



## Revelation 3:7-8

(7) "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. (8) I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

*New International Version*

[Jesus Christ](#) tells the Philadelphians that they have only a little strength, a little power (*dunamis*). They have a small, effective capability for wonderful works and mighty deeds, a limited ability to get things done. If they are dynamic, it is only on a small scale. This has some implications about the letter to Philadelphia that we may not have considered before.

There are at least four applications or audiences to the Letters to the Seven Churches: They are written to 1) seven literal, first-century churches in Asia Minor; 2) seven end-time churches; 3) seven historical church eras; and/or 4) individuals Christians. In each letter, Christ gives the admonition, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" ([Revelation 2:7](#), 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The seven letters can represent attitudes or conditions as well as organizational units and periods. Looking through the lens of the fourth application gives the letter to Philadelphia meaning regardless of the era or corporate organization one may be part of.

Christ's statement that the Philadelphian has only a little strength is not necessarily a criticism. The overall tenor of the letter is extremely positive. However, He is giving a statement of fact: Philadelphians have only a small effective capability for miraculous work, a little physical or spiritual aptitude, a small measure of effectiveness. *Dunamis* is not entirely lacking, but it is present in only a small amount.

The Philadelphian, by this accounting, will probably not be the one [healing](#) people when

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his shadow passes by, or the one moving mountains. Nor will He be prophesying of future events or speaking in unfamiliar languages. He may not have great speaking ability or a dynamic personality. This is not to say that power and effectiveness are entirely lacking, just that the Philadelphian will probably not have the same dramatic outworking we observe in other biblical figures.

Why is this *dunamis* lacking? From the rest of the letter to Philadelphia, it does not appear that the lack of *dunamis* is because of a great failing or negligence in duties to [God](#). On the contrary, the letter is a commendation because of *faithfulness*. Perhaps part of the reason, seen in one of Jesus' [parables](#), is that not much natural ability is there for God to enhance. Perhaps also, mighty deeds are lacking because there is no *need* for such works to be done. Remember, if God has ordained that something be done, *He* will give the power for it to be accomplished. If He has not given that power, it is because it is His will that a thing not be accomplished.

The [Parable of the Talents](#) adds to the picture:

For the [kingdom of heaven](#) is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own *ability*; and immediately he went on a journey. ([Matthew 25:14-15](#))

The word *ability* in verse 15 is also *dunamis*. These verses affirm that 1) talents are given by God, and 2) apparently the bestowing of talents depends somewhat on the effective capability the person already possesses. Along the same lines, it is interesting to note that Christ Himself was limited in the works—*dunamis*—He could perform because of the unbelief in some areas ([Matthew 13:58](#); [Mark 6:5-6](#))!

The two faithful servants double what is given to them. The amounts are not as important as the growth. Both give Christ a 100% increase on what He bestowed on them. The unfaithful servant produces nothing at all.

In this example, we can see the Philadelphian as the servant who receives only two talents rather than five. He does not have the same natural ability. However, even though he may have fewer responsibilities, or the scope of what he controls is much smaller, he is *just as faithful* as the servant who receives more. The Philadelphian may have only a little ability, but with that ability he is able to *keep God's word and not deny His name* ([Revelation 3:8](#)). His power enables him to keep God's command to persevere (verse 10).

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We have been given a measure of *dunamis*. If we have [God's Spirit](#), we have *ability*, *talent*, *effectiveness*, and *strength* in some measure, in some area. It does not matter how much is given, or in what area our strength resides, but that we remain faithful in what God has given to us and that we make use of the power we have to further God's purpose.

— David C. Grabbe

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