

Revelation 3

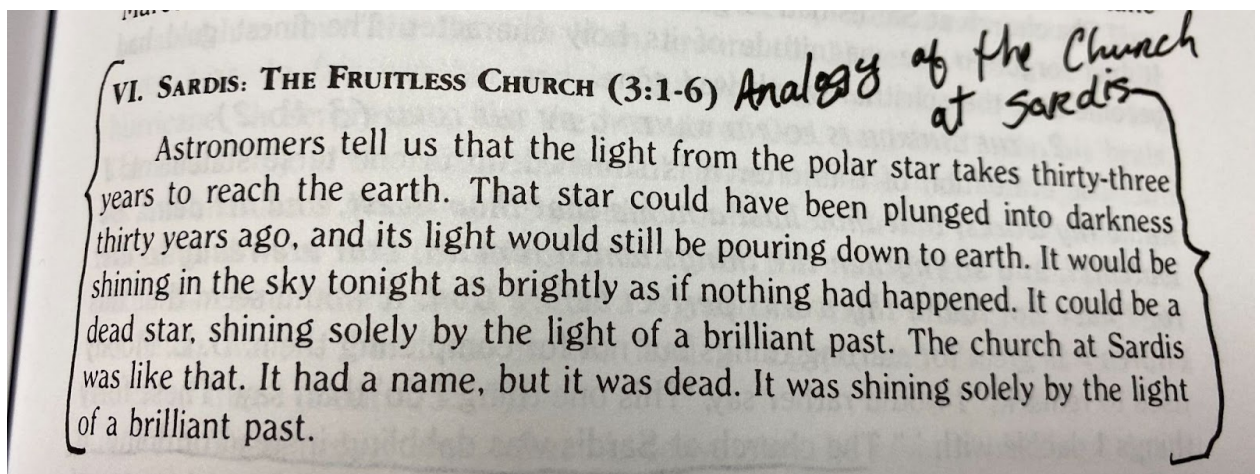
Sardis: The Dead Church

Historical Background of Sardis

- A major trade center in ancient times
- Halfway from the coast to Laodicea. It was founded as early as 1400 BC and abandoned in the 15th century ad.
- The main east—west route through the region—and was the terminus of the “Royal Road” from Susa and Persepolis. Sardis was blessed with an abundance of gold in the Pactolus River in ancient times
- The church in Sardis seems to have heeded the warning. In the second century, the city was home to the prominent bishop Melito
- Sardis was the capital of the Lydian Empire
- Due in part to the discovery of gold in the Pactolus River, Lydia was known for its wealth (many historians believe coined money was invented here).
- Cyrus the Great defeated Croesus, the last king of Lydia, at Sardis in 546 BC
- Sardis became the western capital of the Persian Empire and the terminus of the Royal Road—a 1,500-mile route linking the city with the Persian capitals of Susa and Persepolis in the east. The city prospered from this new trade. It also was known for its fine wool, used to make outer garments (“cloaks”).
- Sardis was taken from the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great in 334 BC
- Rome annexed Sardis in 133 BC
- Sardis was mostly destroyed by an earthquake in AD 17
- Emperor Tiberius gave the city a five-year remission from taxes and personally donated 10 million Sestertii (about 2.5 million Denarii) to help rebuild it
- The city became the hub of the network of Roman highways in the region, and the population swelled to between 60,000 and 100,000 residents as the city profited from extensive trade

- Sardis had a stadium and several theaters, one of which was carved into the acropolis and had 15,000 seats (Wilson, Turkey, 297).
- The most visible remains at Sardis, a monumental bath and gymnasium complex, are a large two-story building featuring marble columns, a heated bathhouse, and a long, oval cold-water pool in the frigidarium

[1] “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: **“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.**”



JB Phillips Commentary

- What an alarming and damning message to hear from the Lord Jesus Christ: you are dead
 - Spiritually speaking
 - No power, no presence of the Holy Spirit
 - Full of unbelievers that professed Christ
 - Church of the tares
- No doctrinal problems mentioned (i.e. nicolaitans, balaam, jezebel)

- It was numb
- It was dead

Revelation 3:2 NKJV

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

- They were dabbling instead of doing
- In today's times:
 - They weren't finishing any of the programs they started
 - Even what was left was fizzling out quick
- I reiterate now, our church must be founded on the preaching and teaching of the Word of God
 - Gimmicks are short lived
 - Programs are temporary at best
 - The word of the Lord stands forever and is relevant to any time or place
- It is especially dangerous for financially prosperous congregations (as Sardis was).
 - Easy to trust in these things
 - Easy to become a clanging gong

Revelation 3:3 NKJV

Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and **repent**. Therefore **if you will not watch**, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

- Remember the past!
 - The revival that established the church
 - The regeneration of the Holy Spirit that gives life to the church
 - Remember those things
- Repent for the present!
 - Complacency
 - Apathy

- Things that lead to an institution instead of an organism. (the church is a living organism!)
- Readiness for the future
 - Without self judgment, God will bring His judgment
 - It will come swiftly and unexpected

Revelation 3:4-6 NKJV

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. [5] He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. [6] “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

- (v 4) There is a remnant who is still faithful.
 - I believe that this is who Jesus is speaking to
 - Those who are alive!
 - Those who have not compromised authenticity for comfort
- (v 5) He who overcomes:
 - Clothed in white= symbolic of purity
 - (maybe a play on the white robes that the rich wore under the Roman rule)
 - This city was a friend of Rome
 - White also associated with weddings: marriage supper of the Lamb
 - “Not blot out his name from the Book of Life”
 - Read closely
 - This is a blessed promise not a veiled threat
 - They had sinned
 - They were cold
 - If they repented, they would be restored

1 John 1:8-10 NKJV

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive

us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

“He who has an ear...”

- Those who have spiritual understanding will hear
- Only possible if they possess the Holy Spirit
- Real believers will always return.

1 John 2:19 NKJV

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

Philadelphia: The Faithful Church

Revelation 3:7-13 NKJV

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘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”’: [8] “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. [9] 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. [10] 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. [11] Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. [12] He who overcomes, I will make 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, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. [13] “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Introduction and Background:

- Philadelphia was the only church of the 7 that was not a major city.
 - However it did have a strategic location which afforded unique opportunities for missions
 - It also had roads connecting it to major cities
- The economy at Philadelphia consisted of wool working and the cultivation of grapes for wine (Magie, Roman Rule, 46, 48).
- In AD 92, Emperor Domitian issued an edict in the province of Asia that at least half of the vineyards needed to be cut down because of a scarcity of corn and an abundance of wine (Suetonius, Domitian, 7.2).
 - Since Philadelphia depended on its wine production for economic stability, this would have been a major blow to the people and region. (Daniel J. Thorpe, “Philadelphia,” ed. John D. Barry et al., The Lexham Bible Dictionary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
- Philadelphia received only a good report in the letter addressed to them.
- What is it that they were doing right?

- (Verse 7) Attributes that Jesus listed about Himself
 - Holy and True
 - Key of David→ the kingdom (throne) of David (Isaiah 22:22)
 - Opens and shuts→ speaks unto His sovereignty (no one can change His decrees)
- (Verse 8) The church's works are commended
 - "have a little strength, **have kept my word**"
 - God blesses when your focus is one teaching and keeping His word and preaching Christ!
 - We are to make much of Jesus and to preach His Word!
 - 1 Corinthians 1:23-24 NKJV ***but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, [24] but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.***
 - Philippians 1:21 NKJV ***For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.***
 - They weren't a big church, nor mighty and powerful, but they were faithful to God's word
 - God rewards them with an open door
 - With opportunity, with fruit
 - Be faithful where you are at and God will open doors for ministry
 - (v 9) Jesus also promises to give them victory over enemies
 - They made much of Christ
 - The enemies try to tear down Christ
 - Philippians 3:18-21 NKJV ***For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: [19] whose end is destruction,***

whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. [20] For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

- Proverbs 16:7 NKJV ***When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.***

- (v 10) They also persevered in all situations
 - Jesus would also protect them from “the hour of trial which shall come on the **whole world**”
 - This refers to the “great tribulation”
- (v 11) Encouragement to hold the line, to keep up the good work
 - Why?
 - So you won't forfeit your crown/reward
- (v 12) Rewards promised
 - “Make him a pillar in My temple”
 - A pillar is symbolic for steadfast and immovable
 - A place of honor and strength
 - “Go out no more”
 - Never fall away
 - Forever free from the possibility of falling away
 - “Will write the **name of My God...city of My God...and...My new name**”
 - Revelation 22:4 NKJV ***They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.***
 - New Jerusalem a future city
 - He will give us a new name
- (v 13) Comes as always with an invitation to hear

Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church

Revelation 3:14-22 NKJV

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans 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 could wish you were cold or hot. [16] So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. [17] Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— [18] 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. [19] As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. [20] Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. [21] 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. [22] ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’””

Introduction and Background:

- It is the only church among the seven that does not receive any praise.
- It was a wealthy city.
 - The city’s noteworthy **banking** assets are reflected in Cicero’s remark about cashing his letters of credit in Laodicea (Cicero, Fam. 3.5.4).
 - Also refused Roman funds after an earthquake in 60 AD and financed the work themselves.
- Laodicea had a famous school of medicine
 - known for ophthalmology, renowned for **eye salve** that they produced

- a fact supported by coins from the area that contain the names of leading physicians from the school (Reddish, Guide, 233).
- The first-century geographer Strabo reports that Laodicea's economy thrived due to its textile industry, which was renowned for its raven-black wool (compare "white clothing" in Rev 3:18; Strabo, Geography 12.8.16).
 - The textile factories manufactured sleeved tunics, hooded cloaks, and carpets (Wilson, Victor, 163).
 - The city's commercial success was due in part to its position at the junction of two roads
- Significant ruins of the city include theaters, an aqueduct, a gymnasium, a council meeting house, and a stadium, which was used for athletic contests and gladiatorial exhibitions (Reddish, Guide, 236–37).
 - In AD 79 the stadium was dedicated to the emperor Titus and the people of Laodicea.
 - The stadium had an arena that was 900 feet (3 football fields) long, semicircular at both ends, and had continuous seating around the entire circumference (Hemer, Letters, 194).
- (Verse 14)
 - Attributes of Christ are listed
 - The Amen
 - Jesus not only speaks truth
 - He is truth
 - Faithful and true witness
 - He is trustworthy
 - He is authentic
 - Beginning of the creation of God
 - Rather the beginner of all creation
 - Col. 1:15-18
 - John 1:1-3
- (Verse 15-17)
 - Neither hot nor cold
 - Lukewarm → metaphor drawn from their water supply

- It traveled several miles through an aqueduct
 - When it arrived it was not cold for drinking like a spring or hot for relaxing like hot springs located nearby
 - It was foul, tasted bad, and useless
 - Reference to their water supply, that was unappealing because it was the same way.
 - Hot = people who are spiritually alive
 - Cold = reject Jesus
 - Lukewarm does not fit into either
 - They were hypocrites playing church
- (v 17) What's worse, they were deluded in thinking they were OK (that nothing was wrong)
 - They were focused on their life of wealth and comfort
 - They were didn't even see their true spiritual bankruptcy which was:
 - Wretched → the only other time this Greek word is used in Scripture is Romans 7:24.
 - Miserable → the only other time this Greek word is used in Scripture is 1 Corinthians 15:19
 - Poor → literally reduced to a beggar (spiritually)
 - (no doubt reference to the cities great wealth and banking industry)
 - Faith in money will always disappoint
 - Blind → spiritually blinded by Satan (no doubt a play on their prided medical practice and eye salve)
 - Naked → laid bare (play on their prided clothing made from black wool)
 - They had placed their trust in physical things when it should be on Jesus Christ
- (vv 18-20) "buy from me"
 - Gold refined in the fire → free of impurities→ refers to the riches of God's grace
 - White garments → their black wool symbolized filthy, sinful garments→ white garments symbolize the righteousness of Christ→ Philippians 3:9

- Eye salve→ they needed to have Christ open their eyes
- (v 19) God rebukes and chastens those He loves.
 - Be zealous for Christ (as zealous as you have been in worldly matters)
 - Repent!
- (v 20) Famous invitation!
 - Philadelphia had an open door
 - The Laodecians had a closed door
 - Christ wants communion with us (dine)
 - This Greek word is for the last meal of the day
 - Opportunity was running out
- (vv 21, 22)
 - For those that overcome, Christ promises that they will reign with Him
 - 1 Cor. 6:3, 2 Timothy 2:12
 - He who has an ear→ listen!