The origin of Philadelphia... “And to the angel of the church at Philadelphia write... (3:7a); Philadelphia is the youngest of the seven cities dating back to 189 BC; Philadelphia is Greek for “one who loves his brother”; the city was named by King Eumenes II of Pergamos who ruled from 197-160 BC; he named the city for the love of his brother Attalus who would succeed him as king; his loyalty to his brother earned him the nickname “Philadelphus” and it was after him the city was named.

The city was known as “The Gateway to the East” for in 300 BC Alexander the Great used this city to spread Greek culture and language around the world; once Christianity came to Philadelphia, the church became a mission for the spreading of Christianity throughout the east; the Risen Lord praises this church as “an open door and no one can shut it” (3:11); therefore this church represents the period in church history known as “the missionary age” from 1780 to the rapture.

The city was built on the edge of a volcanic plain so the land was fertile and famous for producing vineyards; its city god was Dionysus, the god of wine; the city was prone to severe earthquakes; historian Strabo described Philadelphia as a “city full of earthquake”; in 17 AD there was a quake that destroyed the city and Emperor Tiberius had the city rebuilt as he did the city of Sardis; the people were so grateful, the citizens changed the name of the city to Neocaesar—the New City of Caesar; later during the reign of Flavius Vespasian the name of the city was changed to Flavia, the family name of the emperor; neither of these names lasted and the name of the city was changed back to Philadelphia; the people of Philadelphia knew well what it was like to receive “a new name” (3:12).

In its later years, Philadelphia became a great city and there was a time when the Muslims marched across Turkey and when every other town had fallen to Islam, Philadelphia stood against Muhammadanism and its religion; for centuries it
remained a free Greek Christian city and the last bastion of Christianity in Asia; it is unknown how the church was started; the city fell in the mid 14th century to Islam, but the church prospered there up until World War I.

The omni-greatness of the Risen Lord... “These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens” (3:7b); there are three characteristics about Christ:

1. He is “holy”... He is different and separate from mankind (Isaiah 6:3; 43:15); to say Jesus is holy is to say He shares the nature of God.

2. He is “true”... There are two words in the Greek for true, alethes, which means true in contrast with what is false; alethinos, which means real or genuine as opposed to that which is unreal and phony; that is the word used in the text; Jesus is no phony; He is the real deal.

3. He has “the key of David” and opens and shuts doors that no man can open or shut... Jesus alone has the authority to admit people into the New Jerusalem, the city of David; He alone can admit people into the presence of God or to shut them out (Isaiah 22:22).

The opportunity for the church at Philadelphia... “I know your works. See I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (3:8); the church was given an open door by the Risen Lord for a great missionary opportunity; when Paul wrote to the Corinthians he spoke of an effective open door to him (1 Corinthians 16:9); when in Troas he spoke of a door open to him by the Lord (2 Corinthians 2:12); he told the Colossians to pray that a door would open giving him an opportunity to teach the word (Colossians 4:3); when Paul returned to Antioch he saw how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

The church at Philadelphia was called “the church of the open door,” it was a border town where the boundaries of Lydia, Mysia, and Phrygia met; it was through Philadelphia that Alexander the Great spread the Greek culture and it was through this open door that the church had the opportunity to spread the gospel.

The obstacles before the church at Philadelphia...
1. The place of trouble... “Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews but are not, but lie... (3:9a); the synagogue at Philadelphia was called “the synagogue of Satan” because of their persecution of believers; a Jew in God’s vocabulary was not one who could claim racial descent from Abraham and who was physically circumcised, but one who is circumcised in the heart and committed to honoring God’s covenant with Israel (Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-9); some Jews followed the laws regulations, but their hearts were not right with God (Isaiah 29:13); a circumcised heart is one that is “separated” from the world and dedicated to God; the Jews in Philadelphia were Jews in a racial sense, but not in a spiritual sense and therefore to God were not true Jews; as such they became troublemakers for the church in Philadelphia.

Paul says that people from any nation that demonstrate the faith of Abraham and have become a new creation in Christ are the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16; see vvs. 11-16); this is not teaching Replacement Theology for God still has a plan for the Jew (Isaiah 11:10-11; Amos 9:11-15) even though the promises to Israel are also for the Church (2 Corinthians 1:20).

2. The power to overcome... “I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you” (3:9b); The day will come when a remnant of Jews will come to Christ and thus “all Israel will be saved...” (Romans 11:26-27); also the day will come when all opponents of the faith will acknowledge the truth and proclaim Jesus Lord (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10-11); this is not teaching universalism, that ultimately everyone will be saved; it simply means the world will acknowledge Christ, but it will be too late.

When my wife and I were on a European cruise, I had a meal with a pastor from Michigan who believes that everyone will be saved; when the unbeliever dies he will spend time in hell where he is given his opportunity to confess Christ; since everyone will do that, for Scripture says “every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10-11); at that point, this pastor told me, “once that confession is made they will be released from hell and go to heaven”; he calls it “Christianism Universalism.”

3. The protection of Christ from “the hour of trial”... “Because you have kept My commandments to persevere, I will also keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (3:10); the promise is to protect the Church from the great Tribulation that will come upon the whole world for Jesus will “deliver us from the wrath to come” (1
Thessalonians 1:10); the Church will escape “the hour of trial” also called “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7); this “hour of trial” comes in the second half of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 13:14-15).

The outcome of the faithful...

1. His promise… “Behold, I am coming quickly!... (3:11a); this not only speaks of Christ’s imminent return— that He can come at any time, but also it means when He comes it will be sudden; “in a moment in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52)

2. His plea… “Hold fast what you have, that no one take your crown...” (3:11b); the Risen Lord has nothing but praise for this church; He encourages them to continue to persevere in the faith and they will receive “the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8).

3. His pledge… “I will make of him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (3:12-13).

   - There is recognition… “I will make him a pillar”; Peter, James and John were recognized as pillars in the church (Galatians 2:9); the temples to the gods had pillars to support the structure and the names of people were etched on those pillars; so our names will be etched on the heavenly temple as God’s way of recognizing our faithfulness to Him.

   - There is relationship… “I will write on him the name of My God... and My new name” (see 19:12); God’s name is “I Am”; but we do not know Christ’s new name.

   - There is residence... “I will write on him... the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem...”; this is the promise of heaven and eternal life.

The church at Philadelphia represents the missionary age of the church which began around 1780 with William Carey, who was one of the first missionaries to India; he published more than 200,000 Bibles and portions of Scripture; his example spurred the entire movement of modern missions; Adoniram Judson, who labored for many years as a missionary to India and Burma; Robert...
Morrison, China’s first Protestant missionary; Robert Moffatt, pioneer missionary to South Africa and translated the Bible into two African dialects; the church at Philadelphia represents the beginning of the missionary age in church history.

The Pride of a Sick Church... A Message to Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

The importance of Laodicea in history... The city was founded by Antiochus III of Syria around 250 BC and was named after his wife Laodice; this city, based on its location on the main highway from Ephesus that led East through Syria made it one of the great commercial centers of the ancient world; there are three notable characteristics about this city:

1. It was a banking and financial center; next to Ephesus, the wealthiest city of Asia Minor; in 61 AD it was devastated by a great earthquake but the city was so rich and independent it refused any help in rebuilding from the Roman Empire, unlike Sardis and Philadelphia; no wonder the Laodiceans could boast “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”; yet the Risen Lord refers to them as “wretched, miserable, poor...” (3:17); it was a city too prosperous to have any need for God.

2. It was a center for clothing manufacture; the sheep which grazed around Laodicea were famous for their soft, velvet black wool; it was particularly famous for producing outer garments and tunics and was proud of its garment industry; yet the risen Lord says of them “You may be rich and clothed with white garments, yet you are shameful in your nakedness” (3:18).

3. It was famous as a medical center which was noted for an ointment for the ears and a salve for the eyes; her doctors were so famous that their faces appeared on coins; yet the Risen Lord rebukes them calling them “blind” even though you “anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see” (3:17b, 18c).

The institution of the church at Laodicea... Of the seven churches, Laodicea was the worst; there is no word of praise for this church; in early church writings it is said that Archippus was the first pastor in Laodicea; in Paul’s closing remarks to the church at Colosse he writes: “And say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it’” (Colossians 4:17); it seems as though Archippus was failing in his ministry and needed a sharp reminder; this reminder came more than 30 years before Revelation was
written so it may be that even then the rot was setting in the church because of an unworthy pastor.

*The inscribing of the Laodicean church into church history*… This church symbolizes the apostate age of the church which began in 1900 AD when science began to replace the God of the Bible; Scripture teaches, “In the last days men will not endure sound doctrine, but give heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1-2); that could well describe the church at Laodicea as well as the end time church; today is a day of the apostate Church—this is not true for all churches— but there has been among many a falling away from the faith; far too many people no longer desire to be taught the Scriptures; they want “feel good sermons” and not messages that convict them to live a Christ-like righteous life; again Paul wrote, “The time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine; but having itching ears, will heap for themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

We live in a day when Darwinism has taken over the Church with its teaching of Theistic Evolution; a day when Higher Criticism, as spearheaded by Karl Graf and Julius Wellhausen who argued in the latter half of the 19th Century that the Old Testament was not inspired by God, and liberal mainstream Protestant denominations adopted their teachings.

Then came the cults like Mormonism which teaches that Jesus was first a spirit child born to Elohim and his wife on the planet Koleb and was chosen by Elohim to become God to planet earth; that Jesus is one of many gods for man can achieve godhood just like Jesus and overtime rule as god over some unknown planet out there in space; then there is the Jehovah Witnesses who deny the deity of Christ altogether; rather He was the Archangel Michael whom God adopted as His Son to save mankind; in our day we have the Emergent Church Movement which has no use for the doctrine of Scripture, but sees the fundamental purpose of the Church as forming community for the purpose of helping one another; that may be a noble and godly cause but without doctrine there is nothing on which to build one’s faith.

Jesus warned that in the last days there will be false prophets who come in My name who will deceive many (Matthew 24:5,11); they will even “show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24); so we have in the past 20 or so years seen the rise of the “prophetic movement” of self
proclaimed apostles and prophets who claim special revelation from God; it would do us well to remember that Jesus warned about these charlatans saying: “not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

The Church at Laodicea was a poor, sick, blind, and naked congregation that Jesus characterized as “lukewarm” and apostate in the faith; Jesus wanted nothing to do with them (3:16).

The identification of the Risen Lord… “These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God” (3:14b).

1. He is “the Amen”… This is a strange title for Christ; it could refer to the God of truth; in the Hebrew text God, the Father is called “the God of Amen” (Isaiah 65:16) though it is translated “the God of truth”; here Jesus gets the same title as His Father; He is one whose promises are true beyond doubt.

2. He is “the Faithful and True Witness”… This phrase carries the same meaning as “the Amen.”

3. He is “the Beginning of the creation of God”… He was the One involved in creation (Colossians 1:16).

The indifference in the Laodicean church (3:14-16)…

1. The description of their indifference… “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot… so then because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot…” (3:15a-16a); they were insipid; they did not care; the one impossible attitude toward Christ is neutrality; to be neutral in your faith is to be a hindrance to Jesus Christ; today, Jesus works through men and the person who remains totally detached in his attitude toward the Christian mission, is one who is not on the way, but in the way; if you are not a helper, you are a hinderer.
2. The desire of Christ toward indifference... “I wish you were cold or hot” (3:15b); the word for “cold” (psuchros) means cold to the point of freezing; the word for “hot” (zestos) means hot to the point of boiling; He does not want us “lukewarm” or “tepid” (chliaros) which has a nauseating effect; we like our food hot or cold, but tepid food can turn the stomach.

3. The decision of Christ about indifference... “I will vomit you out of My mouth” (3:16b); outside of Laodicea were mineral springs, but the water flowed over lime encrusted cliffs that gave forth a nauseating taste and smell; anyone who would drink the water could get sick; they would want to spit it out of their mouth; that is how Jesus feels about an indifferent attitude toward His mission; it makes Him sick and He will vomit them out of His mouth.

The insensitivity of the Laodiceans toward spiritual matters ...

1. Seen in their false confession... “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing...” (3:17a); a false confession; materially the people were well off, but wealth can be deceptive; people who are rich think they can buy their way out of any problem, but that is not true; money can't buy happiness, or a healthy mind and body, or comfort in time of sorrow, or fellowship in time of loneliness—and it cannot buy one eternal life with God.

2. Seen in their factual condition... “and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked—” (3:17b); the city was wealthy, a banking and commercial center, but without Christ they were miserable, wretched, poor; the city had a medical center and manufactured an eye salve, but they were blind; the city manufactured garments, but they were naked.

The instructions from Christ to the Laodiceans...

1. His meeting of needs...“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed, and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” (3:18).

Christ says, “Buy from me, I will give you true and pure riches; I will give you clothing that will never cause you shame; I will anoint your eyes so
you will have clear sight; you will never do better than what I have to offer!” Christ promises to meet all needs physically and spiritually if we only commit our life to Him in a passionate way.

2. His method of getting their attention… “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten…” (3:19a; see Hebrews 12:3-11).

3. His mandate to the church… “Therefore, be zealous and repent” (3:19b).

*The invitation of Christ to the church…* “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (3:20-22).

1. The door… When I read this it reminded me of Holman Hunt’s painting of Jesus as the “The Light of the World”; He is standing at the door of the human heart with no handle on the outside knocking and wanting to come in; the door can only be opened from within; R.C. Trench wrote: “Every man is lord of the house of his own heart; it is his fortress; he must open the gates of it” and “he has the mournful prerogative and privilege of refusing to open.” The man who refuses to open is “blindly at strife with his own blessedness.” He is a “miserable conqueror.”

2. The dining…To those who open Jesus promises to come in and dine with Him; the word for “dine” (*deipnon*) is the word for evening meal or supper; it was the main meal of the day; people lingered and sat long and used this as a time for unlimited fellowship; this means that if you open the door, you can have intimate fellowship with Christ.

3. The discovery… As overcomers we have the privilege of sitting with Christ on His throne; in God’s kingdom we will have a position of authority as we will in the Millennium rule and reign with Christ.

Sadly, the church at Laodicea pictures the age of apostasy, the last and seventh age before Christ returns; I believe we are in that age.