

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.
Rev. 1:3

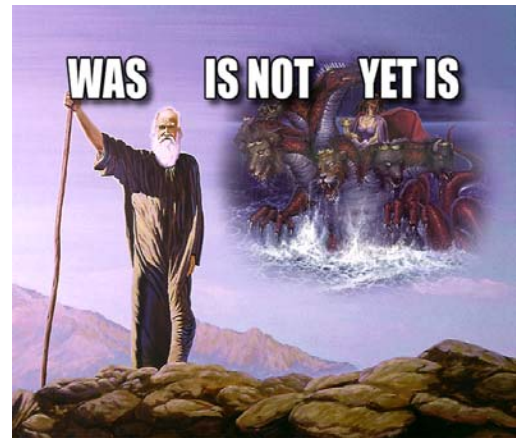
Verse by Verse Through the Book of Revelation

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REVELATION CHAPTER 3

1. **And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: Sardis represents the church during the Reformation.** Sardis was the first important city on the highway south of Thyatira. Strabo, the ancient geographer, speaks of it as “a great city.” The city first appears in history as the capital of the Lydian Kingdom, in the 7th century BC. It was here at about this time that coins were invented and used as money for the first time in history.



These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; This is the same introduction to each of the churches that we’ve already discussed. (See Chapter 1:4)

I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, Here “reputation” is the meaning of the Greek word. Hypocrisy characterized this church, which was not what it pretended to be.

Their name “Protestant” implied opposition to the abuses, errors, and formalism of the Roman Catholic Church, and the name “Protestant” implied that none of these faults were to be found within the Protestant fold. **Today we tend to forget what the term “Protestant” means!**

And art dead. (The New International Version says, “you have a reputation of being alive but you are dead.”) This bitter comment begins a message that consists mostly of reproof. Jesus hated the sin of hypocrisy. (See Matt. 23:13-33) Now, to the hypocritical church of Sardis, Christ sends His most unqualified rebuke.

Some decades after the beginning of the Reformation the new churches experienced a period of violent doctrinal controversy. Eventually, differences of opinion were settled by the adoption of definitive creeds that tended to discourage the search for additional truth. Toward the end of the Reformation period, the Protestant churches came to content themselves with the form of godliness without its power.

2. **Be watchful** Watchfulness is a Christian duty (See Matt 24:42 and Matt. 25:13)

And strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die: Even in degenerate Protestantism there were certain things worth laboring to preserve. Much, but not all, had been lost. The spiritual life of Protestantism was dying, but the system was not yet dead. "Survival" may be thought of as the keynote of the Sardis period of church history.

For I have not found thy works perfect before God. The forcefulness and ardor of Protestantism during its early years gave promise of a pressing forward toward perfection in understanding revealed truth and in applying it to the life. Remember the reformers? John Huss, Martin Luther? **But as the years went by zeal and piety waned, and the church wearied of the effort to reach the goal it had set out to attain.**

3. **Remember, therefore how thou hast received and heard and hold fast and repent** The form of the Greek verb implies not only that the church at Sardis had received the truth but that she still had it—not all had been lost. That there was still hope as indicated by the advice to "hold fast" which in Greek means "to continue to hold fast." Some Christians in Sardis had not backslidden as indicated in verse 4.

Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt now know what hour I will come upon thee. Compare Matt. 24:43 where the reference is to the second coming of Christ. Here the warning may include a more immediate divine retribution (see Rev. 2:5) Either coming would be unexpected to those who failed to repent.

4. **Thou hast a few names even in Sardis** "Names" means persons

Which have not defiled their garments Moral defilement.

And they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. White is a symbol of purity.

5. **He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment;**

Clothed: that is, with immortality in the life to come.

And I will not blot out his name in the Book of Life Assures the repentant sinner that his sins have been forgiven and warns the unrepentant that his name will be removed from the Book of Life. (See Phil. 4:3; Rev. 13:8; 20:15) This means that his very identity as a person will cease to exist; he will no longer have a place among created beings.



But I will confess his name before my Father, That is, acknowledge him as a loyal, devoted follower. Christ is the advocate and intercessor, the great high priest of all who claim His righteousness. (See 1 John 2:1, 2; Matt. 10:32, 33; Heb. 8:1-6)

And before His angels. The broader and deeper purpose of the plan of redemption is to vindicate the character of God before the universe. When Christ in His role as intercessor and high priest presents His ransomed people before the throne of God, He thereby provides the angelic hosts with a convincing testimony that the ways of God are just and true. They see the righteousness of God vindicated, alike in His “strange act” (Isa. 28:21) of committing the unrepentant to destruction and in His pardon of sinners who accept His saving grace by faith.

Without the high priestly intercession of Christ, such otherwise mysterious acts of God might appear to the intelligence of the universe as arbitrary and unjustified.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (We’ve covered the meaning of this phrase before).

6. **He that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches.** (See Chpt. 2:7)

7. **And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write;** A word meaning “brotherly love.” This city was founded before 138 BC. After a terrible earthquake in 17 AD it was rebuilt by the Roman emperor Tiberius. It was located 30 miles south east of Sardis.

In a special way the great evangelical and advent movements in Europe and the United States restored the spirit of brotherly love and stressed practical godliness in contrast with the forms of religion. Revived faith in the saving grace of Christ and in the nearness of His return resulted in a deeper spirit of Christian fellowship than the church had experienced since the early days of the Reformation.

These things saith he that is holy, This title is equivalent to “the Holy One,” used of God in the Old Testament (Isa. 40:25).

He that is true, Greek work alethinos, meaning “genuine or real” in contrast to false gods.

He that hath the key of David, This verse applies Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Eliakim, to Christ (Isa. 22:20-22). Eliakim was appointed to have supervision “over the household” of David, as signified by the fact that he was to be given “the key of the house of David.” Christ’s possession of the “key” represents his jurisdiction over the church. (Matt. 16:19; Matt 28:18)

He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth. That is, opens with the “key of David.” Christ has full authority to open and to shut, to carry the plan of redemption forward to success.

8. **I know thy works:** (See Chpt. 2:2)

Behold, I have set before thee an open door, In the preceding verse Christ is said to have the “key of David.” Verse 8 may imply that with that “key” He now opens before the Philadelphia church a “door” of unlimited opportunity for personal victory in the struggle with sin, and for bearing witness to the saving truth of the gospel. (For similar uses of a “door” as a symbol of opportunity see Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3)

The close of the Philadelphia period (1844) marks the beginning of the investigative judgment described in Dan. 7:10; Rev. 14:6,7. Christ is our great high priest (Heb. 8:2,6; Ex. 25:8,9). The earthly sanctuary was a “copy of the true one in heaven.” (Heb. 9:24).

And no man can shut it: Christ will carry forward the work of redemption until it is complete. Man can do nothing to hinder either His ministry in the courts of heaven or His jurisdiction and control over the affairs of earth.

For thou hast a little strength, It is not clear here whether Christ is reproofing the Philadelphia church for having so little strength or commending them for having some strength. The fact that the “little strength” is closely connected with the commendation for heeding Christ’s Word and not denying His name tends to infer that He is commending them for having some strength.

The church at Philadelphia was apparently neither large nor influential, but it was pure and faithful. The Philadelphia period of church history, with its increased attention to God’s Word represented a much more encouraging picture than the preceding period.

And hast kept my word, God’s Word expresses His will.

And hast not denied my name. The followers of Christ were known by His name: Christians!

9. **Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan,** Those who follow false gods (Jezebel) (compare Matt. 3:7 “generation of vipers) The name Satan means “Accuser or Adversary”

Which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; The Book of Acts reveals that many of the troubles of the early church grew out of slanderous accusations hurled at them by Jews. (Acts 13:45; 14:2; 17:5; 18:5,6,12; 21:27)

Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, The words “come and worship before thy feet” are from Isa. 60:14. (see also Isa. 49:23). As strangers were to have come to literal Israel of old to learn of God, so non-Christians were to come to the light of the gospel and find salvation.

Rev. 3:9 has also been applied to those who persist in their opposition to truth, particularly to the time when circumstances will compel them, though unrepentant, to acknowledge that those who have been loyal to truth are indeed God’s people.

And to know that I have loved thee. These words are probably taken from Isa. 43:4.

10. **Because thou hast kept the word of my patience** Christ encourages us to be patient as He was patient under trial.

I also will keep thee from Greek ek, “out of” indicating that the overcomers will successfully endure the period of tribulation, not that they will be untouched by it. (See Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21, 22, 29-31).

Many today are teaching that there will be a secret rapture prior to the tribulation and that God’s people won’t suffer! This is a false teaching! We will remain on this earth while the seven last plagues fall around us—but they won’t fall on us! (Rev. 15) However, we will be affected by the plagues because economically we won’t be able to buy or sell. Most likely we will lose all earthly possessions. But we will have the strength we need to endure.

The hour of temptation, This refers to the great time of testing preceding the second advent. Remember: the battle is for our minds. Satan will even work miracles to try and convince us that the bible is wrong.

Which shall come upon all the world, to try (test) them that dwell upon the earth. This and similar expressions (Rev. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8; 14; 17:2,8) are used consistently through out the Revelation to refer to the *unrighteous*, upon whom the divine judgments will be poured out.

11. **I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.** The ‘crown’ is the victory wreath! **Is it possible to be saved, commit your life to Christ, and then fall away from Christ and be lost?**

12. **Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God,** A figurative or metaphorical ‘pillar’ would, of course, be part of a metaphorical ‘temple.’ In the New Testament the word translated ‘temple’ (naos) generally refers to the inner sanctuary containing the holy and most holy places, not to the whole complex of buildings that constituted the ancient temple. So, this promise meant that the overcomer will hold a permanent, important place in the very presence of God. (For similar uses of the word ‘pillar’ see Gal. 2:9; 1 Tim. 3:15)

And he shall go no more out: That is, be permanent. In this life the possibility of ‘going out’ remains—if you deliberately turn your back on God—but in the future life no one will choose to go out. Because the conflict between good and evil will have ended forever!

And I will write upon him the name of my God, This continues the figure of speech introduced by the pillar, and is therefore also to be taken figuratively. Inasmuch as a name implies personality and character, the promise here is that those who overcome will receive the permanent impress of God's character; the image of their Creator will be fully restored in them. **In other words, we'll be 'branded' by God as His!**

And the name of the city of my God, This may be taken to signify that the victorious Christian is a citizen of the New Jerusalem and has a right to live there (Rev. 22:14)

Which is New Jerusalem, Ancient Jerusalem was to have become the metropolis of this earth and to have stood forever, but because of its failure to carry out its assigned task that role will be accorded the New Jerusalem. **The term New Jerusalem is limited to the Revelation, but the thought is anticipated in Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22.**

Which cometh down out of heaven from my God: In vision, John beheld the Holy City as it descended from heaven. It will settle on Mt. Olives at present day Jerusalem.

Some people believe that the Jewish nation will, once again, come forward as "God's people." This is not true. The fate of the Jews was sealed at the cross and at the stoning of Steven. No longer would the Jewish nation be God's special people. No, the gospel would go to the gentiles and to all the world. There would no longer be a physical Israel, but, rather, a spiritual Israel. Spiritual Israel consists of every person who loves and serves Jesus Christ.

And I will write upon him my new name. The third name written on the symbolic pillar is that of Christ Himself. The overcomer's reception of the divine character, represented by the name (see Acts 3:16) is mediated by Christ. To receive Christ's name is also to receive confirmation of His ownership. (2 Cor. 1:22).

13. **He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.** (Chpt. 2:7)
 14. **And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write;** The name "Laodicean" means "judging the people," or "a people judged."
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Laodicea was a prosperous commercial center in John's day, specializing in the production of woolen goods. This city had great flocks of black sheep and became known for glossy black wool and manufacture and export of black woolen garments. It also became wealthy for the production of Phrygian eye powder. (See Rev. 3:18). It became one of the richest cities of the East. After an earthquake in AD 60, other towns offered money but the proud Laodiceans refused saying they were rich enough to rebuild their city with out help from anyone. The fact that they were rich and made clothing gives special meaning to some of John's statements about them.

By John's day, this church had been in existence about 40 years. The city was founded in 246 BC by Antiochus who named it after his sister and wife, and populated it with Syrians and Jews transplanted from Babylonia.

Paul had an interest in this city. In Col. 4:16 Paul instructs the Colossians to exchange letters with the Laodiceans. About 1300 the city was destroyed by the Turks and has never been rebuilt.

These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, Coupling the Amen with the faithful and true witness identifies it as a title of Christ (see Ch. 1:5) who is the author of the letters to the seven churches.

Why say Amen when we pray? Amen is a Hebrew word carried over into English, which means "so be it." It is used to confirm or endorse—to agree with—what has just been said. It also expresses our humility before God, submitting to His wisdom and will.

The beginning of the creation of God. "Beginning" from the Greek word arche meaning "initiates an action." Many people no longer believe in the creation story of Genesis. Isn't it interesting that all the Bible writers believed it!

15. **I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.** Bible scholars believe that this expression must have had particular meaning for the Laodicean church. One of the chief landmarks of that vicinity was a waterfall over which a stream from the hot springs at Hierapolis plunged. Hot when it flowed at Hierapolis, these waters grew cooler on their way across the Lycus Valley to Laodicea, some 6 miles distant, and were lukewarm upon reaching the vicinity of that city. Lukewarm water was therefore a familiar phenomenon to the Laodiceans and fittingly described their spiritual condition.

The tepid spiritual condition of the Laodicean church was more dangerous than if the church had been cold. Lukewarm Christianity preserves enough of the form and even the content of the gospel to dull our powers of perception and we stop striving for a really victorious life in Christ! The Laodicean Christian was content with things as they were.

The Laodicean church represents the church during the closing period of earth's history—that of a people judged. The Laodicean message may be thought of as applying in a special sense to the church from 1844 to the close of time. It represents the period of the Judgment that occurs at the end of the 2300 days.

The Laodicean message is applicable to all who profess to be Christians. It wasn't given to one particular denomination. This message of Revelation stands as a rebuke to self-satisfaction with our spiritual condition. When we feel that we are really o.k. and we see no need to grow any closer to God than we are, and we look around us and think that we're no worse than other folks and we "reckon we'll be in heaven some day," we are in a lukewarm spiritual state—and in terrible spiritual danger.

A lukewarm spiritual state results in decreased alertness, a slow response, and indecisive action. If the Laodicean church were cold, the Spirit of God might the more readily convince it of its dangerous condition.

16. **So then because thou are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.** Have you ever tasted warm soda pop? Tepid drinks are disappointing and nauseating and the one who drinks it almost involuntarily expels it.
17. **Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;** This may be understood both literally and spiritually Laodicea was a rich city and had suffered no serious persecution. Pride in its prosperity led to spiritual complacency. They really thought that they had need of nothing.

Is wealth wrong? Can you be spiritually proud of being poor? Can you take spiritual pride in being poor and develop religious bigotry against the rich? It would seem that the sin that is most nearly hopeless and incurable is pride of opinion and self-conceit. Remember Satan saying, "I will be like the most high? I will exalt my throne above the heavens....."

The climax of the Laodiceans' boast is that their situation could not be improved. Such self-satisfaction is fatal, for the Spirit of God never enters where a need for His presence is not felt. Remember the verse: Behold, I stand at the door and knock Rev. 3:20.

and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is well-nigh hopeless. They had no idea of their true condition. Is it possible that we are like that today?

18. **I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich** This represented spiritual riches offered as Christ's remedy for the Laodiceans' spiritual poverty. Tried in the fire refers to faith that has been tried and purified by the fires of affliction (see James 1:2-5)

And white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, Offered in contrast with the Laodiceans' nakedness: the white raiment should be understood as Christ's righteousness.

And that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; This must have had special significance for Laodicea for their city was famous for its black woolen cloth and the manufacture of clothes.

And anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see This is heaven's antidote for their spiritual blindness. "Mayest see" means see sin as God sees it and realize their own real condition—as a prerequisite to repentance.

19. **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten:** Chastening comes to the Christian when Christ's rebuke is disregarded. Neither His rebuke nor His chastening is an expression of anger—as when we lose our tempers—but of vigorous love whose purpose is to bring sinners to repentance.

Christ warns the church that it cannot continue in its halfhearted way without encountering remedial discipline. A little more than half a century after John's time ancient Laodicean church did suffer persecution.

Be zealous therefore, and repent. Zealous "zeloo" meaning "hot." The Laodiceans are called upon to experience the warmth and enthusiasm that comes with true repentance, consecration, and devotion to Christ.

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20. **Behold, I stand at the door, and knock:** The door here referred to is under the control of man. Christ awaits each man's decision.

If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me. Greek deipneo "to eat a meal," particularly the main evening meal. (see Luke 14:12) In these words Christ promises to share our experiences and invites us to share His. (see Gal. 2:20; Heb. 2:14-17)

21. **To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne,** The overcomer will share in the glory and power of Christ, even as Christ shares in the glory and power of His Father.

Even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. See John 16:33. Only on the basis of Christ's victory can man hope to overcome.

22. **He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.** See Rev. 2:7
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SEVEN CHURCHS TO STUDY			
CHURCH	DESCRIPTION	PRAISED FOR	WARNED ABOUT
Ephesus (2:1-7) Apostolic period AD 31—AD 100	The Loveless Church	Labor Patience Not bearing evil people Testing false apostles Perseverance Hating deeds of Nicolaitans	Leaving their first love
Smyrna (2:8-11) AD 100 — AD 337	The Persecuted Church	Tribulation Poverty	Faithfulness under persecution
Pergamus (2:12-17) 321 AD — 538 AD Justinian gave pope absolute political power	The Compromising Church; Constantine changed Sabbath; Paganism entered church	Holding fast to Christ’s name Not denying the faith even when facing death; Pope overthrew the Vandals and Ostrogoths during this period	Allowing false teaching having to do with immorality and idolatry Holding the doctrine of the Nicolaitans
Thyatira (2:18-29) 538 AD —1798 AD	The Corrupt Church; Era of papal supremacy	Love Service Faith Patience Remember the church was in hiding 1260 years; No bible translations during this	Allowing Jezebel to teach and seduce to immorality and idolatry Holding fast and overcoming
Sardis (3:7-13) 1798-1833 AD	The Dead Church;	A few faithful people; Huss, Jerome, Luther: Period of Reformation	Deadness, even though they had a reputation for being alive
Philadelphia (3:7-13) 1833-1844 AD	The Faithful Church: Period of great awakening to 7th day Sabbath and second coming of Jesus Christ	A little strength Keeping Christ’s word Not denying Christ’s name Perseverance	Holding fast what they had and overcoming during coming tribulations
Laodicea (3:14-20) We are living in the era of this church: 1844 — today!	The Lukewarm Church; We’re not bad and we’re not good. We don’t hurt anyone and we don’t help anyone!	The only church without praise!	Being lukewarm Pretending to be well off spiritually when we are impoverished Need for repentance and overcoming

As we study the seven churches to whom Christ dictated letters, with which group do you most identify? What words of warning might apply to your church? What changes might your church need to make in order to be ready for Jesus to come?

