

Revelation 3: Warnings against Immorality and False Teaching at Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea

To the Church in Sardis

Revelation 3:1-2

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These things says he that has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: "I know your works that you have a name that you live, and you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of yours perfected before my God.

The words are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. He knows that their reputation exceeds the reality of their ways. A dead church can put up a righteous front. And so it was with the recipient of this letter—Sardis!

SARDIS: (sar'-dis) (Sardeis): Sardis is of interest to the student of early Christian history as the home of one of the Seven Churches of Rev (Rev 1:11; 3:1 ff). It was moreover one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor, and until 549 BC, the capital of the kingdom of Lydia. . . . At the base flowed the river Pactolus which served as a moat, rendering the city practically impregnable. In 17 AD, when it was destroyed by an earthquake, the Roman emperor Tiberius remitted the taxes of the people and rebuilt the city, and in his honor the citizens of that and of neighboring towns erected a large monument, but Sardis never recovered its former importance (compare Rev 3:12). (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)

The church at Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but they were dead. The use of "Be watchful!" is interestingly compared to the previous commands to repent. They were ordered to strengthen what remains and were ready to die. Their deeds were not complete in the sight of God

Revelation 3:3

3 Remember therefore how you have received and did hear; and keep (it), and repent. If therefore you shall not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shalt not know what hour I will come upon you.

The message is clear: "Remember what you received and heard. Obey it. Repent. If not, the Lord will come like a thief."

Revelation 3:4-5

4 But you have a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. 5 He that overcomes shall thus be

arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

A few people had not soiled their clothes. Revelation 19:8 defines the figure of clean, white clothes: “And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright (and) pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” Some had not soiled their clothes and they will walk with the Lord. Their names will not be blotted out of the book of life. The *book of life* appears throughout the scriptures:

Psalms 69:28-29: Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the righteous.

Philippians 4:2-3: I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, I beseech you also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Revelation 19:8: And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright (and) pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Revelation 13:8: 8 And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, (every one) whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that has been slain.

Revelation 17:8: The beast that you saw was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, (they) whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come.

Revelation 20:12: And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is (the book) of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Revelation 20:15: And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:27: And there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that makes an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life.

To the Church in Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things says he that is holy, he that is true, he that has the key of David, he that opens and none shall shut, and that shuts and none open:

“These things says he that is holy, he that is true” describes the Lord. He “That has the key of David” is spoken of formerly by Isaiah in Isaiah 22:20-23:

22 And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. 23 And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a throne of glory to his father's house.

The *power to open and shut* expression is similar to the power to bind and loose in Matthew 16:19, where the Lord promises the keys of the kingdom of heaven:

19 I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Previously we have seen that the Lord holds the keys of Death and Hades Revelation 1:17-18:

Fear not; I am the first and the last, 18 and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Revelation 3:8:13

8 I know your works (behold, I have set before you a door opened, which none can shut), that you have a little power, and did keep my word, and did not deny my name. 9 Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you did keep the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial, that (hour) which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

11 I come quickly: hold fast that which you have, that no one take thy crown.

12 He that overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out from there no more: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my own new name.

13 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

They have little strength, but have kept the Lord's word and not denied his name. The synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not (see notes on Revelation 2:9), are liars:

9 I know your tribulation, and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

They will fall down and acknowledge that the Lord loves these Christians that they have persecuted. Since they have endured patiently, as commanded, the Lord will keep them from the hour of trial to come upon the whole world to test them. The Lord

promises that he is coming soon, and commands that they hold on to what they have. No one will take their crown, and him who overcomes will be a pillar in the temple of God:

The faithful Christians were always to be a part of the pillar of the temple of God. 1 Timothy 3:15-16 teaches:

But if I tarry long, that you may know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

The Lord, while on earth, had promised in Mark 14:58:

58 We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.

The temple not made with hands is clearly the church. The following scriptures attest to this:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17: 16 Know you not that you are a temple of God, and (that) the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are you.

2 Corinthians 6:16: And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? For we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Ephesians 2:21-22: 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

Revelation 21:22: And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof.

The Lord will write the name of God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, on him that overcomes

The New Jerusalem, just as the temple, is the church. It is the church now and is so described in these scripture:

Hebrews 12:22-24: 22 but you are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better than (that of) Abel.

Hebrews 12:28-29: 28 Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe: 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Revelation 21:2-3: 2 And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven of God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, (and be) their God:

To the Church in Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

14 And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: 15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth. 17 Because you say, "I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing;" and know not that you are the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked: 18 I counsel you to buy of me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich; and white garments, that you may clothe thyself, and (that) the shame of your nakedness be not made manifest; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. 21 He that overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne.

22 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Lord describes himself as the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. The letter is to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

LAODICEA: (la-od-i-se'-a) (Laodikia): A city of Asia Minor situated in the Lycos valley in the province of Phrygia, and the home of one of the Seven Churches of Rev (Rev 1:11). . . . It was founded by Antiochus II (261 BC - 246 BC) of Syria, who named it for his wife Laodike, and who populated it with Syrians and with Jews who were transplanted from Babylonia to the cities of Phrygia and Lydia. Though Laodicea stood on the great highway at the junction of several important routes, it was a place of little consequence until the Roman province of Asia was formed in 190 BC. It then suddenly became a great and wealthy center of industry, famous especially for the fine black wool of its sheep and for the Phrygian powder for the eyes, which was manufactured there (compare Rev 3:18). . . . In the year 60 AD, the city was almost entirely destroyed by an earthquake, but so wealthy were its citizens that they rejected the proffered aid of Rome, and quickly rebuilt it at their own expense (compare Rev 3:17). (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)

Their deeds, which were not hot or cold but lukewarm, characterized them as an indifferent church. As a result, the Lord said that he would spit them out. They were satisfied with their own riches and wealth and needed nothing. In reality, they were wretched, pitiful, blind, and naked.

To the contrary, they should have followed the admonition of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:58:

58 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not vain in the Lord.

They were to buy gold from the Lord to become rich. Peter has described faith as more precious than gold in 1 Peter 1:6-7:

6 Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been put to grief in manifold trials, 7 that the proof of your faith, (being) more precious than gold that perishes though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

They were to buy white clothes to wear so they could cover their shameful nakedness. Revelation 19:8 defines the figure:

8 And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright (and) pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

They were to buy salve to put on their eyes, so they could see. The Lord had said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Faith, righteous acts, and pure hearts will overcome indifference. The Lord rebuked those that he loved; and, in turn, they were to be earnest and repent. The Lord is knocking but we must hear his voice and open the door. He will eat with us, and we with him. Those that overcome will sit with him on his throne. Paul describes this inheritance in Romans 8:16-17:

16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God:
17 and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with (him), that we may be also glorified with (him).