

# **The evangelical revival of Philadelphia**

The foundation for the great  
Second Advent movement  
1833 – 1844

An exposition of  
Revelation Chapter 3:7-13

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## Background

**Philadelphia** is the sixth of the seven churches. This topic shows 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 of the great second-advent movement of 1843 -1844.

### Time period of Philadelphia

As noted in the exposition of Revelation chapter 1, the historical view of these messages to the seven churches is that they represent the seven periods of the Christian church, from the first advent to the second advent of Christ. This has been the view of the leading Bible scholars down through the centuries and 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 last period of the seven churches is called **Laodicea**. The meaning of *Laodicea* is *the judged or justified* people. It comes from two words: *Laos* – people, and *dikaiois* – 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* in the heavenly sanctuary, which began in 1844 and concludes at the close of human probation. On this understanding then, the seventh period would be seen to commence in 1844 and terminate near the Second Advent of Christ.

If Laodicea commenced in 1844, then we can logically conclude that the Philadelphian period ended in 1844. At what time, then, did the Philadelphian period commence?

The timeframe covered by **Sardis**, the fifth church, was that of the Reformation and post-Reformation churches, concluding in approximately 1750. This position has been generally held by most scholars through the years.

The Philadelphian period then is the period between the time of the Reformation and post-Reformation churches and the commencement of the investigative judgment in 1844.

## Character of the Philadelphian church

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

The word *Philadelphia* means **brotherly love**. When we read the message to Philadelphia we find that it is in stark contrast to that of Sardis. There is not a single complaint made by Christ concerning His people in this period. This indicates that there

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<sup>1</sup> EG White, *Acts of the Apostles* (California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn, 1911), 585

<sup>2</sup> Edwin R Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (California: Pacific Union College, 1990), 69  
Smith Uriah, *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation* (Washington: Review & Herald Publishing Assn, 1881), 39

must have been a dramatic change from the condition of the Christian church in the Sardis period. There must have been a revival of Christian faith - a return to Christ. Was there a return? Was there such a revival?

There was indeed a remarkable revival of the Christian faith in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. What was the origin of the revival? It appears that it originated initially with the Pietists of Germany.<sup>3</sup> In the latter part of their existence there arose among them a leader called Count Zinzendorf. He had a large estate at Hernhuth near the Czechoslovakian border. Zinzendorf was foremost in this revival in its latter years.

One day there a band of refugees who had suffered severe persecution from the Roman Catholics arrived from Moravia. Zinzendorf welcomed them and offered them residence at Hernhuth where they established themselves as a religious company. Zinzendorf led this group to experience a genuine revival of Christian faith and they became known as the Moravians. They were inspired to take the gospel to the unconverted and to the heathen in foreign 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 his brother Charles.<sup>5</sup> They were gifted men and undoubtedly the Lord raised them up to turn back the forces of darkness and to revive the Christian faith in Britain, in the remainder of the English-speaking world and beyond.

## John Wesley

John Wesley was originally a cold, legalistic churchman, but 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 George Whitefield who pioneered the proclamation of the Gospel to the masses of England and there began the mighty Evangelical Revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their motto was:

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

How relevant was this motto 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 was this open door?

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<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, Vol 28, 985-986

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* Vol 28, 528 ff (footnote)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* Vol 28, 528-529

There are five different applications given in Scripture of *the open door* and all these are supported by the Spirit of Prophecy.<sup>7</sup>

1. It was the door of access, of communication with God. (John 10:9, DA 113)
2. It was a door to answered prayer. (Matthew 7:7, 6T467)
3. It was a door to the reception of truth and power to overcome sin (Revelation 3:21, COL 117, TM107, 9T 182)
4. It was a door of missionary opportunity (Acts 14:27, 2Cor 2:12, AA 188)
5. It was the door into which Christ was to enter at the close of the Philadelphian period in 1844. (Revelation 11:19, G 429-430,435)

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 at its beginning and throughout its progress. The fifth application applied to the close of the Philadelphian period.

What a revival! It was a powerful exhibition of brotherly love. In order to reach the miserable masses of the under-privileged, Whitfield and the Wesleys were compelled to preach in the open air. At all hours, in all places, and under all conditions they were inspired to proclaim the simple Gospel of Christ. They were burning and shining lights and, in turn, they set Britain alight. Thousands upon thousands listened. Vast audiences stood in wonder. They saw that these preachers – members of the privileged class – loved them, which was so unusual. The wretched masses in their hopeless situation learned that God loved them, that they were precious in His sight. 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>8</sup>*

The work of Wesley illustrates the labour of love by him and his associates. He ministered for fifty-two solid years, preaching 45,000 sermons. He traveled about 225,000 miles, mostly on horseback. He wrote 233 books and pamphlets and aided in producing 100 others. He and his brother produced 417 books between them. He laboured from sixteen to eighteen hours a day. It was a labour of brotherly love – Philadelphia! He was a remarkable man, gifted by God and used by God.

In 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>9</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Scripture and Spirit of Prophecy references are within the text

<sup>8</sup> WH Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century* (London: G Bell and Sons), 11-15

<sup>9</sup> EG White, *Testimonies to the Church* (California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn, 1948), Vol 8, 19

If ever there was seen a demonstration of that 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>10</sup>*

Dr. Skeates declared

*No man in any age has exceeded him in the skill of organization or the wisdom of administration.<sup>11</sup>*

No doubt this remarkable ability stemmed not only from the gifts he was born with, but 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.

Subsequently these converted people transformed their own environment – their families, their homes, their fellow human beings. The masses of the English people at that time were in such a sordid, poverty-stricken, wretched condition, that it was only a matter of time before they would have exploded in awful vengeance upon the privileged class and destroyed them, as occurred in the terrifying French 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. Bready stated

*The Evangelical Revival was in fact a revolution. It was a revolution which had at its heart a love of humanity, not hatred.<sup>12</sup>*

The number and the impact of the social reforms that were inspired by the Evangelical Revival stagger the mind. In our era it is difficult to comprehend the condition of society in England and elsewhere, compared with what we see today. Wesley taught men to look upon every man as his brother. He and his companions engaged in a vast visitation program of the poor, the sick and the prisoners. This was unheard of up until then.

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>13</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> J Bready, *England Before and After Wesley* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), 319

<sup>11</sup> S Skeats, *A History of the Free Churches of England* (London: Alexander & Shephard, 1892), 297

<sup>12</sup> Ibid 324

<sup>13</sup> Bready, *England Before and After Wesley*, 320

## Reforms in England

The reformers attacked the legal, political and religious corruption of the day. The appalling mal-administration of justice to the poor was exposed. They influenced the changing of the barbarous prison system which amounted, among other atrocities, to deliberate torture. They altered the savage penal code, which included the death penalty for 160 different violations of the law. They abolished the appalling crimes permitted against infants of the poor. (At birth it was permitted to strangle or starve them to death).

They abolished child slavery – the cruel system of child labour. The individual prominent in this reform was Lord Shaftesbury, a product of the Revival.

They attacked bribery and smuggling - the curse of English life - and engaged in a remarkable ministry to the poverty-stricken, who were the vast majority of the population.

They led the poor to Christ in whom they found forgiveness, acceptance and peace. They taught them self-respect. They taught them to sing. They started schools for them. They encouraged them to read and Wesley even wrote special books for them.

They taught the poor the dignity of labour and skills by which they could be self-supporting. This included even their women. They inculcated the spirit of initiative and independence in the under-privileged. They raised money to lend to the poor to start them in self-supporting business.

They reformed the working conditions of the labourers, bringing in reasonable hours, pay and other conditions. They inspired the formation of labour unions. The original labour unions were led by Methodist lay preachers.

Wesley founded the first free medical dispensary in England. He commenced a program of natural health and temperance, and the drop in the death rate and the rise in public health was the most marked in British history. They brought into being the voluntary hospital system which through the decades has been such a blessing to the people. Florence Nightingale and all she represented was the fruitage of the great Evangelical Revival.

The liquor traffic was attacked – the populace in that period *was saturated with gin*. The reason food was so expensive was because corn was used for gin production.

The reformers also tackled the national obsession of the day – gambling. Society was described as *a vast casino* and gambling demoralised the people.

The Revival abolished the cruelty and savagery characteristic of the sport of the day, which involved abuse of animals.

The system of slavery was abolished. Britain was one of the main nations promoting slavery. However it was Britain which finally brought an end to it. This was another outcome of the great Evangelical Revival brought to Britain through *Methodism*.

The evangelical revival also instilled into the aristocracy the principle of social responsibility – of using their means to help the poor and of shunning the extravagance and luxury to which they were so prone at that time. The Revival created a middle-class in England and this class became the back-bone of Britain.

## Great Britain revived

Revitalized Britain produced an age of celebrated prose and poetry in the English language. The reformers gave to the English-speaking world a wonderful heritage of sacred song and Charles Wesley was the foremost contributor and inspirer. They inspired the Sunday School movement, involving millions of children in learning the Bible and other branches of knowledge.

The reformers also revived the faith of many in the Church of England and this gave birth to the evangelical branch of that church. However, only five or six percent of the Anglican clergy were affected by the revival. The Revival inspired the *Society of Strangers in Distress* – brotherly love again.

They revived the flagging spirits of the other dissenting churches – Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist and Quaker. They revived and transformed the church in Scotland which resulted in the tremendous philanthropic and missionary zeal of the Scots, who made such a magnificent contribution in establishing the British Empire.

The revival renewed the moral fiber of the British people and it was this that 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>*

In the religious sphere, the Evangelical Revival inspired the formation of Gospel and tract Societies for the distribution of the Bible to the world. It gave birth to the mighty unprecedented surge of missionary endeavour that took the gospel to the non-Christian world.

It inspired the formation of the YMCA, the Boy Scouts movement, homes for orphans and homeless children, such as those of Dr Mueller and Dr Barnardo. It inspired the formation of the Salvation Army, for William Booth was 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 arose one of the mightiest movements the world has ever seen in connection with foreign missions. In 1792, a sermon was preached by the Baptist William Carey, by which God set on fire Christians of all churches. In 1797 Dr DL Leonard declared:

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<sup>11</sup> Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century*, 11-15

*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>14</sup>*

Philadelphia!

Again, Dr JA Seiss stated

*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>15</sup>*

In 1784 (near the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), there were only twenty Protestant mission stations in the world, and half of these were Moravian. The Christian church, as such, showed little or no interest in missions. However in 1792, William Carey galvanized Christians into action. From 1792 until 1844, a period of fifty years, we can count at least thirty–six significant events involving the great foreign mission movement of that time, including the following:

- the Baptist Missionary Society was formed
- William Carey, the first Baptist missionary, sailed for India
- the Scottish Tract and Colporteurs Society was formed
- the Evangelical Magazine commenced its missionary publication
- the London Missionary Society was established
- the New York Missionary Society began its work
- 29 missionaries sailed to the South Seas on the missionary ship *The Duff*
- the Church Missionary Society was formed by the Church of England (the evangelical arm of that church was playing its part as a result of the great revival)
- the British and Foreign Bible Society was established in 1804
- the *Haystack* group in America began at Williams College, which resulted in a remarkable missionary thrust from the United States
- In 1812 Henry Martin sailed for Persia and Arabia
- Adoniram Judson began work in Burma
- the Baptist Missionary Union was formed in America

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<sup>14</sup> DL Leonard, *A Hundred Years of Missions* (New York: Funk and Wagnell, 1895), 75, 89

<sup>15</sup> JA Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962 - lectures originally published 1870-1844), Vol I, 197-198

- John Williams sailed for the Society Islands in the South Seas in 1816
- the American Bible society was formed
- the Wesleyan Society was established
- Robert Moffatt sailed for Africa in 1817
- Bingham sailed for Hawaii in 1820
- Alexander Duff sailed for India in 1829
- David Livingstone began his remarkable work in Africa in 1840

What a period it was!

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

– and no man was able to shut it.

The Philadelphian period was a marvelous era of opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel to the non-Christian world.

The Lord had said to Philadelphia

***...you have a little strength, have kept my word and have not denied my name. v9***

In the great Evangelical Revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries this was truly fulfilled. They entered that open door of missionary opportunity with little human strength but by the grace of God they kept the faith as they understood it and 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 terms in

*the synagogue of Satan --- who say they are Jews and are not ?*

Firstly what is a Jew 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 has 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 that made up the synagogue of Satan, but they are not genuine Christians.

Who then is *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>16</sup>

In the time of the great Evangelical Revival was there any organization over which Satan presided which professed to be Christian? The one that fulfilled to the very letter this description was none other than the established church of the day - the Anglican Church.

If ever a church was responsible for an hour of temptation or trial upon God's people of that period, it was that organization. Historians have been inclined to white-wash the appalling guilt of the established church through the centuries. That religious organization not only refused to walk in the light of truth itself, but it also oppressed those who did.

### **Anglican opposition**

The Anglican church continually opposed the reform and improvement of society. The 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>17</sup>

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century it is claimed that only two primates held office who were even half worthy of it. The Anglican clergy were almost traitors to England. They were Jacobite in their sympathies and continually supported the Catholic Stuart pretension to the throne. They resisted social reform and the emancipation of the masses. 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>18</sup>

This explains the attitude of many of the clergy of the established church over the centuries. Dr Brady 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>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> SDA Bible Commentary Vol 7, 958

<sup>17</sup> Bready, *England before and after Wesley*, 50

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 70-73

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 95

Likewise Daniel Defoe declared

*The established Church of England was the most intolerant church in Christendom.*<sup>20</sup>

Dr Skeates, writing 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>21</sup>

The gentle and sainted Archbishop Leighton had remarked of the church of England... that in its administration, both in relation to the ecclesiastical courts and pastoral duties, it was the most corrupt he had ever seen.<sup>22</sup>

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

Previously, the Anglican church had supported and aided in the martyrdom of 18,000 Scottish Covenanters. It had been responsible for fining and imprisoning thousands of English dissenters, even from the times of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. At one time, 4,000 alone were in prison because they could not pay the severe fines for being dissenters.

It was the established church which inspired the mobs to wreck the meetings of the Methodists; to pull down Methodist meeting houses; even to murder Methodist lay preachers. It fought strenuously through the years to retain the oppressive laws against all dissenters.<sup>23</sup>

John Wesley himself spent 52 years in continuous ministry. He proclaimed the Gospel publicly until the very year of his death. But for the first 35 years of his ministry, he suffered violent attacks from the 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>24</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*

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<sup>20</sup> HS Skeates, *A History of the Free Churches 1688 - 1851* (London: Alexander & Shephard 1891), 178

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 178, 329

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>23</sup> Bready, *England before and after Wesley* 218-219

<sup>24</sup> Wesley's Journal, 3 July 1745 (quoted in Bready, 208, 277)

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? Did the Anglicans pay homage to the Methodists? In the time of John Wesley himself the tide began to turn. At 35 years of age John Wesley was converted to Christ and commenced his life-long campaign. Through human storm and tempest, with the mighty spiritual weapons given by Christ, he waged relentless warfare against the entrenched forces of darkness.

After thirty-five to forty years the relentless, violent opposition began to cease and Wesley's final years were years of homage – homage of the masses, homage of the people and even homage of the Anglican clergy. Bready's account of Wesley's final years stated

*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>25</sup>*

How impressive! 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*

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<sup>25</sup> Wesley's Journal, quoted in Bready, *England Before and After Wesley*, 218, 277-278

## England's greatness

The great evangelical movement became acceptable. It finally received recognition as it transformed society and the English-speaking world. Many of its leading opponents became its firmest supporters. Even George III, King of England, in 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>26</sup>

This was the fruitage of the great revival. But not only that, Queen Victoria reigning at the height of the British Empire's power was asked by the German Ambassador what was the secret of Britain's greatness. The Queen, taking a Bible and handing it to the Ambassador, declared

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

And what was it that brought the Bible to the British people and transformed them, making Britain great? It was the Evangelical Revival. It was Methodism. Leading churchmen of the established church – its fiercest enemy – though reluctantly at first, have eventually done homage to the Revival and to Methodism.

When one steps into Westminster Abbey, a stronghold of the established church through the centuries, one can see the plaque there in honour of John and Charles Wesley. On it is inscribed *The world is my parish*. Thank God for that man and his associates. Statesmen, historians, educators and hundreds of other leading lights have lauded Methodism - and rightly so.

Thus the prediction of the Philadelphian period was abundantly fulfilled

*I will have them come to do homage before your feet and learn that I did love you*

We now have come to the climax of the Philadelphian period. God's people have passed through a time of difficulty - *the hour of trial* - a tremendous time of testing which lasted for decades, but through which God preserved them. The final climax of the Philadelphian period was a great awakening of interest in the prophetic books of the Bible.

## The prophetic awakening

In the first forty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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>27</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 in that period.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 355

<sup>27</sup> Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation*, 66

## 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. Mason's two essays on *Daniel's Prophetic Numbers of 2300 Days* were published in 1821.
6. Freer's contribution entitled *The 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.
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 united conclusions on 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 about Revelation 14:6-7 and this ushered in the proclamation of the First Angel's Message.
11. Alexander Keith's book *Evidence of the truth of the Christian religion derived from the literal fulfillment of prophecy* was published in 1839.

It was the Evangelical Revival that prepared the way for the proclamation of the Great Second Advent message. The Revival familiarized society with the Bible as never before. Society was already biblically-minded. Thus when the great prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were preached people generally were able to appreciate their significance and in particular the truth of the second advent of Christ.

It was from among those who had been influenced by the Evangelical Revival that the Advent message was received and proclaimed to the world. This was a fitting conclusion to the great Philadelphian period of the Church, a period of which Christ finds no complaint concerning his people.

## Christ's promise to the overcomer

In conclusion let us notice the unique promise 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***

How often had the Evangelicals been driven out when they proclaimed the gospel to the generations of their time. This promise conveyed protection, victory and permanence and was thus a very fitting one.

It also indicates that they would be objects of beauty in the kingdom of God.<sup>28</sup> They would be like the inscribed pillars in a glorious temple. After so much hostility and persecution this was very meaningful to them.

The Philadelphians had fought against such overwhelming odds; they had battled for the betterment of mankind and through the proclamation of the Gospel their efforts did end in victory. But the promise here denotes permanent victory – they would be as pillars in the kingdom.

Did they become *objects of beauty* in the society of the day? John Wesley was an adornment to society. Of beautiful character, he was a man who reflected the image of Christ. In the kingdom overcomers will be objects of beauty.

*“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 for Christ and His fellow human beings.

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 be finally 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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<sup>28</sup> Dr Philip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor* (London: R Baldwin, 1805). Notes on Revelation 3:12

## End note

What about the application of Revelation 3:7-12 for Philadelphia made by the Spirit of Prophecy? 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 is also an individual application. The message can also apply to the church today. In this sense it would 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 the end, is a secondary application of that scripture. However, such an application is in harmony with sound Biblical exegesis.

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