

# THE CHURCH OF SARDIS



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*Week Six - February 13, 2022*

The church at Sardis appeared to be a thriving church with a strong reputation. They thought highly of themselves and what they'd been able accomplish. So very much alive! Jesus, however, disagreed passionately. The church was dying, and the works were incomplete and out of line with God's purposes.

Years ago, I was visiting my cousin Tim in Rockford, Illinois. At the time he was one of the pastors of a very large church. During the summer they would hold outdoor concerts in a huge amphitheater built on their property. It held over 1,000 people. Some of the top Christian musicians and entertainers of the day would come to perform. My cousin Tim was the MC and would introduce the entertainers for the evening. It was quite a spectacle and well attended. When the time came, I entered the amphitheater with Tim and we went forward to the front row and sat down. Soon the seats next to us filled up. Tim went up to the platform to introduce the evening's entertainment. What happened next, I will never forget; I felt a little tap on my shoulder, so I turned to see who it was. There staring into my face was a bright-eyed young lady. "Are you somebody?", she said. I knew what she was hoping for. Was she lucky enough to be sitting next to a famous performer? Maybe she'd be able to meet the guy who would be introduced next. Perhaps she'd be able to share the story of that time she met "that guy before he was famous." But alas, it was not to be. I looked at her and said as kindly as I could, "No, I am nobody." I think I might have felt the breeze as the air went out of her sails as quickly as I've ever seen.

Have you ever thought of yourself more highly than you ought to? Believe me when I say that at this point in my life, I really did want to be somebody. That evening as I replayed the event in my mind I thought of a better response. I could have said "Yes! Indeed, I am somebody. I am a Prince, an adopted son of the most-high God and a brother of Jesus Christ." That just may have rocked her world! When you and I sit in a church gathering with fellow believers, we are sitting next to sons and daughters of God. We are family. Instead of looking for a worldly understanding of being somebody, we must first look to the only one who is somebody. The Lord Jesus Christ! Thru Him and in Him alone I find my purpose and meaning. To be somebody, I must not take my eyes off the only one who is somebody. Jesus gave those at Sardis the clue. *If you do not die to yourself, you will never live.*

# DAY 1

## Read Revelation 3:1-6

**PRAY.** Ask for guidance by the Holy Spirit for wisdom and understanding and to be right with God.

As you read it is important to make good observations from the text, I would recommend that you underline key words and phrases that “knock your socks off” as an insight into spiritual truth or as a question. Think in this way as you look at the text. What is this about? What was Jesus saying? To whom was he saying it? Why was he saying it? And why should it matter to me?

## HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Sardis was an important commercial city in ancient times and was the capital of the Lydian kingdom. Croesus (pronounced Kree-sus) was the final king to rule over the Kingdom of Lydia (560-546 BC) It was the first city to ever mint gold and silver coins, thus giving it credit for starting the modern use of trade based on coinage backed by a country/kingdom. Sardis was located 30 miles southeast of Thyatira at the junction of 5 roads overlooking the Hermus Valley. The most important of the trade routes ran east and west thru the kingdom of Lydia and the capital city of Sardis. This road connected Asian (East) to Greek and Roman (West) countries. It was a city where many from the east and west met to share ideas new concepts and trade. Sardis used the road to transport trade from its notable industries of dye, textiles and jewelry making the city and its people very wealthy. The upper city of Sardis was built on a very steep hillside its defenses appeared to be impregnable, guarding the walls was almost not necessary since the natural defenses appeared too strong to defeat. Complacency to guard the walls is what led to its defeat in (594 BC) by Cyrus king of Persia and by Antiochus in (218 BC). Both times Sardis posted few guards on the walls who paid little attention if any. Sardis came under Roman rule in 133 B.C. and was listed as a principal city of a judicial district.

By the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries Sardis was a center of worship for the pagan gods. They worshipped many gods, like Cybele (the great mother goddess and protectorate, believed to have given birth to Zeus), Artemis (goddess of the hunt - remains of the temple of Artemis remain today) and Emperor worship, (the application of divinity to the Roman Emperor). There was also a strong Jewish presence in Sardis, and the discovery in recent times, of one of the largest Synagogues ever built in an ancient city. And yes, there was a Christian presence, the church of Sardis with a self-imposed good reputation.

This was a heavily polytheistic and multicultural city; toleration of different religions was expected. People were likely taught to blend in and try not to look so different. Participate in civic celebrations, be a voice on the city council, be a productive citizen, have your worship but keep it separate from the rest of the public activities.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** *When comparing history and events to the Bible's truth we really have conjecture at best. We start with the Bible. Sometimes, we can make interesting comparisons and offer a telling view of the times, the peoples, and the understanding they may have drawn from the words of Jesus to their church. Sometimes interesting comparisons to our current culture and situation become more relevant. But let's be certain that we place our foundation on what God has chosen to reveal and preserve in His Word.*

After having read the history and geography about Sardis and the first 6 verses as a quick overview of the text, what comparisons could be drawn from the history and geography of the city and what Jesus had to say to the church?

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How have your comparisons clarified our own culture and church? What warnings could you see Jesus speaking to us? And what things could we do to wake up in areas we tend to be lethargic?

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Spend time in prayer and reflection. Review your answers and ask yourself what can I personally change in my life in light of what has been revealed to me today?

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## DAY 2

### Read Revelation 3:1.

In day one we looked at an overview of the history and geography of Sardis and how that possibly compares to our current culture and situation. We started our study of the scriptures with a general overview and first pass of the verses 1-6. Today we will take a look at some characteristics describing Jesus and his observations of the church at Sardis.

**Write out verse 1 here:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**KEY WORDS & PHRASES:** the one who holds, seven, spirits, stars, deeds, reputation that you are alive, in reality you are dead. What other keywords do you see?

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Observe some divine characteristic of Jesus. How many do you see and what are they?

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What are the seven spirits of God and the seven stars and who is in control of them?

**Seven spirits:** \_\_\_\_\_

*(Look up Rev. 1:4. Holy Spirit? Or Rev.5:6. The seven horns and seven eyes are the seven spirits of God? This could still be understood as the Holy Spirit everywhere present seeing all. Bottom line: God sees and knows all things. Nothing is ever missed or overlooked by God.)*

**Seven stars:** \_\_\_\_\_

*(See Rev.1:20 concerning the seven stars. They are angels over the churches. (If the nations have angels over them, e.g. The angel over Persia, the angel over Greece, the angel over Israel, and they have certain responsibilities (see Dan. 10:12-21) could not the same be true of Churches!)*

What observations does Jesus make concerning the church? What is the condemnation stated here? (See James 2:17, 2 Tim. 3:1-5, Matt. 23:27-28)

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Define death. Is there more than one type of death found in scripture? (See Heb. 9:27, Rev. 20:6;14). There is also the idea that we are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 6:1) How would you put all this together?

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Spend time in prayer and reflection. Review your answers and ask yourself what can I personally change in my life in light of what has been revealed to me today?

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## DAY 3

Write out verses 2-3 here: \_\_\_\_\_

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**KEY WORDS & PHRASES:** wake up, strengthen what remains that was about to die, deeds not complete in the sight of God, remember what you have received and heard, obey, repent, wake up, thief. What others do you see?

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State in your own words the condemnation Jesus made of the Church at Sardis.

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Jesus says, “strengthen what remains that was about to die.” What was about to die? How does one strengthen the church or self so as not to die? What does “wake up” and “your deeds have not been found complete in the sight of my God” have to do with strengthening?

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What areas in your life need to be strengthened? Do you see areas in your life of self-deception? (If not, stop and ask God for discernment and confirmation.) Where do you need to die to self and stop believing your own lies?

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What further solutions to the problems do you find in verse 3? Here's some that I found. Take a moment to add more detail to these solutions.

a. Remember (bear in mind) what you received and heard: \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Obey: \_\_\_\_\_

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c. Repent: \_\_\_\_\_

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What warnings does Jesus give to them if they do not wake up? Again, here are a few that I found. Take a moment to add more detail here too.

a. Come like a thief: \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Not know when He will come: \_\_\_\_\_

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c. Not know how He will come against: \_\_\_\_\_

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Jesus says to them, "If you do not wake up..." Is there a chance that they could wake up?

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Ask yourself: "Today, can I wake up to what I am doing which is incomplete?" Is there a chance that you could change what you are doing now? Remember all things you do, you say and you think are seen, heard, and known by God!

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Spend time in prayer and reflection. Review your answers and ask yourself: "What can I personally change in my life in light of what has been revealed to me today?"

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# DAY 4

Write out verse 4 here: \_\_\_\_\_  
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**KEY WORDS & PHRASES:** stained, clothes, they will walk with me, dressed in white. Add others that you may see!

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Like the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira, Sardis has a mixed body. Sardis, unfortunately, had only a few people who had not stained their garments. The righteous were in the minority. Conversely, in the other two churches, those who had stained their garments were few. The language chosen here is interesting and might be a connection to that culture. Archeological inscriptions in Asia Minor/Turkey have found in pagan temples that to enter a temple with dirty clothing was to dishonor the pagan deity, those in soiled garments were disbarred from worshipping. (Moffet)

In Sardis, many have stained their clothes (dishonored the Lord). Only a few have not. Given what you know of scripture, how does one stain their clothes? What does it mean to walk with Jesus dressed in white?

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This topic has been discussed and some have come to different conclusions. Among them are the following:

- A. Walk of victory
- B. Walk of festivity
- C. Walk of purity
- D. A standing dress or characteristic of all blessed and heavenly beings
- E. Walking in justification

All of these do have possibilities; however, I think two stand out to those saved by grace. 1- Purification (see Daniel 11-12) white robes here seem to indicate that those believers who endure end-time tribulation will be made pure i.e., purification. 2- Justification! I did not earn it. I cannot brag about it but must walk in humility with my Savior. This makes sense given the division of those who have soiled garments and those who don't. Just because those in Sardis heard His teaching does not mean that they walked with Him in that teaching. (Like in John 6:66.)

Let's be careful though! Jesus says that "they are worthy." This does NOT mean that they have earned or merited justification (their salvation). We know that Ephesians 2 says that none of us have earned that. So, what do you think it means when Jesus says, "for they are worthy?" And perhaps more importantly, who makes us worthy?

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Imagine this for a moment: Christ has returned you are dressed in a white robe walking with Jesus. Who's work justified you and made you as Holy as he is Holy? Who granted you the right to become a child of God and wear that white robe? You have nothing left to do but bow to a holy God in worship.

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Spend time in prayer and reflection. Review your answers and ask yourself what can I personally change in my life in light of what has been revealed to me today?

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## DAY 5

**Write out verses 5-6 here:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**KEY WORDS & PHRASES:** who conquers (overcomes), white clothing, never erase his name from the book of life, declare name before Father and angels. What else would you add?

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White clothing appears here again in reference to those who overcome followed by two more promises to the overcomer in Christ. "I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will declare his name before my father and before his angels." Lest there be confusion at this point it is important to clarify what is being referred to here. As has



been noted for centuries by theologians there are two books being referred to in scripture, they are the book of Life and the book of Judgement. One is for believers and the other is for unbelievers. (See Daniel 12:1-2; 7:10, Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, Isa. 4:3) some of the verses mentioned here refer to erasing the names of unbelievers from the book of salvific (pertaining to salvation) blessing. Of these two books one contains only believers' names while the other contains the deeds of all written therein and becomes the basis of judgment for unbelievers. The promise here in verse 5 is that he will not erase a believer's name from the book of life. This promise does not imply the opposite. It never says that he does erase believers' names from the book of life. Finally, we see that these overcomers are those who do confess the name of Jesus before others and as a result Jesus will confess them before the father and his angels (Luke 12:8-9). He will not deny those who do not deny him. True believers will not deny Christ.

What promises does Jesus make to those who overcome?

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Do these promises make you feel more secure or less? Jesus promises to the true believer, that he will never, in all time to come, deny or remove him from the book of life or from his presence.

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Spend time in prayer and reflection. Review your answers and ask yourself what can I personally change in my life in light of what has been revealed to me today?

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Be careful to not live in a fantasy world of self-deception as the church of Sardis did. Take time to evaluate yourself and ask others close to you if they see any wandering from your relationship with God. Seek a confidant, someone that you can share your greatest fears and needs. Then take time to encourage one another!

## FOOTNOTES

*IVP Eerdmans-Revelation, Leon Morris*  
*Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament Revelation: G.K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough*  
*The Bible Speaks Today: The message of Revelation: Michael Wilcock*  
*The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament Edition: Walvoord and Zuck*  
*Tourism Turkey online research concerning Sardis*