

=Book of Revelation –

Revelation Chapter 3

An Interpretation

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Introduction:

1. This chapter continues the seven letters dictated by Jesus to John the Apostle while he was on the Isle of Patmos.
2. Jesus had not committed His words to the printed page during His lifetime, relying on Matthew, Mark, Luke and John for the written record.
3. Here, He targets his words to seven churches in Asia Minor that teach lessons for all of us through the centuries.

SARDIS

(1) To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.'

- The previous three letters had opened with a commendation to the church, but not so here. Jesus did not find anything to commend in the Sardis church.
- They wore the name of Christ, but they were dead. But not out of existence - yet. We might call them nominal Christians.
- The church had a good reputation with the community, but not with the true Judge of actions.
- The church did not have internal divisions. But that was not benefiting them.
- There was no persecution from the community, but that didn't help them.

- This church did not suffer from poverty, but the opportunity did not result in useful **deeds**.

(2) **'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.**

- This church was receiving its **wake up** call.
- To be watchful had historic meaning at Sardis. In past centuries, the city had twice fallen at night to invaders because the sentries were not watching.
- The church must salvage failing good works projects. The church had launched good works, but the programs were never completed. Not one thing had been brought to completeness as God viewed events.

Discussion: Since Jesus knows what is going on in church, should we do anything differently?

(3) **'So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.**

- Do a roll back. **Remember**. **Repent** of drifting and go back to what they had heard in the first place.
- If they failed to act, then as in their town history, the invader would climb the cliffs as a thief at night and their freedom to **repent** would be ended.
- This is a **coming** of Jesus, but not the great formal coming.

(4) **'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with**



Me in white, for they are worthy.

- There is a happy exception. **A few people** are not defiling their **garments** with sin and they will be **walking** with the Lord. Jesus commends this small group of saints who live in a **worthy** way.
- The garments manufactured at Sardis were various colors, so the **white garment** was a contrast.
- The **white garments** point to a righteous reward.
- **Walking with** the Lord shows intimacy and agreement.

Discussion: It is significant that the approved saints were not _____ contaminated by the the soiled ones. There was no _____ call for approved saints to leave the congregation.

(5) 'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and 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.'

- The whole church was not “written off” because of the drift of the majority. They weren’t told to start a new church.
- **The Book of Life** is the divine register spoken of beginning in Exodus 32:32:

**But now, if You will, forgive their sin—
and if not, please blot me out from
Your book which You have written!**

See it in Philippians 4:3 and Revelation 21:27. This is the family register of the redeemed throughout the ages.

- Some were going to have their **names erased from the book of life** because of their conduct.
- Barclay:

In the ancient world a king kept a register of his citizens. When a man committed a crime against the state, or when he died, his name was erased from that register.

- These overcoming saints were to have their **names confessed before** the **Father** and his whole staff of **angels**. Jesus had earlier promised this recognition in Matthew, Mark and Luke.
- **The Spirit** is speaking through the word from Jesus that John is writing here.

PHILADELPHIA

(7) "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:

- **Philadelphia** has been renamed to Ala-Sheher and still exists.
 - Jesus says three things about himself in this verse:
 - He is holy. 1 Peter 2:22 reads:

who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth . . .
 - He is true. What he says is guaranteed in writing.
 - He **has the key of David**, language drawn from Isaiah 22:22:

**Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder,
When he opens no one will shut,
When he shuts no one will open.**
- The one who holds the key has the authority.
- Local opposition was from the synagogue (verse 9) and they claimed to be God's voice, but Jesus, not the rabbi, is on David's throne.
 - Having the **key** to heaven, he will choose to let people in or refuse to admit them.

- Christ is NOW on David's throne. There is a theory that he will come later to occupy that throne.

(8) I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

- **I know** is used seven times by the Lord as he addresses the seven churches. He was intensely aware of their internal condition.
- There is a three-fold commendation here for the believers:
 - **An open door** was set before them because of their **deeds**. Was this the door to heaven?
 - Christ commends their obedience. **They kept His word.**
 - Christ commends their faithfulness. They had not **denied** the **name** of Jesus.

(9) Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

- The Jews had expected others to bow down to them as seen in Isaiah:

The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, And all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; And they will call you the city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 60:14 NASB)

- These Jews were not true sons of Abraham because they did not do his works. John 8:39. Further, they did not share the faith of Abraham. Galatians 3:29. They claimed to be God's people,

but Jesus called them **liars**.

- In some way, members of the synagogue would acknowledge that the little group of believers had it right and that Jesus loved the church.

(10) **Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.**

(11) **'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.**

- . . . **the word of My perseverance** is obscure.

The New King James reads:

Because you have kept My command to persevere

This captures the idea. As a result of their past faithfulness, the Lord would keep them safe through a persecution that he could see coming on others.

- **Hines:**

The particular trial is not named and we have no means of knowing what it was. In principle the same promise would fit the judgment as the great trial for the whole human race. God will keep those who obey his commands. All trials test the genuineness of those who profess to be followers of Christ.

- **Coming quickly** is a problem here. It cannot be his formal second coming. Looking at the context, it may be to **keep you from the hour of testing**. The coming will either be shortly or suddenly, both possible definitions of **quickly**.
- They had a **crown**, but it could be **taken** by someone else if they were inattentive. This shows the teaching of eternal security is not according to the Scripture.

(12) He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and 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 My new name. (13) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

- There is no **temple** in eternity (Revelation 21:22), so this temple points to the present figurative temple, the church (1 Corinthians 3:16).
- The overcomers in the church will have three great blessings:
 - They will become a pillar. The **pillar** was a natural place for a plaque and Jesus specifies what is to be written there. We have pictured pillars from a temple in their town of Philadelphia. These are the pillars that would have come to their minds.
 - Believers will be able to live at the temple and not be going out to their tiny homes and coming back again to worship.
 - The pillar would have three inscriptions showing ownership:
 - ◆ The **name** of the **God** of Jesus.
 - ◆ The **new Jerusalem**. Believers are citizens of the Jerusalem from above. Hebrews 12:22.
 - ◆ The new name of Jesus.



Discussion: What do pillars in the church look like today?

LAODICEA

(14) To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

- James Burton Coffman writes,

Laodicea was a banking center with a great deal of wealth. One of the great industries was that of wool and woolen garments, featuring a fine quality glossy black wool from Phrygian sheep; another industry was that of drugs developed in connection with the medical school there. One of the famous Laodicean remedies was a "Phrygian eye-salve" which was supposed to cure inflammation.
- As with earlier letters, Jesus restates his authority to speak and to be heard. He gives three here:
 - He is the **Amen**. So be it. His word cannot be challenged successfully.
 - He is **the faithful and true Witness**. What He says is true and will come to pass. You can depend on it.
 - He is **the Beginning of the creation of God**.

A.T. Robertson says of the beginning of the creation:

Not the first of creatures as the Arians held and Unitarians do now, but the originating source of creation through whom God works . . ."

(15) I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. (16)



So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

- The letters to most of the churches opened with a commendation. Not this time. Instead, there is an allusion to their local water supply. Some was piped from the hot springs at Hieropolis, but by the time it arrived at Ladocea, it was **lukewarm** and disliked.
- The Lord wanted them **hot**, but if they were **cold**, they could come to realize it, but being **lukewarm**, they were comfortable and totally unmotivated.
- Their **lukewarmness** made the Lord of Heaven gag and vomit. They were worse than unpalatable, they were nauseating.
- This church was going to be removed from the Lord's list and for reasons He states next:

(17) Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, (18) I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

- They had a defense for their comfortable indifference: Their **wealth** proved to themselves that they were in an acceptable condition before God.
- Hear *The Message* translation:
You brag, 'I'm rich, I've got it made, I need nothing from anyone,' oblivious that in fact you're a pitiful, blind beggar, threadbare and homeless.
- Actually, they needed a counselor (vs. 18) rather than a banker.



- This world trade center did not have the right kind of **gold**. The coin pictured is an AR Denarius from Laodicea dated about A.D. 200.
- Jesus distributes true **gold**. It had a high level of **refining**. A number of commentators suggest the refined gold was faith.
- This great center for manufacture of apparel left people spiritually **naked**. (That would not have an impact on the American culture where being nearly naked is a goal for some.)
- The **eye salve** sold locally did not enable people to truly **see**.
- This church desperately needed different money, clothes and medicine. Christ was the source.

(19) Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; 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 will dine with him, and he with Me.



- Although Jesus was outside the **door**, He had not given up on these lukewarm Christians. He was planning to **discipline** them - evidence of His **love**. They needed to restore their **zeal** (to boil over) for God.
- The incredible truth about our God is that he gently pursues his worshipers.
- This great picture is for the church and is not telling unbelievers what to do to be saved. It should not be used in a presentation to the unsaved because it does not apply to them.
- The church is invited to have lunch with the

Lord. The key is hearing his voice and taking action to open the door. He wants our fellowship, but the latch is on the inside.

- Here is another **coming** of Christ (vs. 20).
- Some have seen in this a reference to the Lord's Supper.

(21) He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down 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.

- Hines:

Sitting with God upon his throne means that the Father gave him the right to rule as king. In like manner those who overcame by doing Christ's commands were to be given authority to rule with him. This faithful Christians do by teaching and practicing his laws by which men are to be governed spiritually. Only in this way can the Lord reign over men. His law has been revealed to the world through the apostles and perpetuated by the teaching and lives of his disciples. He has made no other provision for its dissemination. All faithful Christians, therefore, share with him in ruling through his truth - here called sitting "down with me in my throne."

In chapter 4, we look into the throne room of God.

1. Jesus did not find anything to commend at Sardis.
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2. The deeds of the church were well-managed and complete. (1)
3. There were a few good people left in the Sardis church. (3)
4. Some of the Sardis believers had missing ears.
(4)
5. The town of Philadelphia still exists. (3)
6. Jesus has the key of David. (3)
7. The Jews at the synagogue were not true sons of Abraham (4)
8. Believers at Philadelphia would have many markings. (5)
9. Jesus was the first person that God created. (6)
10. The church at Laodicea was asking for money (6)