



World Christian Fellowship

www.wcflondon.com
wcflondon@gmail.com

Seven Churches Sardis – Dead Church

Revelation 3:1-6, *“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.² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.³ 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.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.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.” ’*

Sardis:

Sardis is rich and Sardis is sinful. It is the ancient capital of the Lydian kingdom, going all the way back to 1,200 years before Christ; rich in gold, rich in silver. Because the city was built in a mountainous region it was a natural citadel. Still an important city during the Roman Empire. Sardis had become famous for their abilities in arts and crafts. They made lavish use of the local brightly coloured and semi-precious stones such as fire opal and banded agate.

Fire Opal



Banded Agate



The Sardians also had a process in which they used blue chalcedony that they mined nearby. Their jewellery was renowned throughout the empire. Some historians claim that Sardis was the first city to mint coinage using the precious metals such as gold and silver. The nearby mountains were dotted with gold mines thus making the city the monetary capital of the region.



The patron deity, named Cybele, was believed to possess the power and ability of restoring the dead back to life.

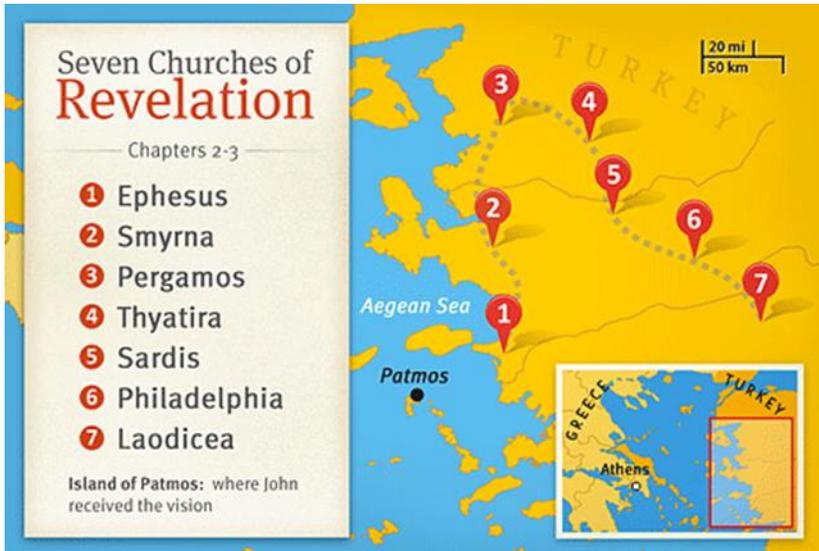
Sardis was devoted to the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele and no temple worshipper was allowed to approach the temple of the gods with soiled or unclean garments. A white and clean robe was required to approach its so-called gods.



The Romans built a temple for the goddess Artemis. The temple was 160 feet by 300 feet with columns 48 feet high. A large bath-gymnasium complex. An earthquake hit the city in A.D. 17, causing tremendous damage.

They became a centre for wool and dying, things that were particularly common in the ancient world. By the middle of the sixth century, the city attained such a high level of respect.

It was conquered not once, but it was conquered twice. It was conquered in 549 B.C. It was conquered again in 195 B.C. The Persians conquered it, and then Antiochus the Great, the Greek, conquered it.



By the time we come to the New Testament era, there's a temple there to Caesar, to honour Caesar, and there is a temple there to the Empress Livia. There is the normal idolatry there. Seven hundred years before this letter, Sardis was one of the great cities in the world.

If you go there today, we will find nothing but a pile of ruins near a little village called Sart. But once, it was the glory of Lydian Empire, and it's greatest king was a man named Croesus. Croesus reigned from 560B.C- 546 B.C. Unlimited luxury and wealth.

Sardis stood 30 miles southeast of Thyatira in the fertile Hermus valley near a range of mountains, and it was elevated about 1,500 feet high.

Under Croesus, it reached its greatest heights and it plunged and collapsed.

It had some famous people.

Thales, the first Greek philosopher.

Solon, a wise legislator.

Xerxes, the great general;

Aesop, the fable weaver.

This was some great city that had fallen into a degenerating cycle. 17 A. D. an earthquake hit it, massive earthquake, turning it into rubble.

Tiberius Caesar came and rebuilt it, and so that's why they built a temple to Tiberius Caesar in the city of Sardis.

Its history was a history of degeneration. From its glory days under Croesus, it had crumbled into nothing and been rebuilt by the Romans. Politically, morally and economically it had declined.

The church also was in a rotting condition. Its vitality and power were gone. It was a kind of corpse, a degenerate church in a degenerating city.

Church at Sardis:

Acts 19:10, *And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*

We do have one name of one pastor of that church at a later time by the name of Melito, who some think wrote the first commentary on Revelation.

- There is no mention of persecution against this church, although there might have been some.
- There is no mention of bad theology.
- There is no mention of any false teachers.
- There is no mention of any compromise with the world.
- There is no mention of any sin.

Author of the Letter:

Our Lord introduces Himself as the author.

V1, *“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.*

Seven Spirits of God.

Isaiah 11:1-5, *There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. ²The Spirit of*

the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. ³ His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; ⁴ But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist.

1. Spirit of the LORD,
2. Spirit of wisdom,
3. Spirit of understanding,
4. Spirit of counsel,
5. Spirit of power,
6. Spirit of knowledge,
7. Spirit of the fear of the Lord.

Seven stars

The vision of Lord Jesus Christ in Revelation chapter 1 shows that its Him.

Revelation 1:16, *He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.*

Commendation

There is NO commendation to this church at all.

Condemnation:

V1, *“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.”² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God”*

Our Lord is omniscient.

He sees everything, He misses nothing.

There is nothing to be commended in this unsaved church.

This church is the world. It is decayed on the inside and disintegrated. Like any liberal church that denies the Bible, denies Christ, denies the gospel and it is dead.

“You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”

Ephesians 2:1, *“Dead in trespasses and sins,”*

Dead in trespasses and sins.

Colossians 2:13, *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,*

When it says dead, it means spiritually dead. This is a church full of unconverted people.

There are churches attended by people and led by people who don't believe the Bible, don't believe in Christ, don't believe the gospel. Are you surprised to hear this? Think again.

30 years after the founding of the church the church has died. Warned by our Lord Jesus Christ.

If a church can go dead in 30 years, then any church is in danger of dying when it gets caught up in the world.

You can tell a dead church by the way they react to the traditions.

Concerned with,

- Tradition,
- Form,
- Liturgy,
- Welfare,
- Social problems,
- Material things, and
- Tolerance of sin.

It doesn't proclaim the gospel or uphold the Scripture. It doesn't pursue holiness.

What kills a church?

Sin!

Error kills the church.

Compromise kills the church.

Sin in the members, sin in the leaders.

Sins of commission, sins of omission.

Little by little, sin kills the will because it becomes a habit.

It kills the feelings because we become hardened.

It kills the character because we become warped and twisted.

By receiving in unbelievers, and false Christians, putting in positions of leadership, the power of sin brought into the church and that church will die.

Accepting unbelievers in the church and in positions of leadership grips the church by the neck and kills it. Like how the creepers kills the trees.

Church in Sardis maybe they helped with some of the social problems or did some philanthropic works. Maybe they provided some service to the community.

Whatever they did, "Their deeds were not sufficient in the sight of My God." That's what our Lord says. It's not enough.

The church is a living lie!

So, there was no reason to persecute the church, that is why there is no persecution.

The true church and the world are enemies.
The world hates the true church.

But the sinful worldly church is never attacked by the world.
Now you know why our channel got hacked.

People could argue that churches die for many reasons, but they die for one reason, and that is because they tolerate sin. Sin in the teaching error and sin in the living.

Let me give you some details about **Church of England**.

Between 1969 and 2010, almost 1,800 church buildings, roughly 11% of the stock, were closed (so-called "redundant churches"); the majority (70%) in the first half of the period; only 514 being closed between 1990 and 2010.

Some active use was being made of about half of the closed churches.

By 2019 the rate of closure had steadied at around 20 to 25 per year (0.2%); some being replaced by new places of worship.

Church may be socially distinguished, may have all of its programming, but it's a spiritual graveyard, and its works are grave clothes.

Samson

Initially, the charming, lovable hero of Israel in the dark days of their history, in the days of the judges, when Samson showed up to be the greatest champion ever. So many feats and exploits of heroic strength and courage. And every child knows all the wonderful stories.

But something happened. Samson fell into sin, lost touch with the source of his strength. His hair only symbolized the spiritual fact that God was his strength. When he disobeyed God, he lost that strength. When confronted with danger, he tried to react.

Judges 16:20, *And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” So he awoke from his sleep, and said, “I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!” But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.*

What a sad statement!

Same old Samson, same living name, but the Lord was not there.

The result:

Samson’s defeat, imprisonment, blindness, and death. Miserable wreck, Samson: pitiful, blind giant, tied with two brass chains, stooping over the grinding mill in the prison of Gaza, brought there by sin.

This is an illustration of Sardis!

A church once alive: strong, virile, powerful.

Began to court the world and tolerate sin.

Became weak and blind and dead.

Now the church at Sardis is bound in brass chains, grinding the grains of sin's prison because God has long gone.

So many churches like that. This nation and the world are covered with them dressed up, organized, but the whole congregation is blind and dead.

Command:

V3, 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.

“Be watchful.” We could translate this, “become and stay awake” or “get awake.”

By the analogy of Scripture this was a command for believers to get back into fellowship, i.e., to repent or confess their sin and start walking in the Spirit and in the light of the Word.

(Ephesians 5:14-18).

For the unbeliever or the merely apparent believer, this becomes a call to become genuine with Christ, to put one's faith in the Saviour (**1 Thessalonians 5:4-8**).

They were to remember the early days of their life in the Word, when the Word was received by faith and was their source of strength and wisdom for all of life.

This former life of faith they were to keep, to hold fast to continually, but it was also vital that they repent carefully because a true change of mind and heart is necessary for a genuine and consistent walk with the Lord.

Proverbs 4:23, & 26, *Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.*

²⁶ Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established.

Commitment:

V4, *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.*

The church as a whole is dead.

Yet a very few people are not!

We know God always will have His remnant.

There was no other church in Sardis. That was the only church available in the town.

If you went there because that's all there was.

Ezekiel 14:21-23, *For thus says the Lord God: "How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem—the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence—to cut off man and beast from it?"²² Yet behold, there shall be left in it a remnant who will be brought out, both sons and daughters; surely they will come out to you, and you will see their ways and their doings. Then you will be comforted concerning the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, all that I have brought upon it.²³ And they will comfort you, when you see their ways and their doings; and you shall know that I have done nothing without cause that I have done in it," says the Lord God.*

Romans 11:2-4, *God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying,³ "Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"?⁴ But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."*

There are a few unspotted from the world.

There were a few

- believers among the unbelievers,
- genuine among the hypocrites,
- humble among the proud,
- spiritual among the carnal,
- separated among the worldly.

Few true Christians, leading a pure, wholesome, Christ-like lives in the midst of corruption.

They have not defiled their garments.

The word “defile” is used with reference to dying, colouring something.

- They have not stained their garments.
- They have not polluted their garments.

Garments have reference to character.

Even in pagan worship they can do their worship only when they had cleaned their clothes. They were not to come with dirty clothes.

That was a symbol of their goodness, of their virtue. They wanted to present themselves before their false deities as worthy of the deity’s affection and good will. Garments have reference to character. There were some who had not defiled their garments.

Isaiah 64:6, *But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.*

So, the people who came with undefiled garments, were those who had been cleansed by Christ. The Christians had been covered with the righteousness of Christ.

Believers are so identified later in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 19:7-8, *Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”⁸ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

Fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Revelation 7:14, *And I said to him, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

Believers in Christ who have made their garments white in the blood of the Lamb, who are covered by the righteousness of Christ, imputed to them as if fine linen was their garment.

These undefiled have not fallen into the pagan impurities. They had not fallen into the sinful practices.

They had not bought into the lies and the deception.
They were there in that church, as surely, they are in many dead churches.

Lord speaks to the people who are there, in both groups:

1. Wake up.

What does that mean?

Assess your condition.

Why?

V 3, *“If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know what hour I will come to you.”*

Whenever the Lord talk about coming like a thief, it's in judgment.

Throughout the New Testament we can see that clearly its for judgement.

1 Thessalonians 5:2, *For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.*

Coming as a thief in the night is coming at an unknown moment for the purpose of doing harm, of destruction. Thieves comes to do harm.

1 Thessalonians 5:3-4, *For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains*

upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. ⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

Christ is coming, not as a thief to the believer. We welcome His coming. We open the doors for Him to come.

We say with John, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.”

He’s coming to us as a welcome Lord, and we want Him to come, the sooner, the better.

But to unbelievers, this is a terrible reality. He is coming in judgment. He is coming like a thief comes, to kill and destroy and steal.

So, the first command then is to the nonbelievers in the congregation: “Wake up before judgment comes.”

2. Remember

Remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent.”

This is directed to the believers.

Remember what you received and heard from the apostles. Hold it and repent, wherever repentance is near. Wherever it’s possible repent!

"If you don't do these things, I will come to destroy you."

Some of these churches have been destroyed, but they still go through motions.

To the dead: "Watch, repent."

To the sleeping: "Remember, repent."

To the faithful: "Strengthen, hold on to the truth."

This is amazingly precise careful counsel to people who are believers in a dead church, and the dead people as well.

V5, *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.*

Who is an overcomer?

1 John 5:4-5, *For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

In the ancient world, white stood for festivity, as it does even now for a wedding.

In the ancient world, white stood for victory, white stood for purity.

For all of these reasons, the garments of the believer in glory will be white fine linen, (Revelation 19:7-8).

“And I will not erase his name from the Book of Life.”

Rulers of cities had census. They had the name of all the citizens. They kept records of the citizens even as people do today. Your name could be erased, and it would be erased two ways basically.

1. If you died, your name would be erased.
2. If you committed some crime against the state, you would lose your citizenship. Your name would be erased.

But God will never erase the name of His own out of the Book of Life. Be an overcomer! Put your trust in Christ.

Believe in Christ Jesus as the Son of God and you will be eternally clothed in white garments and even when you die, your name will never be erased from the Book of Life.

“Book of Life.”

It is God’s book in which He keeps the record of those who have eternal life.

Exodus 32:33, *And the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.*

God speaks about someone being removed from the Book of Life, but that's a completely different context. That is a kind of an expression meaning an untimely death. That's a different setting all together. God is saying in Exodus 33 you could die.

But when it comes to that heavenly Book of Life, no one whose name is written there will ever be removed.

In the Post-Reformation period 1517-1750, the Roman Catholic church exercised terrible acts of excommunication.

For example: The pope's henchman stood in the presence of the fearless preacher Girolamo Savonarola in Florence, Italy 1452-1498A.D. and they read out the words of Pope which said, "I separate you from the church militant and triumphant."

Savonarola, the preacher, replied, "From the church militant that is alive on earth, yes. From the church triumphant in heaven, no, never. No, never."

Martin Luther was excommunicated. His name was blotted out of the church books, and his soul was consigned to everlasting hell and damnation. That is what the Catholic church did.

God would never do that to an overcomer!
Never.

Revelation 20:12, *And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.*

The dead, unconverted, are judged by books that keep a record of their sin. But our names are in the Book of Life.

V 5, *“but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”*

Matthew 10:32, *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.*

Genuine faith in Christ means that we receive all these promises.

- ✓ Eternal life,
- ✓ Never to be removed from the book of Life, and
- ✓ Confessed as Christ’s own before His Father, and the holy angels.

V6, *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

This is how each of these ends.

Are you listening?

What happened in Sardis?

What was the response?

There's a little bit of hope. A man named Melito who was a pastor there, and he was a pastor and faithful man, several decades after this letter was delivered.

That historically argues for the fact that there may well have been a revival in Sardis. Some of those who were dead came to life. Some of those who were a little indifferent remembered the truth that they had heard and strengthened what remained and held fast to Christ.

Our church is alive!

We are grateful!!

But if there is anyone in our church/ hearing our message, those that are dead, and the message is to wake up.

Conclusion



A light year is the distance light goes in a year, moving at 186,000 miles a second.

Hyades, star estimated about 153 light years away from earth. It would take 153 years for that light to reach earth. If that star could have been plunged into darkness 100 years ago. It could have died. But light would still be pouring down to earth. It would be shining in the sky as brightly as if the star was still alive.

The church at Sardis is something like that. It was dead, but it was still shining by the light of a brilliant past. It was a dead

church. That is the worst thing that could ever be said about a church: it's dead.

Are you???