

THE REVELATION

MARCH 17, 2024

Chapter 3:1-13

E. Sardis – The Performance Church (3:1a)

Rev 3:1a "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:"

Clement, a disciple of Paul and John, was the pastor in Sardis, appointed to the Church by John since Paul had been dead for more than 25 years in 95 AD. From 1071 AD to 1402 AD, the city fluctuated between the Christian and Muslim struggle for control. Finally, in 1402 AD, the Muslims captured the city and ousted all Christians and the Church closed its doors.

1. The LORD's Identification (3:1b)

Rev 3:1b He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this."

The LORD identifies Himself by mentioning the seven Spirits before the throne continually and the seven stars – both are dear to Him. It means that Sardis was dear to Him, too, and He did not like the shape it was in at the time of this letter. It needed revival within its walls.

2. The LORD's Oracle to Sardis

a) The LORD's Acknowledgment (3:1c)

Rev 3:1c 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."

Evidently, the Church was playing Church because of the language the Lord uses here. The LORD knew the deeds of the Sardis Church and it was dead. This letter was a wake-up call to this congregation. Yes, they were meeting as a Church but nothing good was being accomplished in the city for the LORD. Were the deeds of the Sardis Church complete? No!

b) The LORD's Warning – Wake up from the Dead (3:2-3)

Rev 3:2 '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. 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."

The Lord encouraged the Church to remember what they had received from Him and heard about Him. He asked the Church to remember and repent.

c) The LORD's Promise (3:4)

Rev 3:4 '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.'

But there were a few Church members at Sardis who pleased the Lord. Notice that the LORD said, “a few … have not soiled their garment.” Notice also the blessing to those who had not soiled their garments and will therefore walk with the LORD in white garments! We know for sure that these few were not totally sinless, but their sins were not totally intentional. King David in 1st and 2nd Samuel was probably one of the greatest sinners in all the Bible pages, yet, he was absolutely the greatest repenter of them all. That is why the LORD loved his heart. The LORD loves those who will repent of their sins. Those are the worthy ones, worthy to walk with the LORD in a robe of white, purer than the driven snow.

d) The LORD’s Gift – White Garment, Name in Book of Life and Presented to Father and Angels (3:5)

Rev 3:5 '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.'

The LORD has a grand gift for the one who is worthy of a garment of white in His kingdom. That gift is that the overcomer’s name will never be erased from the “Book of Life.” Hallelujah, what a Savior!

When the LORD created the heavens and the earth, a “Book of Life” was created with the names of every human who would ever live on this earth, from Adam and Eve to the last child to be born before the *Great White Throne Judgment* and the establishment of the sinless heaven and earth, also called the *New Heaven* and the *New Earth*. We often think that heaven is sinless today, but it is not. Satan still has access to the throne of God in order to complain about the sins of the believers who are being inaugurated into life eternal. He is never successful at this task, but Satan continues to attempt to cause at least one believer to be rejected by the LORD.

The all-knowing God recorded every name in the “Book of Life” in the beginning (Revelation 13:8). As each person comes to this earth and lives his life, if he trusts in the LORD with all his heart, makes Him LORD of his life, then his name is permanently in the “Book of Life” when that person dies; he will go to be with the LORD for all eternity. The names of those who fail to make Him their LORD in this life will be erased from the “Book of Life” at their death. They will go to the place in Hades called *torment*. Notice that the LORD says to the overcomer, “I will not erase his name from the Book of Life.” That same thought is found in David’s Psalm (Psalms 69:28). It is another responsibility of the LORD, one of His duties. He is the only One who knows the heart of a human and can rightfully and justifiably erase one’s name from that book and refuse to allow that person to enter into eternity with Him forever.

The LORD also said, “and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” He said the same in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matthew 10:32; Luke 12:8). That means that at death, each believer will be taken by the LORD to the throne room of God the Father and introduce him to the Father and all the angels surrounding the throne. How many in the Sardis Church were worthy of these three blessings? Only a few!

The church and the city of Sardis would struggle to survive. Diocletian would reorganize the region in 295 AD and Sardis would become the capital of the district of Lydia, the seat of the governor and metropolitan Catholic archbishop. The Council of Rimini deposed pastor Hortasius of Sardis in 359 AD because he had been ordained without the sanction of the bishops of Lydia. Arabs

sacked Sardis in 716 AD, but the city remained a part of the Byzantine Empire until the aftermath of the battle of Manzikert in 1071. In 1118 AD, Byzantine general Philocales recaptured Sardis from the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum. Ottoman Turks captured Sardis in 1306 but the Church held on. Timur suddenly and unexpectedly destroyed the city in 1402 AD and that was the end of the Church as all Christians were ousted from the city. The LORD had sent the Muslim and his hordes to bring an end to the Church there in the city.

The first systemic investigation of the ruins of Sardis came in 1910 AD with an expedition from Princeton University. Excavations in 1912 AD revealed a small "church," containing coins that dated back to the 5th century. In 1959 AD, a landslide revealed several church artifacts and a throne that archaeologists believe may have been used by the pastors of Sardis.

e) The LORD's Charge (3:6)

Rev 3:6 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

The warnings and promises to Sardis are no different from those to all Churches and true believers. Therefore, if anyone hears this message, believes it, the blessings of the few in Sardis will be granted to the one who hears the words of the Spirit.

F. Philadelphia – The Pillared Church (3:7a)

Rev 3:7a "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:"

In 1390 AD, the city was taken by Sultan Bayezid with his Muslim force and all Christians were either removed from the city or killed and, obviously, the Church closed its doors. The walls of the city were built with the dead bodies of those who were killed.

The Church of Philadelphia was a wonderful Church and the LORD does not have one hint of a complaint against them. However, it is a feeble Church, needing strength that only the LORD can give. He will give it to them to make it a strong and sturdy Church, pillared we might call it.

1. The LORD's Identification (3:7b)

Rev 3:7b 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:

In Isaiah 22:22, we find the reference to the "key of David." It was a reference to the key that unlocked the treasury of the king. One of David's servants kept the key. In this case, Jesus is the keeper of the key that unlocks the door to the treasury of the King of kings. He is the only One authorized to open and shut its doors.

2. The LORD's Oracle to Philadelphia

a) The LORD's Acknowledgment (3:8)

Rev 3:8 '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.'

The LORD was pleased with the Church at Philadelphia. Within its walls it had stayed true to Him and because of that, the LORD had kept its doors open. But the Church had "little power;" it was feeble but faithful in the community in word and deed.

b) The LORD's Wrath (3:9)

Rev 3:9 '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.'

But, once again, the Lord speaks of trouble caused by the Jewish synagogue. The LORD's wrath will come upon this synagogue, making it bow at the feet of the believers. The members of the synagogue will not get away with their antics much longer. They will soon be extremely aware of the love the LORD has for this Church.

c) The LORD's Promise – Keep from Hour of Testing (3:10-11)

Rev 3:10 '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. ' 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.'

When the LORD brought his wrath on the synagogue of Satan, the Church of Philadelphia was “kept from the hour of testing.” It was 95 AD and John had appointed Demetrius to be its pastor. Although it was a small congregation, the Jews still tried to disturb its worship, work and ministry. The Church did not flinch at their attempts. St. Ignatius of Antioch later sent to the Christians of Philadelphia an interesting letter warning them about the Jews. It is interesting that the Lord did not want the Philadelphia Church to lose its Crown of Life. That was already guaranteed to the members of the Church because they were all faithful to the LORD. It is also interesting that part of this congregation's church building remains today as the main archaeological attraction in the modern city. The town suffered greatly and decreased to just a few people. The church disappeared in 1071 AD with the arrival of the Ottoman Turks. All that remains of that church building are the two pillars that led into the basilica. When the town was obliterated by the Turkish conquest 1093-94 AD, the city that was eventually rebuilt at Philadelphia was renamed Ala Sheir. The city ruins were recovered by the Byzantines in 1098. In the seventeenth century it had 8000 inhabitants, of whom 2000 were Christians. Today it has about 15,000 inhabitants including 3500 Greeks. It possesses numerous ruins, a theatre, stadium, two walls, many Byzantine churches, etc., and mineral springs.

d) The LORD's Gift – Pillar in Temple Forever and Name of God and the New Jerusalem (3:12)

Rev 3:12 '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.'

All the faithful members of the Philadelphia Church were promised an inheritance in the eternal city of God the Father, the New Jerusalem, built on the first day of creation in heaven and it will come to earth to remain for all eternity one day. Ezekiel tells us the name of the city is *the LORD is there* (Ezekiel 48:35). Each member of this Church was promised to live eternally in the city of God.

e) The LORD's Charge (3:13)

Rev 3:13 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

But the great gift of the heavenly home of God is for all believers, too. *Listen up* if you have ears and hear what the Spirit is saying to all the Churches, these seven Churches and all that will read this letter. The New Jerusalem will be the eternal home of all believers.