

Living Word Fellowship Church
Revelation
An Overview of the Seven Stars and The Seven Churches of Revelation
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I. An Overview of the 'Seven Stars' and the 'Angels of the Church'.

The Church of Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6):

1. Introduction:

- a) The Lord did not find the deeds of this church complete in God's sight. Although the church had a reputation of being alive, it was dead on the inside. This is similar to the loss of first love for Christ (cf. 2:4). Again, as in 2:5, the remedy was to "go back to" (remember), "hold to" original behavior and teaching, and "turn" to God. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel was also called to "remember" and "return" to God's redemption and commands. This is the most severe denunciation given to the churches. But this church had no named heresy or outside opposition, only incomplete acts of obedience to Christ (3:2).¹
- b) This church has a reputation that is well know ("you have a name") that it is a church that is alive. "You are dead" compared to "things that remain, which were about to die."
- c) The deeds are "not completed in the sight of God." These deeds that may not be complete are the things they need to strengthened.
- d) They must keep what they heard and repent. These are not just things they received, these are things they have also heard. They once had a heart to do what the Lord said but they did not practice it so they became 'dull of hearing' (Hebrews 5:11-15).
- e) A few (just a few) who have not soiled their garments. These could be the things that remain. These people will walk with Christ because He has found them worthy. These will wear white garments.
- f) He never says that He would remove His lampstand. He states that he will come in an hour they do not know. It seems that they will face judgment suddenly. This church does not exist today.

2. Background:

- a) The Lord describes Himself the same way he does for the church of Ephesus.
- b) The city stood on the northern slope of a mountain with a river flowing at its base. This setting rendered the city almost impregnable. Sardis was once the capital of the kingdom of Lydia. In A.D. 17 the city was destroyed by a great earthquake. Although rebuilt by Tiberius, Sardis never recovered its former glory and importance. The ancient city was noted for its fruits and wool. The making and dyeing of woolen garments was the chief industry of Sardis (cf. Rev. 3:4-5). Worship at Sardis had a sexual emphasis and focused on Sybele, a goddess similar to Diana in Ephesus. The church was probably founded during the time of Paul's ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19:10).²

¹ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 739). Tyndale House Publishers.

² Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (pp. 738-739). Tyndale House Publishers.

- c) Ramsay pointed out that the two churches condemned most harshly belong to the only two cities of the seven that are completely uninhabited.³
- d) A large Ionic temple to Artemis was built in Sardis, although it was never finished. The population during the Roman period numbered between 60,000 and 100,000 residents.⁴

3. Christ description of Himself:

- a) Christ introduces Himself in similar manner He does to the church of Ephesus - '*he who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.*' (3:1)
- b) Because Christ is fully engaged with all these churches, He knows everything. Because He is the Christ there is no point in challenging what He is saying He knows.
- c) He who hath all the fulness of the Spirit (Rev 1:4; 4:5; 5:6, with which compare Zec 3:9; 4:10, proving His Godhead). This attribute implies His infinite power by the Spirit to convict of sin and of a hollow profession.⁵ This is why in verse 6 those who are alive can hear from the Spirit.
- d) The 'seven stars' based on Revelation 1:20 are the seven pastors who He holds in His right hand.
 - The human ministry is the fruit of Christ's sending the gifts of the Spirit. *Stars* imply brilliancy; the fulness of the Spirit, and of brilliant light in Him, form a contrast to the formality which He reproves.⁶
- e) Christ wants them to be aware that has a complete intimate understanding, based on his personal experiences with the church, of all that they are doing.

4. Strengths:

- a) They have the ability to strengthen the things that remain so the Lord commands them to do so. To strengthen means to be steadfastly committed to make sure what remains (meaning what is not dead; 'about to die') stays alive due to the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit.
- b) The Lord still by telling them change their heart is implicitly saying their hearts are not hard. They still, despite how they are behaving, have the propensity to change their minds.

churches ***Church**. The Greek term used in the New Testament reflects the terms often used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for the "congregation" (*qahal*) of Israel: "church" (assembly) and "synagogue" (gathering). Although some scholars have suggested that Jesus could not have spoken about the church during his earthly ministry, the Dead Sea Scrolls used the Hebrew term for God's community; hence Jesus could use this word in talking about his future community (Mt 16:18; 18:17). The term was in common use in Greek culture for "assemblies," especially citizen assemblies in cities. (The popular modern surmise that the Greek word for "church," *ekklēsia*, means "called-out ones" is thus mistaken; that sense is actually more appropriate for "saints," i.e., "those separated [for God].")

³Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. 1993. *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* . InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Ill.

⁴ Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, p. 271). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 559). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁶ Brown, D., Fausset, A. R., & Jamieson, R. (n.d.). *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Acts-Revelation: Vol. VI* (p. 666). William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited.

- c) The same as repent is implied when the Lord says to 'wake up'. They have the propensity to become alert again by being spiritually engaged with the Spirit of the Lord is seeking to influence them to do in obedience to the Word of God. He does not like their indifference to the doing the work of the Lord because their worship services are 'alive.'
- d) Many of the members of the church has not soiled their garments. What are these garments:
- The garment represents inner purity (Revelation 3:18; 4:4).
 - The meaning is, that they had not defiled themselves by coming in contact with the profane and the polluted; or, in other words, they had kept themselves free from the prevailing corruption. They were like persons clothed in white walking in the midst of the defiled, yet keeping their raiment from being soiled. (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)
 - Inscriptions in Asia Minor indicate that many temples barred worshipers with soiled garments, whose entry would insult the deity. White robes were worn by priests (and purportedly other worshipers) in the Jerusalem temple, worshipers of most deities (e.g., Isis, Apollo, Artemis), celebrants in cult festivals for the emperor and so on.⁷
- f) They were provided an opportunity to repent. They could have changed their mind an attitude and the Lord would have relented from punishing this church.

5. Weaknesses:

- a) "If you do not wake up': This is a strong statement that they were already asleep. So long the church in their way of thinking was alive when it comes to serving the Lord they did not care to put energy or attentiveness to serving the Lord faithfully. They just wanted to come to church, have an alive time and go home.
- Accordingly, the meaning here is that of vigilance and expectancy as contrasted with laxity and indifference. Those who are lax and fail to be watchful will suffer loss 1 Cor 3:15; 9:27; 2 Cor 5:10. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.).

b) They believed that they were the 'alive' church but Jesus viewed them as dead:

- That is, spiritually. This is equivalent to saying that their profession was merely in name; and yet this must be understood comparatively, for there were some even in Sardis who truly lived unto God, Rev 3:4. The meaning is, that in general, the profession of religion among them was a mere name. The Saviour does not, as in the case of the churches of Ephesus and Thyatira, specify any prevailing form of error or false doctrine; but it would seem that here it was a simple waist of religion. (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.).

c) 'Dead' means to be eternally separated from God:

⁷ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 3:4). InterVarsity Press.

- Dead can be both spiritual (Romans 6:23) or physical. Those who did not practice the truth and were committed to serve the Lord were considered spiritually dead which can also lead to an early physical death (1 John 5:16).
- Of spiritual dying as the separation of the soul from God *lose (eternal) life, die* (JN 6:50); (3) of being subject to death as a human being *be mortal* (HE 7:8); *face death* (1C 15:31)⁸

d) 'Deeds are incomplete': By deeds the Lord means their work in the church. This is required to make a church productive for spiritual growth (Ephesians 4:12-13) and unifying as each believer exercises their spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:16). This explains why they were spiritually dead.

- The word for work is critical to understanding why the Lord is upset they are not engaged. It means to perform with energy a task as if a person is fulfilling responsibilities on their job with a commitment to accomplish a goal.
- "The general object or result of doing and working, an object or result whose attainment or realization is not accomplished by a single act but by accumulated labor and continued work (Rom. 14:20; 1 Cor. 4:15; (1; Phile. 10); calling or occupation (Acts 14:26; Eph. 4:12; 1Thess. 5:13; 2 Tim. 4:5); labor enjoined by and done for Christ as the spreading of His Gospel and the furthering of His Church; moral conduct (Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:17)."

e) 'In the sight of God': All of this took place with the Lord in the presence of the Lord. He is present with complete attention provided because He holds 'the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars' and walks among the churches (Revelation 3:1; 1:20).

6. Consequence:

a) Christ will come like a thief not letting them know the time He is coming. This is normally the way the Lord exercises heavy judgement.

- "You shall not know beforehand; you shall have no warning of my immediate approach. This is often the way in which God comes to people in his heavy judgments. Long beforehand, he admonishes us, indeed, of what must be the consequences of a course of sin, and warns us to turn from it; but when sinners refuse to attend to his warning, and still walk in the way of evil, he comes suddenly, and cuts them down." (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

b) Erase your name from 'the book of life.'

- A heavenly book in which the names of the righteous (the redeemed or saved) are written. The concept of God's having a "book of life" was probably first enunciated by Moses, who prayed that God would blot him out of God's book rather than dooming his fellow Israelites (Ex 32:32-33). This concept likely arose from the practice of registering people by genealogy (Neh 7:5,64) and keeping a record of priests and Levites (Neh 12:22-23).
- Please remember this statement: "alive but you are dead" - When the members of the church of Sardis view those who are coming to church they believed that they were saved. When Christ view these individuals He says that they are dead so their names will not be in the 'book of life.'

⁸ Friberg, T., Friberg, B., & Miller, N. F. (2000). In [Analytical lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#) (Vol. 4, p. 67). Baker Books.

- At the end of time (Rev 20:11-15), those whose names are not written in the Book of Life will be "cast into the lake of fire" (Rev 20:15). But those whose names appear here (Rev 21:27) will be allowed to enter the New Jerusalem. (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers).

7. Overcomers are Blessed:

- a) They that overcome all that is taking place in Sardis and in the church prove that they have the Holy Spirit working in them so they are truly alive. As a result their names will remain in the 'book of life.'
- b) *'I will confess his name before My Father':*

- "And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. (Luke 12:8-9; NASU)
- "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." (Titus 1:15-16; NASU)

8. Conclusion: *'He who has an ear, let him hear'* - hear means a mind to told what was said. Only these believers will actually pay attention the Spirit of God that lives inside of them (1 Corinthians 2:10-15).