

Understanding Revelation – Topic 5

# **Philadelphia and the Evangelical Revival**

How it laid the foundation for the great  
Second Advent movement of 1833–1844

**An exposition of Revelation Chapter 3:7-13**

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## Background

Philadelphia is the sixth of the seven churches. The focus of this era demonstrates how the evangelical revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries faithfully fulfilled the Philadelphian period of the seven churches of Revelation and laid the foundation for the great Second Advent movement of 1843 -1844.

### Time period of Philadelphia

As noted already in the exposition of Revelation Chapter 1, the historical view of the messages to the seven churches indicates that they represent the seven periods of the Christian church, from the time of the first advent through to the second advent of Christ. This has been the view of the leading Bible scholars down through the centuries and it is the view of Seventh-day Adventists.

*The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in the different periods of Christian era.<sup>1</sup>*

The very last period of the seven churches is known as the era of the Church of Laodicea. The meaning of *Laodicea* is *the judged or justified* people. It is derived from two words: *Laos* meaning 'people' and *dikaiois* meaning 'justified' or 'judged'.<sup>2</sup> The meaning of the name provides a clue to the time period of the final church of Laodicea.

The judging of the people is an allusion to the pre-advent judgment, or investigative judgment, which takes place in the heavenly sanctuary. This began in 1844 and will conclude at the close of human probation. With this understanding then, the seventh period is seen to commence in 1844 and terminate near the Second Advent of Christ. If Laodicea commenced in 1844, then we could logically conclude that the Philadelphian period ended in 1844. If this is the case, when did the Philadelphian period commence?

The timeframe covered by Sardis, the fifth church, pertained to the Reformation and post-Reformation churches, and concluded in the middle of the eighteenth century. This position has been generally held by most significant Protestant scholars down through the years.

The Philadelphian period, then, is the period between the middle of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth, between the conclusion of the Reformation and the beginning of the post-Reformation churches and the commencement of the pre-advent judgment in 1844.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1911), 585.

<sup>2</sup> Edwin E. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (Angwin, CA.: Pacific Union College, 1990), 69.

## Character of the Philadelphian church

*And to the angel of the church of Philadelphia write...*

The word *Philadelphia* means *brotherly love*, and when we read the message to Philadelphia, we find that it is in stark contrast to that given to Sardis. There is not a single complaint made by Christ about His people during the Philadelphian period. This, then, indicates that there has been a dramatic change from the state of the Christian church during the Sardis period to that of the succeeding Philadelphian era. It necessarily indicates that there has been a revival of Christian faith and a return to Christ. Is there evidence of such a revival?

There was indeed a remarkable revival of the Christian faith evident in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It appears that this revival originated with the Pietists of Germany.<sup>3</sup> In their latter years a leader arose from among them by the name of Count Zinzendorf, who was a prime mover in this revival.

Zinzendorf had a large estate at Hernhuth, near the Czechoslovakian border. When a band of refugees arrived at the estate, having fled from Moravia where they had suffered severe persecution at the hands of the Roman Catholic authorities, Zinzendorf welcomed them, offering them refuge. The refugees established themselves as a religious company at his estate. Under Zinzendorf's leadership this group experienced genuine revival and became known as the Moravians. They subsequently became inspired to take the gospel to the unconverted across the globe, even to heathen lands.<sup>4</sup> The Moravian movement became one of the most remarkable missionary movements of the Christian era.

The second event that prompted the Philadelphian revival originated at Oxford University. Here the *Holy Club* was formed by a number of young religious scholars, mostly Anglican, who sought a renewal of spiritual life. Among them were three remarkable characters: George Whitefield, John Wesley and John's brother Charles.<sup>5</sup> They were gifted men the Lord undoubtedly raised up to revive the Christian faith in Britain, as well as the remainder of the English-speaking world and beyond. The Lord dramatically used them to turn back the forces of darkness.

### John Wesley

John Wesley was initially a cold, legalistic churchman. However through the influence of the Moravian missionaries he found Christ and true salvation. As a result he became a transformed man.<sup>6</sup> He united with the gifted George Whitefield who pioneered the proclamation of the Gospel to the masses of England initiating the mighty Evangelical Revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their motto was:

*The Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man.*

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<sup>3</sup> Phillip Jacob Spener, "Pietism", in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Edited by 1911), 28:985-986.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 528.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 528-529.

How relevant this motto proved to be in the light of the sad and wretched times that had befallen the majority of the English population!

## **An open door**

***...I have set before you an open door...***

John Wesley declared *The world is my parish* and the message to Philadelphia was *I have set before you an open door*. What, then, was this *open door*?

There are five different applications given in Scripture of *the open door* and all are supported by the Spirit of Prophecy. The *open door* was:

1. the door of access, of communication with God (John 10:9)<sup>7</sup>
2. a door to answered prayer (Matthew 7:7)<sup>8</sup>
3. a door to the reception of truth and the power to overcome sin (Revelation 3:21)<sup>9</sup>
4. a door of missionary opportunity (Acts 14:27, 2 Cor 2:12)<sup>10</sup>
5. the door into which Christ was to enter at the close of the Philadelphian period in 1844 (Revelation 11:19).<sup>11</sup>

All five of the above applications were abundantly fulfilled in the great Evangelical Revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first four applied to the Revival from the beginning and continued throughout its progress. The fifth application applied solely to the close of the Philadelphian period and what a revival it was! True to the meaning of the name *Philadelphia* this revival was a powerful exhibition of brotherly love.

In order to reach the masses of the under-privileged, Whitfield and the Wesleys were compelled to preach outside in the open air. At all hours of the day and night, in all sorts of locales, in all weathers and often under extreme conditions they were inspired to proclaim the simple Gospel of Christ. They were burning and shining lights and, in turn, they set Britain alight. Vast audiences stood in wonder while thousands upon thousands took heed of their message. The huge crowds of people realized that these preachers who were members of the privileged class actually loved them, so contrary to normal expectations. It was thus that the wretched masses, in their seemingly hopeless circumstances, learned that God loved them, that God regarded them as precious in His sight.

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 113.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), 6:467.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1900), 117. See also Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 3rd ed. (Boise, ID.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1962), 107. See also Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 9:182.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, , 188.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 429-430, 435.

The historian declared:

*The true awakening of the religious life of the English-speaking race dates from Wesley. To say that he reshaped the conscience of England is true, but it is only half the truth. He recreated it. It was dead, twice dead, and through his lips God breathed into it the breath of life again.<sup>12</sup>*

John Wesley was a remarkable man, gifted and used by God. His work illustrated his labour of love as well as that of his associates. He ministered for fifty-two years, preaching 45,000 sermons in that half century. He laboured from sixteen to eighteen hours a day, traveling around 225,000 miles during his ministry, often on horseback. He wrote 233 religious and devotional books and pamphlets, while he and his brother produced 417 books between them and aided in the production of a hundred others. Philadelphia truly represented a labour of brotherly love.

In the example of Wesley we see the striking fulfillment of the promise given in the Spirit of Prophecy:

*There is no limit to the usefulness of the one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart and lives a life wholly consecrated to God.<sup>13</sup>*

If ever there was seen a demonstration of this principle, it was seen in the life and ministry of the beloved John Wesley and his companions. The high Anglican churchman, Dr Knox, declared concerning Wesley:

*Referring to pride, ambition, selfishness and personal gratification of what ever kind; since the days of the apostles, there has not been a human being more thoroughly exempt from all the frailties of human nature than John Wesley.<sup>14</sup>*

Dr H.S. Skeats declared:

*No man in any age has exceeded him in the skill of organization or the wisdom of administration.<sup>15</sup>*

No doubt this remarkable ability stemmed not only from Wesley's natural talents, which he undoubtedly inherited from his outstanding mother, but also from his close relationship with Christ. As a result of the complete dedication of Wesley and his fellows there developed the greatest revival since the times of the apostles. It was a revival affecting not only the hearts and the minds of millions, but their very lives, their society, their nation and the world.

Those who were converted subsequently transformed their own environment: their families, their homes, their communities. The masses of the English population at that time were in such a sordid, poverty-stricken and wretched condition, that it was only a matter of time before they would have burst out in awful vengeance upon the privileged class and destroyed them, mirroring what had occurred during the terrifying French

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<sup>12</sup> W.H. Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century* (London: G. Bell, 1906), 11-15.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 8:19.

<sup>14</sup> J. Bready, *England before and after Wesley* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 319.

<sup>15</sup> H.S. Skeats, *History of the Free Churches of England* (London: Alexander and Shephard, 1891), 297.

Revolution. But Wesley and his companions saved England from such a dreadful experience. The great Revival produced a bloodless revolution through the Gospel of Christ.

Dr J. Bready states

*The Evangelical Revival was in fact a revolution. It was a revolution which had at its heart a love of humanity, not hatred of class.*<sup>16</sup>.

The number of social reforms that were inspired by the Evangelical Revival and the impact they had staggers the mind. Today it is difficult to comprehend the condition of society in England in those times. Wesley taught those who listened to him to look upon every person as his brother. He and his companions engaged in a vast visitation program, unheard of up until this time, visiting the poor, the sick and those incarcerated in prisons.

However, perversely, Wesley was ordered to

*...cease preaching at the Newgate prison, lest he make the prisoners wicked and also at Bedlam (an insane asylum), lest (he) drive the inmates mad.*<sup>17</sup>

## Reforms in England

The revival evangelists attacked the legal, political and religious corruption of the day. They exposed the appalling maladministration of justice as it applied to the poor. They affected the improvement of the prison system which had perpetrated, among other barbarous atrocities, deliberate torture. They ameliorated the savage penal code, which included the death penalty for 160 different offences. They abolished child slavery, the cruel system of child labour. The evangelists also abolished the appalling crimes permitted against infants of the impoverished. (At birth it was permitted to strangle or starve them to death). The leader in abolishing child labour was Lord Shaftesbury, a product of the great Revival.

The evangelists engaged in a remarkable ministry to the poverty-stricken. They led the poor to Christ in whom suffering humanity found forgiveness, acceptance and peace. They taught the impoverished masses to respect themselves as befitting children of God. They taught the untutored to sing. They started schools. They encouraged the habit of reading and Wesley even wrote special books for their particular needs.

The practice of bribery and illicit practices like smuggling, which were the curse of the English social structure, were attacked. The evangelists reformed the working conditions of the labourers, resulting in reasonable work hours, improved rates of pay and other advances. While teaching the poor the dignity of labour as well as the skills by which they could support themselves, they went to the extent of raising money to lend to the poor to enable them to start self-supporting businesses. These reforms even extended to include impoverished women. The endeavours of the Methodists inculcated the spirit of initiative and independence in the under-privileged. They inspired the formation of labour unions, and in fact the original labour unions were led by Methodist lay preachers.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., , 324.

<sup>17</sup> J. Bready, , 320.

Wesley founded the first free medical dispensary in England and commenced a natural health and temperance program. The drop in the death rate and the concomitant rise in public health was the most marked in British history. These men established the voluntary hospital system which through the decades has been such a blessing to the whole population. Florence Nightingale and all she achieved and represented was the fruitage of the great Evangelical Revival.

One of the unhappy truths of that period was that the populace was saturated with gin. In fact the reason food was so expensive and out of the reach of the normal person was because corn was used for gin production. Wesley and his associates successfully attacked the liquor traffic. They also tackled the national obsession of the day – the demoralizing practice of gambling. Gambling was so rife that society of that time was described as a vast casino.

The Revival also abolished the cruelty and savagery that was characteristic of sports of the day which involved the abuse of animals.

At that time Britain was one of the primary nations promoting slavery. However it was Britain which also brought an end to it - another outcome of the great Evangelical Revival brought to Britain through Methodism.

The evangelical revival also instilled in the English aristocracy the principle of social responsibility, encouraging them to shun the extravagance and luxury to which they were so accustomed and to use their means to assist the poor. The revival, therefore, was responsible for helping create a middle-class in England, a move which was to become the back-bone of Britain.

### **Great Britain revived**

A revitalized Britain produced an age of celebrated English prose and poetry. The reformers also gave to the English-speaking world a wonderful heritage of sacred song, Charles Wesley being its inspiration and foremost contributor. They inspired the Sunday School movement, which involved millions of children in learning sourced from many branches of knowledge, particularly from the Bible.

The reformers also revived the faith of many in the Church of England, giving birth to the evangelical branch of the Anglican faith. Unfortunately, however, only about five percent of the Anglican clergy were inspired to join the revival. The *Society of Strangers in Distress* was established – another example of *brotherly love*. The movement also revived the flagging spirits of other dissenting churches such as the Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist and Quaker assemblies. The church in Scotland was revived and transformed, resulting in the tremendous philanthropic and missionary zeal of the Scots who made such a magnificent contribution to the establishment of the British Empire.



The revival renewed the moral fiber of the British people and it was this which brought greatness to Britain. One historian declared:

*The true awakening of the religious life of the English-speaking race dates from Wesley. To say that he reshaped the conscience of England is true, but that is only half the truth. He recreated it. It was dead, twice dead, and through his lips God breathed into it the breath of life again.<sup>11</sup>*

The Evangelical Revival also inspired the formation of gospel and tract societies for the distribution of the Bible to the world and gave birth to the unprecedented surge of missionary endeavour which took the gospel to the non-Christian world. It also inspired the formation of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Boy Scouts movement and homes for orphans and homeless children such as those set up by Drs Mueller and Barnardo. It inspired the formation of the Salvation Army by William Booth, a Methodist clergyman.

Finally the Evangelical Revival prepared the way for the great Second Advent Movement of 1833 to 1844.

### **The door of mission opportunity**

Remember that one of the promises Christ made to the Philadelphian church was

*...I have set before you an open door...*

One of those doors was the door of mission opportunity. At the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century one of the mightiest foreign missions movements the world has ever seen arose. The Baptist William Carey preached a sermon in 1792 whereby God set on fire Christians of many churches. By 1797 Dr D.L. Leonard was able to declare:

*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...the efforts most successfully made to introduce the Gospel to the South Seas have had a most powerful tendency to unite the servants of Christ of every denomination in the bands of 'brotherly love'.<sup>18</sup>*

Again, Dr J.A. Seiss states

*The era of revivals and missions and united efforts for the general conversion of mankind ensued, such as had not been since the primitive ages, there was a great love and fraternity among Christians.<sup>19</sup>*

This was Philadelphia epitomized.

In 1784, toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were only twenty Protestant mission stations in the world, half of these being Moravian. The Christian church, as was all too evident, had shown little or no interest in foreign missions. However eight years later, it

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<sup>11</sup> W.H. Fitchett, , 11-15.

<sup>18</sup> Delavan L. Leonard, *A Hundred Years of Missions* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1895), 75, 89.

<sup>19</sup> J.A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 1:197-198.

was William Carey who galvanized Christians into action. In the period between 1792 and 1844, a period of fifty years, there were no less than thirty–six significant events associated with the great foreign mission movement of that time. These included:

- Formation of the Baptist Missionary Society
- William Carey, the first Baptist missionary, sailing to India
- Formation of the Scottish Tract and Colporteurs Society
- Publication of the Evangelical Magazine
- Establishment of the London Missionary Society
- The beginning of the New York Missionary Society's work
- 29 missionaries sailing to the South Seas on the missionary ship *The Duff*
- Formation of the Church Missionary Society by the Church of England (the evangelical arm of that church was playing its part as a result of the Great Revival)
- Establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804
- Beginnings of the Haystack group at Williams College in America, resulting in a remarkable missionary thrust from the United States
- Henry Martin sailing for Persia and Arabia in 1812
- Adoniram Judson beginning work in Burma
- Formation of the Baptist Missionary Union in America
- John Williams sailing for the Society Islands in the South Seas in 1816
- Formation of the American Bible Society
- Establishment of the Wesleyan Society
- Robert Moffatt sailing for Africa in 1817
- Bingham sailing for Hawaii in 1820
- Alexander Duff sailing for India in 1829
- David Livingstone beginning his remarkable work in Africa in 1840.

Philadelphia was truly a period of faith in action.

**...I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it...**

No man was able to shut the door of mission opportunity. The Philadelphian period was consequently a marvelous era of opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel to the non-Christian world.

The Lord had also said to Philadelphia:

**...you have a little strength, have kept my word and have not denied my name. v8**

During the great Evangelical Revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries this prophecy was truly fulfilled. By the grace of God faithful Christians entered the open door of missionary opportunity with little human strength, keeping the faith as they understood it and they were not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

## The synagogue of Satan

***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. Revelation 3:9-10***

What is the meaning of the statement *who say they are Jews and are not*?

Firstly we must understand what being a Jew entails in the New Testament.

A true Jew according to Romans 2:28-29, refers to one who is a true believer:

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly... in the flesh... but he is a Jew who is one inwardly... in the Spirit... whose praise is not from men but from God.*

The person who warrants the praise of God is the true, born-again Christian. Who then are these that say *they are Jews and are not*? Undoubtedly they were professing Christians who made up the synagogue of Satan, but they were not genuine Christians.

Regarding *the synagogue of Satan*, notice this statement from the Spirit of Prophecy:

*Christ speaks of the church over which Satan presides as the synagogue of Satan. Its members are the children of disobedience. They are those who choose to sin, who labor to make void the holy law of God. It is Satan's work to mingle evil with good and to remove the distinction between good and evil. Christ would have a church that labors to separate the evil from the good, whose members will not willingly tolerate wrong-doing, but will expel it from the heart and life<sup>20</sup>*

We must ask ourselves then whether at the time of the great Evangelical Revival there was any organization over which Satan presided and which professed to be Christian.

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<sup>20</sup> F.D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1957), 7:958.

The church that fulfilled this description to the very letter was none other than the established church of the day - the Anglican Church. If ever a church was responsible for imposing an hour of temptation and trial upon God's people in that period, it was this religious organization. It not only refused to walk in the light of truth itself, but it also oppressed those who attempted to walk in faith. Unfortunately the Church's blame-worthiness in this regard has not been easy to detect, as historians have been inclined to whitewash the culpability of the established church throughout the centuries of its existence.

### Anglican opposition

The Anglican Church continually opposed the reform and improvement of society, which cast light on its own indulgence. Its prelates were guilty of pride, pomp, arrogance and corruption. It is recorded of the bishop of Winchester that

*...he excused his much swearing by claiming that he swore as a baronet but not as a bishop.<sup>21</sup>*

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century it is claimed that only two primates held office who were even half worthy of their office. Most resisted social reform and the emancipation of the masses. In fact the Anglican clergy were almost traitorous in their disposition toward the general population. Jacobite in their sympathies, they continued to support the Catholic Stuart pretension to the throne. As one authority has said:

*The attitude of the established clergy was that they were a classical royalist society and that the lower majority were a vulgar, menial herd.<sup>22</sup>*

This explains the attitude of many of the clergy of the established church over the centuries. Dr Bready wrote:

*The rapidly increasing industrial population came to account the parish clergy among the most merciless of all the forces of reaction and subjugation.<sup>23</sup>*

Likewise Daniel Defoe declared:

*The established Church of England was the most intolerant church in Christendom.<sup>24</sup>*

Dr Skeats writes of the Wesleys and their associates:

*They began the regeneration of a whole people who were sunk in almost heathen darkness. The good they effected, they effected against their own church, which again exhibited herself in what was her characteristic attitude as the opponent of all sincere religious life and active religious work.<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup> J. Bready, 50.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 70-73.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>24</sup> H.S. Skeats, 178.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 178, 329.

The gentle and sainted Archbishop Leighton remarked of the administration of the Church of England, both in relation to the ecclesiastical courts and its pastoral duties, that it was the most corrupt he had ever seen.<sup>26</sup>

This was the condition of the established church of the day. The Lord correctly termed it *the synagogue of Satan*. It vehemently and violently resisted the religious revival of Whitefield and the Wesleys.

Earlier, the Anglican Church had been complicit in the martyrdom of 18,000 Scottish Covenanters. Even from the times of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I it had been responsible for fining or imprisoning thousands of English dissenters and fought strenuously to retain the oppressive laws against all such dissenters<sup>27</sup>. At one time, 4,000 of these people were imprisoned because they could not pay the severe fines incurred because of their nonconformist stand.

It was the established church that inspired the mobs to wreck the meetings of the Methodists, to demolish Methodist meeting houses and even to murder Methodist lay preachers. While John Wesley spent fifty-two years in continuous ministry, proclaiming the Gospel until the very year of his death, for the first thirty-five years of his ministry he suffered violent attacks from mobs inspired by the established church. In his journal, he relates how at his meetings organized mobs endeavored to destroy the effect of his preaching.<sup>28</sup>

### **Wesley exonerated**

Surely the established church was the *synagogue of Satan*. Now notice the prediction concerning the synagogue of Satan:

*... I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Revelation 3:9*

Moffatt's translation says

*Lo, I will make those who belong to the synagogue of Satan, who style themselves Jews...lo I will have them come and do homage before your feet and learn that I love you.*

Did those of the established church pay homage to the Evangelical Revival? In other words, did the Anglicans finally pay homage to the work of the Methodists? The short answer is yes. Even during the time of John Wesley himself the tide had begun to turn. John Wesley was converted to Christ when he was 35 years old and immediately commenced his life-long campaign. Through human storm and tempest, with the mighty spiritual weapons granted by the Life-giver, he waged a relentless warfare against the entrenched forces of darkness. After approximately thirty-five years of facing relentless, violent opposition, finally this began to abate. Blessedly, Wesley's latter years were years when he enjoyed homage – from the masses, from the national leaders and even from the Anglican clergy. Brady's account of Wesley's final years states:

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>27</sup> J. Brady, , 218-219.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., , 208, 277. See quotes from Wesley's Journal.

*Though from his spiritual birthday, late in his 35<sup>th</sup> year, unbroken peace and increasing joy had reigned within, nevertheless, for at least four decades he had encountered a succession of violent tempests without. But ere the termination of his 80<sup>th</sup> year, cloud and storm had well-nigh passed from his horizon and the veteran prophet thenceforth moved largely in an atmosphere of serenity, veneration and awe.*

*Many, indeed, who had cursed him, now were praying for him. Not a few persons, who long had thundered against him from their pulpits, were now imploring him to preach from those same pulpits. The stiff-necked, ecclesiastical and lay, continued to put on airs and expatiated on the folly of enthusiasm and the madness of the masses, but to multitudes, Wesley finally was an honoured and matchless prophet.*

*The tide had turned. The latter years of the great evangelist's itinerary were a series of triumphal tours. Commonly, as this veteran campaigner for God passed through towns and villages, the streets were lined with excited crowds, gazing with stark admiration and wonder, as if the king were going by. Clergymen – non-conformist and Anglican – turned out everywhere to hear him preach. Even bishops stole sheepishly into his open air congregations. The fury of the anti-Wesley mobs was no more.<sup>29</sup>*

This was an overwhelming reversal of attitude. The prediction to the Philadelphians was fulfilled:

*I will have them come and do homage before your feet and learn that I love you.  
Revelation 3:9 (Moffatt)*

### **England's greatness**

The great evangelical movement at last became accepted in the eyes of the 'powers-that-be', finally receiving the recognition it deserved as it transformed not only English society but also the English-speaking world. Ironically many of its early, leading opponents became its firmest supporters and advocates. Even George III, King of England, acknowledging publicly the influence of the Evangelical Revival on popular education in 1805, said:

*It is my wish that every poor child in my dominions should be taught to read the Bible.<sup>30</sup>*

This was the fruitage of the great revival. And the bounty continued. Queen Victoria, reigning at the height of the British Empire's power, was asked by the German Ambassador the secret of Britain's greatness. The Queen, handing a Bible to the Ambassador, declared

*This is the secret of England's greatness.*

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., , 218, 277-278. See quotes from Wesley's journal.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., , 355.

It was the Evangelical Revival that brought the Bible to the British people and transformed them, taking a leading role in making Britain great. It was Methodism. Leading churchmen of the established church – its fiercest enemy – however reluctantly at first, eventually did homage to the Revival and to Methodism.

When stepping into Westminster Abbey, a stronghold of the established church through the centuries, one can view a plaque in honour of John and Charles Wesley. On this plaque is inscribed, 'The world is my parish'. Statesmen, historians, educators and hundreds of other leading lights have lauded Methodism - and rightly so. We should thank God for John Wesley and his associates.

The biblical prediction regarding the Philadelphian period was abundantly fulfilled.

We now come to the climax of this period. God's people had passed through a time of great difficulty - *the hour of trial* - a tremendous time of testing which lasted decades. He had preserved them through this trying period. Finally, there was a great awakening of interest in the prophetic books of the Bible.

## The prophetic awakening

In the first forty years of the nineteenth century dramatic events were taking place that were seen as a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. In various parts of the world scholars were led to the study of the books of Daniel and Revelation. Over twenty landmark events occurred that finally led to the establishment of the Great Second Advent Movement of 1833-44.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to note just a few of these events because they reveal the tremendous interest in the study of Daniel and Revelation during that period.

### Dramatic events in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century

1. In 1800 the famous Bampton lectures entitled *The Divine Origin of Prophecy – Illustrated and Defended* commenced.
2. Faber's *Dissertations on the Prophecies* were published in 1811.
3. There was wide circulation of Manuel Lacunza's 1820 book *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*.
4. William Cunninghame's *Dissertations on the Seals and Trumpets of the Apocalypse* was published in 1817.
5. Archdeacon Francis Mason's two essays on *Daniel's Prophetic Numbers of 2300 Days* were published in 1821.
6. Hatley Frere's *Combined View of the Christian Prophecies* was published.
7. Joseph Woolf began his proclamation around the world of the Lord's second coming, arousing tremendous interest in the subject.

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<sup>31</sup> Edwin E. Thiele, , 66.

8. In 1826 the Albury Park prophetic conference in Surrey, England was called. Over twenty godly, scholarly men who were writing and studying the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation met and reached unified conclusions regarding the completion of the 2300 day prophecy and the imminence of the Second Advent.
9. The collected works of Edward Irving were published including his *Exposition of Revelation* (1831).
10. In 1831 William Miller began preaching on Revelation 14:6-7 and this ushered in the proclamation of the First Angel's Message in America.
11. Alexander Keith's book *Evidence of the truth of the Christian religion derived from the literal fulfillment of prophecy* was published in 1839.

Society was already biblically aware at the beginning of the century. The Evangelical Revival had prepared the way for the proclamation of the Great Second Advent message by familiarizing the population with the Bible as never before. Thus when the great prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were preached people were generally able to appreciate their significance, particularly in regard to the truth of the second advent of Christ which was received and proclaimed to the world. This brought to a fitting conclusion the great Philadelphian period of the Church, a period for which Christ has no complaint concerning his people.

## Promises to the overcomer

In conclusion let us notice the unique promises to the overcomers of the Philadelphian period:

***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...And I will write on him my new name. v12***

The Evangelicals had often been driven out when they proclaimed the gospel to the multitudes of their time. The promise in the above text conveys the notion of protection, victory and permanence. It was thus a very fitting one.

The promise also indicates that the faithful would be objects of beauty in the kingdom of God.<sup>32</sup> They would be like the inscribed pillars in a glorious temple. After enduring so much persecution and hostility, this promise was very meaningful to them. The Philadelphians had fought against overwhelming odds as they had battled for the betterment of mankind. Through the proclamation of the Gospel their efforts did end in victory. However the promise now forecasts a permanent victory – they would be as pillars in the new earth.

John Wesley became an adornment to the society of his time. However he was an adornment of substance, not tinsel. Of beautiful character, he was a man who reflected the image of Christ. In the Kingdom overcomers will be objects of beauty.

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<sup>32</sup> see Philip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor*, 9th ed. (London: Charles and Robert Baldwin, 1805), Revelation 3:12.



*“They shall be mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “on the day when I make them my jewels... Malachi 3:17*

This beautiful promise has particular application to those of the Philadelphian period. But more than that, this promise is also for every believer of every church period who sincerely sacrifices himself for Christ and for his fellow human beings.

In a very real sense the messages to all of the seven churches apply to us today. As we read them may we apply them to our own individual lives, so that like the Philadelphians, we will finally be judged by Christ to be without fault and ready for translation.

***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. v13***

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## **Appendix A - Spirit of Prophecy application of Revelation 3:7-12**

Regarding the Spirit of Prophecy’s application of Revelation 3:7-12 to Philadelphia some may ask, “Isn’t the Spirit of Prophecy application at variance with the application given in this exposition?”

The answer to this query is that there is often more than one application of some scriptures. There are primary applications and there are secondary applications. The historic application as given in this exposition is a primary application.

However, like the messages to the other six churches, there may also be an individual application. The message can apply to the church today. In this sense it could be classed as a secondary application. Frequently the Spirit of Prophecy applies the messages of the previous six churches to the seventh or Laodicean church.

We believe the application that the Spirit of Prophecy gives concerning Philadelphia to the time of trouble involving God’s people at time’s end, is a secondary application of that scripture. Such an application is in harmony with sound biblical exegesis.

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