wonted speech;  
But every word was dead.”

Protestantism was founded on a protest against the doctrines and corrupt practices of Romanism. The name continues large with life and reputation, but it has largely lost its significance. The average Protestant is ignorant of the great truth of justification by faith and other doctrines on which Protestantism was founded. Lack of a knowledge of the Scriptures has produced spiritual weakness and worldly conformity in many churches, and thus robbed most Protestants of their protest.

The modern church has built up an enviable reputation for activity. Its services are orthodox in form and are fairly well attended. It has many rallies, campaigns, and anniversaries. Many prominent people are numbered among its membership, and yet with all this machinery and pretense to life the modern church is declared to be dead. This is evident first of all by the almost total absence of spiritual life. Very few souls are being saved, and even the saints are slipping in their religious experience. In the second place the lives of many church members are tarnished by sin so that only a few “have not defiled their garments,”

### **Modern Protestantism**

James Anthony Froude thus describes modern Protestantism: “Protestantism has made no converts to speak of in Europe since the sixteenth century. It shot up in two generations to its full stature, and became an established creed with defined boundaries; and the many millions who in Catholic countries proclaim their indifference to their religion, either by neglect or contempt, do not swell the congregations of the Protestant church or convent. Their objections to the Church of Rome are objections equally to all forms of dogmatic and doctrinal Christianity. And so it has come about that the old enemies are becoming friends in the presence of a common foe. Catholics speak tenderly of Protestants as keeping alive belief in the creeds, and look forward to their return to the sheepfold. While the old Antichrist, the Scarlet woman on the seven hills, drunk with the blood of the saints, is now treated by Protestantism as an old sister and a valiant ally in the great war against infidelity. The points of difference are forgotten. The points of union are passionately dwelt upon, and the remnants of idolatry which the more ardent Protestants once abhorred and denounced are now regarded as having been providentially preserved as a means of making up the quarrel and bringing back the churches into communion. The dread of popery is gone. The ceremonial system, once execrated as a service of Satan, is regarded as a thing at worst indifferent, perhaps in itself desirable. And even those who are conscious of no tendency to what they still call corruption are practically forsaking the faith of their fathers, and re-establishing, so far as they can or dare, those very things which their fathers revolted against.”

Sardis not only represents “those escaping” or “that which “remains” after the great apostasy and terrible persecutions of the Middle Ages, but some authorities believe that the word Sardis means “remnant” or “an escaped few,” and therefore represents Protestantism after what was vital in it had evaporated so that there are only a few faithful ones remaining. There would be a “remnant” who would continue the work of reform even after the Reformation had waned and Protestantism in general was dead. There would be “a few names,” or “a few souls” (Moffatt), in Sardis who had “not defiled their garments.”

The promise is that during the decadence of Protestantism a few would maintain their loyalty and spiritual experience, even in a church that had more profession than vital godliness. In the beginning Protestantism was very much alive and acquired a name that has long outlived its spirituality. In Daniel 11:32-34 is described the days when men of God did “exploits” in breaking the papal power and ushering in the dawn of a new day for Christendom. This prophecy also indicates a later popularity of the movement that brought the Reformation to a standstill. Success brought feelings of pride and overconfidence, so that the church ceased to “be watchful.” The various church factions hid behind man-made creeds and refused further light. They began to live on the names and reputations of their founding fathers and failed to watch, with fatal results.

### **A Partial Reformation**

“I have not found thy works perfect before God,” is the divine indictment. Perfect as used here means “fulfilled,” or “up to the mark or standard.” “I have found no works of your perfected before my God” is the American Revised Version, and “fully performed” is the rendering in the Emphatic Diaglott. This indicates that the Reformation was started but not completed. It came to a standstill, and was not carried to its consummation. The good work of reform that was so nobly begun did not come to perfection, and Christ’s people were therefore not complete before God. The great truths which were “received and heard” were not appreciated and remembered.

The new spiritual life engendered by the message of the Reformers soon languished, and eventually ended in stagnation and death. With all the boasting and pretense of life there was little left except a hollow shell and a lifeless form. The great enemy had gained a victory on a new battlefield. He had entered the church in disguise and as a fifth columnist accomplished from within what he had never been able to do from without. Seiss declares that with this change Protestantism “was one step further in its process of ripening for ultimate rejection.” (Page 184.)

Protestantism became stagnant and lifeless because it ceased to protest and therefore failed to finish the work of reform. Dr. Philip Schaff, in his History of the Christian, Church, The German Reformation, Volume 1, Page 7, 8, says: “The Reformation of the sixteenth century is not the finale, but a movement still in progress,” and Sir Robert Peel, while Prime Minister of England, in 1840, said: “The day is not far distant, and it may be very near, when we shall have to fight the battle of the Reformation over again.” The Reformation cannot be completed until God’s people are brought all the way back to the faith once delivered to the church by Christ and His apostles.

The statement “ready to die,” indicates some signs of life. Swete declares that “amid the general reign of spiritual death Christ detected vestiges of life, though they were on the point of becoming extinct.” (Page 49.) The elements of spiritual life, love, faith, missionary energy, and watchfulness were “ready to die” and would soon disappear if not revived and strengthened. “Strengthen those thy remaining few graces, which in thy spiritual deadly slumber are not yet

quite extinct.” - HENRY ALFORD, *The Greek Testament*, Volume 4, part 2, Page 580. The command is to awake and watch. Christ does not say, “Arise from the dead,” because there is some life left which might be fanned into a flame. The situation is not hopeless, because Christ is able to give life even to the dead forms of religion.

The message to Sardis bears witness to a spiritual decline from a far better state. As in the Ephesian message, the Sardian letter applies chiefly to the close rather than the beginning of the period. It applies to the time when rationalism denied the faith of the early Reformers, and the church became deadened by cold formalism. Protestantism today is filled with members who are dead spiritually. There are still many works; in fact, they have largely supplanted faith, and have “become to the majority the all-important thing in religion. But dead faith can only produce dead works. Such works may reach the standard of man’s perfection, but they are not “perfect before God.” They do not measure up to His requirements. The call to modern Protestantism is to wake up and become watchful before being overtaken by sudden and unexpected disaster.

### **Further Reformation Demanded**

The divine call is for a further or continuing reformation. Remembering the great truths of the Reformation of the sixteenth century and what they accomplished in liberating the world from the slavery of papal domination, the church today is asked to “hold fast” to the truths then revealed, and then “repent,” or “reform.” (Emphatic Diaglott.) The call is for a new or further reformation, for the finishing of the one that had been arrested by a second “falling away,” or apostasy. There must be an awakening from spiritual death. “Wake up, rally what is still left to you, though it is on the very point of death.” (Moffatt.)

A sleeping sentinel is considered a traitor. The same must be true of a sleeping minister or watchman of the church. No person can reach such a high pinnacle of Christian attainment that he is safe from the danger of falling and can with safety be off guard for a single moment. “Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” is the warning. Self-deception is perhaps the greatest of all sins. To boast of life when on the verge of death is a tragic state. The call of the Sardian message is to return to the spiritual experience and high standards of the reformers and founders of the church and then complete the work they had so well begun. The appeal is summed up in the statement, “Awake thou that sleeps, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” Ephesians 5:14.

Because Protestants have lost much of what the pioneers had, they are admonished to remember the past glorious history and experience, and to return to “the faith once delivered unto the saints,” but forgotten by their children. What marvelous doctrines the saints had restored to them by the Reformation, and what wonderful spiritual revivals have swept through the church from time to time since those days of spiritual heroes with their mighty exploits. It would be profitable for modern Christians to contemplate not only the work of Luther and his fellow Reformers, but also of the Wesleys, Whitefield, Knox, Finney, Spurgeon, and Moody. We need more of the faith and works of our fathers.

The similarity between the Ephesian and Sardis periods is striking. Both had a glorious beginning, with a corresponding spiritual decline to a condition of half warmness in affection and deadness in spiritual life. The Christians of both periods are therefore urged to remember the past and to repent and return to the love and faith and practice of their fathers. Because of the wonderful opportunities for advancement in knowledge and spiritual experience, the modern

Sardians have no excuse for their back sliding state, and for them Christ has no praise or commendation.

As an incentive to watchfulness Christ said to the Sardians, “You will certainly not know the hour at which I will come to judge you.” (Weymouth.) The Sardian period reaches to the time of the judgment and the coming of Christ. The secret coming of judgment “in such an hour as you think not” and as the visit of a thief in the night is referred to in Matthew 24:40-44; Luke 21:34-36. (See also 1 Thessalonians 5:3-5.) Just as the overconfident and self-satisfied citizens of Sardis were suddenly surprised and overtaken by judgments, so the religious world in general will be caught in an overwhelming surprise because of the failure to watch.

But there is to be a faithful remnant. Jesus declared that there are “a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.” The promise is “And they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.” Names here has the meaning of “persons” – “a few souls.” (Moffatt.) They are the persons whose names are in the book of life. Christ knows His people by name. The reference may indicate a registry in the Sardis church typical of the registry in heaven in which the names of the saints are enrolled.

There will be a remnant in decadent Protestantism who will repent and carry the Reformation to completion. They will be watching and waiting when Jesus returns. Their character garments will not be defiled by sin. While Christendom as a whole will be unready for the crisis, a remnant will be prepared and saved. (Joel 2:32; Revelation 12:17.) There can be living souls even in the midst of a dead church. Garments soiled by sin can be cleansed by the blood of Christ and made “as white as snow.” This remnant will walk with Christ in white in Paradise restored, “for they are worthy.” They are worthy on the basis of grace and God’s acceptance rather than actual perfection as measured according to strict justice. The worthiness is relative rather than absolute.

### **The Promised Reward**

The promise to the faithful remnant in Sardis is threefold. They are to be clothed in the symbolic white robes of victory, their names -will not be blotted out of the book of life, and Christ will confess their names before His Father and the angels. The Hebrews regarded holiness as a beautiful white robe that could be soiled by sin. When a white-robed priest committed a sin that disqualified him for the duties of his sacred office, his white garment was taken from him and he was given a black robe in its place. His name was also stricken from the sacerdotal register. In the Scriptures white is used as the symbol of both purity and triumph. (Zechariah 3:3-5; Revelation 7:13, 14; 19:7, 8, 11-14.)

It was the custom of the early Christians who were candidates for baptism to put on white robes and march in a procession to the place where the sacrament was ministered. This was the evidence to all that they had become Christians. This custom still prevails to some extent in the South among the colored Baptists. The white robe of our text is the robe of righteousness and glory worn by the redeemed and furnished by the Divine Host. We are told that the Lord is “clothed with honor and majesty,” and covers Himself “with light as with a garment.” (Psalm 104:1, 2.) The symbol is doubtless that of the glittering and dazzling linen garments worn by the high priest on important occasions. Of the transfiguration of Jesus we read: “His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.” Mark 9:3. The glorified saints are promised such a covering as they march in triumph through the gates of pearl into the celestial city and kingdom of glory.

In ancient Rome the white toga was symbolic of joy and victory, and black garments were symbolic of mourning and defeat. Black was worn by captives and slaves. Successful candidates for office were clothed in white robes by their friends and marched in a triumphal procession to their new official headquarters. On days of a Roman triumph all citizens were dressed in white and Rome was called "The White City." The victorious general and his staff wore white togas and rode on white horses or in chariots drawn by white horses. The poet Juvenal wrote:

"And now the imperial eagle, raised on high, With golden beak, the march of majesty;  
Trumpets before, and on the left and right, A cavalcade of nobles, all in white."

In Greek and Roman cities the names of the citizens were registered as in modern times. It was a special privilege to be a registered citizen and a terrible disgrace to have the name expunged, or blotted out, because of unworthy conduct. The blotting out of the name from the citizenship registry was the preliminary step to the execution of the sentence of death or banishment for life. The names of the spiritually dead members of the Sardis church could not be retained in the book of life. When the investigative judgment is over, only the names of the spiritually alive will be found recorded in the family record in heaven. The book of life is for the names of the victors in the warfare against evil. (Revelation 20:12, 15; 21:27.)

On the other hand the names of hypocrites and backsliders, together with their recorded good deeds, will be erased. (Exodus 32:32, 33; Nehemiah 13:14.) Either the name is blotted out of the book of life or the sins are erased from the books of record. Peter said, "Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Acts 3:19. Only the sins of those who openly confess Christ as their Advocate will be blotted out. (Matthew 10:32, 33.) The promise of our text implies a solemn warning to those who do not confess and overcome sin. It indicates that it is possible to fall from grace. The picture is doubtless drawn from a Roman triumph given a victorious general and his army, which is used as a type of the final triumphal procession of Christ and the redeemed into the celestial city. As they approach the city, the command goes forth to the angel gatekeepers, "Open you the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in." Isaiah 26:2.

#### **14. PHILADELPHIA - BROTHERLY LOVE**

AND TO the angel of the church in Philadelphia write. These things said He that is holy, He that is true, He that bath the key of David, He that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens. I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. For thou has a little strength, and has kept My word, and has not denied My name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie - behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. "Because thou has kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou has, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out. And I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God: and I will write upon him My new name. Re that bath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches." Revelation 3:7-13.

Philadelphia was located about twenty-eight miles southeast of Sardis. The city was founded in 189 BC by Attalus Philadelphus, for whom it was named. Some believe that it was so named also because of the love and loyalty existing between Philadelphus and his brother, the king of Lydia. The city was also known as Decapolis, because it was one of the ten cities of the plain. It was sometimes called Little Athens because of the magnificence of its public buildings. Its modern Turkish name is Ala Shehr, which means "The City of God" or "The Exalted City." Philadelphia has thus been given a number of new names.

Philadelphia guarded and commanded an important pass through the mountains between the Hermus and Meander valleys. It was thus the keeper of the key to the door, or gateway, to the eastern highlands, with the power to open and close according to the will of the officials. Through this portal passed the mail and trade and commerce of the west to the wide regions of central and eastern Lydia. The introduction of Christ in His epistle therefore had a forceful meaning to the Philadelphians. He reminded them of other and more important doors, to which He alone holds the key, with the power and authority to open and shut.

### **A Place of Trial**

Philadelphia was subject to frequent and severe earthquakes. Trench (page 181) declared that "no city of Asia Minor suffered more, or so much, from violent and oft-recurring earthquakes," and the historian Strabo, who lived between 64 BC and AD 21, said that Philadelphia was "full of earthquakes." He may have been there at the time of the great earthquake that destroyed the City in AD 17. That was only one of a series of quakes that kept the citizens in a state of fearful expectancy. Strabo wrote: "Philadelphia has no trustworthy walls, but daily in one direction or another they keep tottering and falling apart. The inhabitants, however, pursue their original purpose, ever keeping in mind the writhing pangs of the ground, and building with a view to counteracting them." (Book 12, Chapter 8.)

Strabo was astonished that a city should ever have been founded in such a locality, and he questioned the sanity of the people for re-entering the ruined city and planning to rebuild to withstand the future shocks which were momentarily expected. He felt that when people are driven from a city by earthquakes they ought to be wise enough never to return. He declared that the walls of the houses were incessantly opening, and sometimes one, and sometimes another part of the city was experiencing some damage. The citizens therefore lived in constant dread of quaking earth and falling buildings.

Because of this situation the people often fled to the open country and lived in tents or booths in earthquake seasons in order to keep themselves beyond the range of disaster. Although the city was often shattered and the migrations from its ruins were frequent, so that its citizens lived in constant terror, yet in spite of an ever present sense of danger the brave Philadelphians were determined to make the city realize the aims for which it was founded. This constant fear of the day of trial, when the citizens must flee for their lives, made the language employed by Christ very striking. (Verses 10-12.) He encouraged His people with the promise that if faithful they would one day enter the New Jerusalem, the city of God, where they could dwell safely and "go no more out." When the Tartars captured the city of Philadelphia in 1403 it is said that they built a wall around it with the bodies of their victims.

### **The Philadelphian Message**

This message reveals the best spiritual condition of any of the seven churches. The letter is addressed to a small but exceptional company who had remained faithful in the midst of a large number who had failed. The message indicates a commendable change for the better from the Sardian condition of spiritual deadness. To the Philadelphians had come a renewal of life and love and missionary zeal, a resurrection from spiritual death, a return to the first love of the early Ephesian period. Suffering Smyrna and tried Philadelphia are the only two of the seven churches that received no rebuke, and with Thyatira are the only ones that remain of the original seven. The present city has a population of about 15,000, a third of whom are professed Christians. Philadelphia held out against the conquering Turks long after the other cities of Asia, except Smyrna, had fallen. After being besieged by a powerful Ottoman army till the inhabitants were reduced to the verge of starvation, they held out for eleven years before yielding, in AD 1390, surrendering on excellent terms.

The courage and heroism of the Christian defenders of the city aroused the admiration of the historian Gibbon, who wrote: "In the loss of Ephesus the Christians deplored the fall of the first angel, the extinction of the first candlestick, of the Revelation; the destruction is complete. The circus and three stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes; Sardes is reduced to a miserable village; the God of Mahomet, without a rival or a son, is evoked in the mosques of Thyatira and Pergamos. . . . Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy or courage. At a distance from the sea, forgotten by the emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion and freedom above fourscore years, and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect—a column in the scene of ruins—a pleasing example that the paths of honor and safety may sometimes be the same." (Gibbon, Volume 2, Chapter 64.) Gibbon doubtless refers to the lone pillar that for so many years stood like a sentinel amid the ruins of the ancient city. I will make you "a pillar in the temple of My God" is the divine promise to the Christian victor.

### **The Philadelphian Period**

The era of brotherly love came as the result of a great revival in Protestantism. The period covers the latter part of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, until the beginning of the Laodicean state. In 1865 Joseph A. Seiss declared that "the Philadelphian era [was] marked by a closer adherence to the written word, and more fraternity among Christians, but [is] now rapidly giving place to Laodicean half warmness." (Page 143.)

The Philadelphian condition of brotherly love and missionary zeal must again prevail in the remnant who are to be translated when Christ returns. The message shows clearly that this period reaches to the end. It began with the great foreign missions movement, which sent a revival through Protestantism and ushered in an era of love for both God and man such as had not been known since apostolic days. Love for the Elder Brother always leads to love for the other brothers. This is the love that was lost during the Ephesian period. It is not fully regained till just before Jesus returns. Its return to the church will bring a repetition of Pentecostal power.

Those who escaped from the dominion of Jezebel and the spiritual deadness of Sardis, began to remember how they had "received and heard," and repented. The arrested Reformation was started again. Dead Christendom was mightily stirred 'by great spiritual revivals bringing renewed life and love and unity. The church entered upon a program of world evangelism to fulfill the great commission. May 31, 1792, William Carey preached his memorable sermon on



foreign missions from Isaiah 54:2, 3. This date is reckoned as the birth of modern missions, and if an exact date can be chosen it may also mark the beginning of the Philadelphian period of the universal church.

The revival movement spread through all denominations and broke down many of the barriers that had hitherto separated the different religious sects. The Wesleys and Whitefield had an important part in this great movement that ushered in the era of brotherly love. Of this movement one writer said: "Thus early the prophetic hope was expressed that this uprising for the world's redemption 'will spread to every Christian bosom, to the Dutch, German, American, and all Protestant churches, till the whole professing world shall burn with fervent love, and labor to spread in every heathen land the sweet savor of the Redeemer's name.'" -Quoted by D. L Leonard, A Hundred Years of Missions, Page 87. On page 86 he quotes Dr. Bogue as saying: "This will be ever remembered by us as the era of Christian benevolence."

In speaking again of the dawn of this new day, the same author said: "In January, 1797, it could be affirmed concerning the religious fervor resulting far and wide: Christians in every corner of the land are meeting in a regular manner, and pouring out their souls for God's blessing on the world. And again: The efforts most successfully made to introduce the Gospel to the South Seas have had a most powerful tendency to unite the devoted servants of Christ of every denomination in the bonds of brotherly love, and to awaken zeal to help the perishing multitudes in our own country, and also the Jews. Inspiring letters came too from Basle, which since 1771 had been the seat of a wide-spread movement to maintain evangelical doctrine and piety. Certain devout German brethren sent their congratulations couched in these glowing words: "It is like the dawn promising the beautiful day after the dark night. It is the beginning of a new epoch for the kingdom of God on earth." - Ibid., Page 89-91.

In 1797 the first missionaries landed in Tahiti in the South Pacific. Robert Morrison went to China in 1807, and Robert Moffat to Africa in 1817. In the same year John Williams began the work of exploring and Christianizing the South Sea Island races. In 1840 David Livingstone began his missionary explorations of Africa. The British and Foreign Bible Society was organized in 1804, and the American Bible Society in 1816. The multiplication of Bibles in various languages was an essential part of the program of world evangelism that began with the Philadelphian era.

### **The Second Advent Movement**

This great revival of Christian love resulting in a burden for world evangelism naturally culminated in the Great Second Advent Movement. Church leaders around the world began the study of the prophetic word, and almost simultaneously came to the unanimous conclusion that the end of the reign of sin was near and that Jesus would soon return in fulfillment of His promise. In fact no other conclusion is possible from the study of Bible prophecy. This prophetic investigation centered on the books of Daniel and the Revelation, and the great sermon of Christ in answer to the question of the disciples, "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

On May 19, 1780, the sun was supernaturally darkened in fulfillment of prophecy, and the predicted shower of falling meteors followed on the night of November 13, 1833. Thousands of ministers of many denominations began to proclaim the message of the Second Advent, and all Christendom was stirred. Based on the 2300-year time prophecy of Daniel 8 and 9, many came

to the conclusion that Christ would return in 1843, and, later, in 1844. There swept over the Christian world the greatest revival since Pentecost and early apostolic times. The believers in the Advent hope were brought into a state of brotherly love and unity and godliness such as had not been known since the beginning of the Christian Era. It has been suggested that the Philadelphian period began in 1798 with the close of the 1260 years of papal dominion, and reached to the close of the 2300-year time prophecy in 1844, when the investigative judgment began in heaven and the Laodicean state of the church was ushered in by the disappointment.

To the holiest of the seven churches Christ introduces Himself as “He that is holy” and “He that is true.” “The Holy One of Israel” is speaking to His people. The Head of the church lays claim to divinity, and every word He speaks is true and dependable. His divinity is also proved by the fact that He has “the key of David” because He is the “Son of David,” with the right to occupy his throne. Christ holds the key to the house of David, which is the kingdom of heaven. He has the authority to open and close the heavenly kingdom and decide who can and who cannot enter. All must appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

### **Citizenship is possible only through Him.**

The declaration that Christ has possession of the key of David, with the authority to open and shut, is a quotation of a Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 22:22. “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon His shoulder; so He shall open, and none shall shut; and He shall shut, and none shall open.” (See also Luke 1:32, 33.) A key is the means of locking and unlocking doors, and is therefore a symbol of power and authority. Since the year 605 BC, when Israel’s last independent king, Jehoiakim, was dethroned by Nebuchadnezzar, the house and throne room of David have been closed and locked. The throne of David will remain vacant “until He come whose right it is.” (See Ezekiel 21:23-27.) The Philadelphian message indicates that the time is near when Christ, the Son of David, is about to take His rightful place on the long-unoccupied throne of Adam and David. We are told that this will take place at His Second Advent. (Matthew 25:31-34.)

There are several other doors that Christ alone can open and shut.

1. The door of the tomb. The keys of death and the grave are in the keeping of Him who is “the resurrection, and the life.” (Revelation 1:18.) When the Philadelphian message applies to the church, the time of the resurrection of the righteous is drawing near.

2. The door into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, which was opened in 1844, at the close of the 2300 years. This door into the final phase of the mediatorial ministry of Christ is mentioned in Revelation 4:1; 11:18, 19.

3. The doors of missionary opportunity. Paul said that when he visited Troas “to preach Christ’s gospel a door was opened unto me of the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 2:12.) Paul and Barnabas related to the church of Antioch how God “had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” (Acts 14:27.) Philadelphia had the power to open and close the door through the mountains reaching to the cities of the great tablelands of Asia. The Philadelphian period of Christendom is that of the open door to foreign missions. It was the beginning of the modern missionary age, when the door of the kingdom of heaven is to be open wide to all nations. During this period a divine hand began to open the hitherto closed mission fields of the world so that the

gospel commission could be finished and the prophecy of Revelation 14:6-14 fulfilled.

4. The door of probation, which will be closed when Christ completes His priestly mission and becomes the Lord of lords and King of kings. Christ alone through His atoning death has the authority to open and close the gates of Paradise. Jesus said: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Luke 13:24.

### **A Faithful Remnant**

Some believe that Philadelphia not only means "brotherly love" but also "faithful remnant." The Philadelphians constitute the faithful remnant of the universal church, 9 who will be translated when Jesus comes. The statement ' "For thou has a little strength," has been rather difficult to explain. It seems that the open door of missionary opportunity was set before them because they had a little strength, the only spiritual strength left in Christendom. The Sardians were wholly dead and powerless. Now God had found a people with a little strength for missionary endeavor. They had responded to the appeal to "be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain." They were doubtless also conscious of their weakness, and therefore qualified to do service for Christ. They were not overconfident, like the Sardians, or self satisfied, like the Laodiceans. Their "little strength" led them to rely on the Word and power of God. Others take the position that the reference has to do with their small numbers and material weakness. Trench declares that they were "a little flock, poor in worldly goods, and of small account in the eyes of men." (Page 187.) The former seems the more probable explanation. The first qualification for service in the cause of Christ is a recognition of our spiritual poverty.

The promise that those who claimed to be Jews but were rather of the synagogue of Satan would be made to worship at the feet of the true Israelites and to know that God had loved them, was an even better promise than a similar one made to Smyrna. In the Smyrnan letter an assurance was given that the enemies of Christ would not prevail against the church. But here the promise is that the church would prevail against her enemies who made hypocritical pretensions of being God's chosen people. It is a solemn warning against apostasy.

The Jews bitterly persecuted those of their nation who became Christians, and treated them as the outcasts of Israel. They were put out of the synagogue and excluded from the temple and its services and even from the city of Jerusalem, which had long been the city of God. Now the true Messiah, who has the authority to open and close the door into the fold of the true Israel, admits genuine Christians as the only true Jews, and excludes their opponents. He promises the persecuted Christians an entrance into the New Jerusalem, which He calls "the city of My God," and from which they will "go no more out." All will someday acknowledge that the love of Christ is centered on those who are Israelites indeed, the faithful of all nations.

Verse 10 pictures a world crisis: "Because in spite of suffering you have guarded My word, I in turn will guard you from the hour of trial which is soon coming upon the whole world, to put to the test the inhabitants of the earth." (Weymouth.) It is evident that this is still future, which fact is proof that the Philadelphian condition will be revived and continue to the very end. It seems that the last four of the seven churches continue in some respects till the coming of Christ. Just before the end the church and the world must pass through the crucible so as to separate the dross from the gold. Before Christ returns there must be a clear distinction between the church and the world, and this is made possible by a great crisis.

The distinction between true and false professors of religion is not always apparent at the present time. Malachi 3:2, 3 pictures Christ as a silversmith refining and testing His people. The fiery trials of the furnace burn out the dross till He can see in them the reflection of His own image. "The word of My patience" doubtless includes the whole gospel, which is the teaching which finds its central truth in the patience of Christ. True Christians will be kept from falling, because they have kept His word. In Deuteronomy 4:34 the plagues of Egypt are called "temptations." Those who keep the Word of Christ's patience during the last crisis will be kept from the seven last plagues. The language indicates that pressure will be used to compel God's faithful remnant to let go their hold on His truth. It is to this time that Revelation 12:17 applies.

### **Second Advent Near**

The statement "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou has, that no man take thy crown" indicates that the Second Advent of Christ is at hand. Beckwith declares that this is "the keynote of the book," and Trench says that "the speedy coming of the Lord" is "the ever-recurring keynote of this book." (Page 191.) The language indicates that the severe test will not be of long duration. The patient endurance of the saints will soon 'be rewarded, and in the brief interval they must "hold that fast" which they had received, till deliverance comes. The crowns of victory depend on the keeping of the Word of Christ's patience to the very end. There is no reward for the quitter.

The admonition does not mean that one person gains the crown that another loses, as in an athletic contest. "That your wreath of victory be not taken away from you" is the Weymouth translation. Paul wrote: "Let no man beguile you of your reward." Colossians 2:18. The person who deceives another so that he loses his crown of eternal life and righteousness does not himself get the lost reward. The Greek and Roman athletes who gained crowns, or wreaths, of victory made every effort to keep others from taking them away from them in subsequent contests. The Christian must maintain his spiritual experience or lose his eternal reward.

The language of our text seems to indicate a delay of the Second Advent beyond the expectation of the church. Christ's Advent was indeed very near at the close of the Philadelphian period proper, when the faithful of Christendom were expecting that great event and had made preparation for it. But His coming has been delayed by the entrance of the church into the terrible Laodicean condition of half warmness in affection and flagging missionary zeal. In the parable the ten virgins, who represent the people of God who are expecting the coming of the Bridegroom, "all slumbered and slept" while "the 'bridegroom tarried.'" (Matthew 25:1-5.)

This is the divinely indicated reason for the delay in the Second Advent of Christ that makes the admonition of our text necessary. Only those who patiently hold fast through the tarrying time will be saved and crowned with wreaths of victory. According to Hebrews 10:35-37, "the word of my patience" seems to have to do with the attitude of the church during the delay of the Second Advent. It is because of this delay that many cast away their confidence and lose their reward. They do not live and walk by faith but say in their hearts, "My Lord delayed His coming," which leads them to smite their fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken. (Matthew 24:48-51.)

### **The Promised Reward**

The overcomer is to be made a permanent pillar in the temple of God, on which is to be inscribed the new name representing the character of God. The new home of the Christian victor

is the New Jerusalem. In the New Testament the chief men in the church are called pillars, and all Christians are called living stones in the church temple. It is the pillars that keep in place and uphold the multitude of lesser stones of a temple. A pillar is symbolic of dignity, beauty, permanence, stability, and strength. In Solomon's temple were two brazen pillars thirty feet in height, called Jachin, meaning "He shall establish," and Boaz, "In it is strength." The promise to the overcomer is that " 'he shall be one of the great and beautiful stones on which the others rest,' but 'he shall be so placed that he cannot be removed while the whole fabric stands.'" (Cambridge Bible.)

Just as the pillar cannot be moved as long as the building stands, so the Christian victor in the closing crisis shall "go no more out" of the temple of God. His triumph is permanent. "He shall never go out from it again" is the Weymouth translation. Charles declares that "fixity of character is at last achieved." (Page 91.) There will be no more backsliding. God's faithful remnant reach the highlands of holiness, the plateau of perfection, so that they go triumphantly through the final day of test and trial. They have not been turned aside by the dragon's roar, or defiled by the corruption of the world. They are clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ's righteousness, and their names are enrolled among the faithful of all ages in the Lamb's book of life. Augustine said: "Who would not yearn for that city out of which no friend departs, and into which no enemy enters."

Philadelphia was a city of many new names. When the city was destroyed by the great earthquake of AD 70, Tiberius gave \$600,000 to help rebuild. In appreciation the citizens changed the name of the city to Neo-Caesarea in honor of the donor, but when the emperor became a cruel tyrant, the Philadelphians became ashamed of the new name. During the reign of Vespasian the name was again changed, to Flavia, in his honor, as he was the first of the Flavian family to rule. These changes of name doubtless called for great celebrations of dedication, when the whole city worshiped the emperor in whose honor the new name was given. Such occasions brought an hour of trial to every Christian in the city.

The victors are called pillars, on which the character of God is written. Important writings were engraved on the pillars of the ancient temples, especially the names of the emperors who built them and to whom they were dedicated. McCarrell declares that "in Apostolic days, pillars were erected to rulers and generals with testimonies of their accomplishments chiseled upon them." (Page 64.) This was also true of the triumphal arches dedicated to victorious generals. The emperor who erected a temple was usually given divine honors and worshiped as a god. This meant persecution for those who like the three Hebrew worthies refused to bow the knee.

A new name is necessary for those who develop a new character. This is a renewal of the promise of Revelation 2:17. When Jacob's character was changed the Lord changed his name, for the purpose of a name is to describe the character. The New Jerusalem is the capital city of the renewed kingdom, on whose throne will sit the Son of David. The overcomer will be a citizen of that kingdom forever. In that city the names of all its citizens are enrolled. (Heb. 12:22, 23.) With the name of God and the name of the city of God written on the overcomer, "the gates of hell shall not prevail" to keep him from reaching the promised destination.