

REVELATION

VISIONS OF VICTORY

JOSH FRANKLIN, PHD

Jesus Wants an Awakened Church

(Revelation 3:1-6)



*Artist Rendering of Ancient Sardis (**notice the walls** that were considered impenetrable high above the city)

Churches so far:

- The Church at Ephesus (symbolizing the apostolic church, A.D. 30-100)
- The Church at Smyrna (symbolizing the persecuted church, A.D. 100-312)
- The Church at Pergamum (symbolizing the church married to the world, A.D. 300-500)
- The Church at Thyatira (symbolizing the church of Middle Ages, A.D. 500-1500)
- **The Church at Sardis (symbolizing the church of the Reformation (A.D. 1517-1800))**

Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV) – Bible passage [my explanatory notes]

¹ “And to the angel [Gk. “messenger” – the pastor] of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God [symbolism for the complete, full and perfect work of the Holy Spirit] and the seven stars [the pastors of the churches]: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive [you have a false reputation of spiritual life], but you are dead. [“completely ineffective” or “utterly useless”]’

- In Isaiah 11:2, the Holy Spirit is described in a “seven spirits” kind of way: “the spirit of the Lord... the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”
- “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

² Be watchful [ESV: “wake up”, should reflect this idea - “stay alert”; literally “prove yourself to be watchful or vigilant”], and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect [or “complete”] before God.

- The 5 commands from verses 2-3 are: 1) Be watchful; 2) Strengthen; 3) Remember; 4) Hold fast and 5) Repent.
- “Be watchful” – “While it could be translated ‘be watchful,’ most agree that it more properly means ‘show yourself to be watchful.’ In other words, they have to change their ways and ‘prove’ that they are vigilant. They have fallen asleep spiritually and must ‘wake up.’”¹

¹ Condensed from Grant Osborne, *Revelation: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2002), 174.

Extra Notes:

- “What little that remains must be strengthened, built back up. Why? Because it ‘is about to die.’ Specifically, Jesus says, ‘I have not found your works [which ‘I know,’ v. 1] complete before My God.’ Though the quantity of their works was deficient, it is more likely that it was the quality of their works that was most lacking. They had grown content with a mediocre, halfway, comfortable, and convenient Christianity.”²

³ Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast [guard, hold on to, or keep] and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief [similar to how their city fell twice in its history], and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

- The almost perpendicular walls of the elevation on which the city was built made the inhabitants overconfident and proud. During the reign of Croesus, one of the strongholds of the city was captured by Cyrus in 547 BC when one of his soldiers scaled the rock face at night and opened the gates to the Persians. Herodotus, in *The Histories* (Book 1, Chapters 80-85), describes how Cyrus offered a reward to any soldier who could find a way up the steep cliffs. A Persian soldier observed a Lydian soldier descend the cliff to retrieve his helmet, revealing a vulnerable point. The Persians then scaled the walls at this weak spot, taking the city by surprise. In 214 BC the armies of Antiochus the Great (III) captured the city by a similar method.

⁴ You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

- “they shall walk with Me in white” – **Three options³ (I prefer #3):**
 1. heavenly clothing, thus stressing victory, glory, and the heavenly state
 2. the wedding garment, thus imputed righteousness
 3. the Roman triumph, when citizens wore white robes in celebration of military victories. Of these, the last fits the context best. In a city and a church that has primarily known defeat and only the bitter memory of past triumph, it would be exciting to think of oneself as part of the few “who would walk with Christ in the triumphal procession of his final victory”.

⁵ He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life [a divine ledger recording the names of believers (see Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19)]; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels [Jesus will vouch for them (see Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8)].

- “If a person is clothed with eternal righteousness, make no mistake—he or she has an eternally secure future. Obviously, God has no need of a literal book to remind Him of our standing before Him. The Book of Life is a symbol of permanent security. Our future blessings are certain, as if God had written our names in a great registry of the citizens of heaven.”⁴

⁶ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’

² Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 84.

³ Grant Osborne, *Revelation*, 178-179.

⁴ Charles Swindoll, *Revelation*, vol. 15, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 68.