

Revelation Lesson 45
Sardis: The Lifeless Church (Salutation)

Revelation 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Tonight we are going to take a look at the first part of verse 1 from Chapter 3! Here we shall see Christ's Greetings to the Church at Sardis.

We note again, that these epistles or letters to the 7 churches were literally sent to them, but at the same time we see matters applicable to various eras or ages of Church history and our future. I merely echo what the late Evangelist Oliver B. Greene stated: "I realize that these messages were actually directed to churches that existed in John's day – but as I have stated already, each church represents a period of time from Pentecost to the Rapture."

Sardis was about 27 or 28 miles south of Thyatira. The city was a wealthy one and there was good reason for that as it was the capital of the Kingdom of Lydia. Historical records inform us that in 1850AD there wasn't anyone living in the former bustling city. That did change and today the present-day dwellers' village is called Sart which operates essentially to showcase the town's ancient wonders year round. Sardis originally meant "escaping ones" or "those who come out."

LaHaye says: "The name Sardis then, together with the Lord's condemnation of this church, provides a perfect description of the Reformation churches." Greene relates the following: "In...Thyatira, we have the condition of the church before the Reformation. In Sardis...we have the general state or condition of the church after the Reformation." Here we see "...Protestantism is in power, whereas in the Thyatira assembly the Papacy (Rome) controlled. The one overlaps the other; but although there is an abrupt break between the two, they do signify certain periods of time. The Reformation was a definite turning point in the history of Western Christianity." Hence most Bible scholars who agree that this church also shows us an era of Church History typically state that this represents the time from: 1520-1739AD (D. A. Waite) or 1520 – Tribulation (Tim LaHaye).

Allow me to add something here. Most Bible historians date the formation of the Baptists to 1609. They do this because they point to John Smyth (1570-1612) when this English Preacher rebaptized himself and the adults of this congregation. The name Baptist was applied to them. The "first" church organized with the name Baptist would emerge almost 30 years (29 years to be exact) later in 1638. In 1631 Roger Williams (1603-1683) came to America and would establish a Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island in 1638 and another would be established in 1644 by John Clarke (1609-1676) in Newport, Rhode Island. The first Baptist Church established in the South would hail from 1696 in Charleston, South Carolina under Pastor William Screven (1629-1713).

If the Baptists came out of the Protestant Reformation this would imply we as Baptists are like the Presbyterian or Methodist or some other "mainstream" denomination in that we would be classified as Protestants. While a lot of folks believe that, the truth is that if you take the essential Baptist doctrinal tenants held throughout the years you can trace "Baptistic Doctrine" well beyond the Reformation and into the Apostolic Age itself. While we do NOT claim to be Baptist Briders (a false teaching that states that only the Baptists will be in Heaven) we do however affirm that the Baptists have held to the same tenants of Doctrine taught by Christ and the Apostles through the ages – granted there have been offshoots that have "perverted the Baptist name" like Seventh-Day Baptists and Free-Will Baptists.

One other thing before we start. If you will notice throughout these lessons from Sardis, Christ places emphasis upon 2 things: a name and garments. Why? Well stay tuned. So what exactly did Christ say in His opening Words to this congregation? Let's take a look....

And unto the angel of the church – Again we pause to note the identity of the “angel.” We have covered this 4 times already and I won't belabour the point but will refer you back to Lessons 22, 23, 20 and 34 for more details. The word angel was transliterated into English and was not interpreted. Some wonder why? I think God did this to allow us to study some in His Word. The word angel means messenger thus based on a thorough study of this section of Scripture we find that this messenger was a man and as a man he was a messenger of God within the church. Hence in short – this angel of the church is the pastor of the church.

in Sardis – Here we find the location of the Church. It is within the City of Sardis. For more information on the history of Sardis refer back to Lesson 13. I would like append one historical point here that the city of Sardis was known for its carpet industry as well as its riches. Thus within this bustling town of commerce we find a church had emerged there, they warred against various false regions chief of which was the cult of the goddess Cybele the Mother of the gods or the Great Mother. She has come down to us today within two forms: “Mother Earth” and “The Virgin Mary the Mother of God.” Please note that Christ as God is from Everlasting – hence God has no mother, but the humanity of Christ DID have a mother and that was Mary while she was a Virgin, after the birth of Christ she no longer remained a virgin but bore 4 sons and an unknown number of daughters to Joseph.

Write; - Again this shows part of the way that John received some of the Book of Revelation. Christ spoke and John wrote what He was commanded to write.

These things – These “things” encompasses Revelation 3:1-6 or the “Epistle” or Letter to the Church at Sardis.

Saith he – Here again we see that Christ is doing the speaking, John is doing the writing – much like dictation is done.

that hath – These English phrase is the Greek word ECHO (G2192) and denotes as the English says: to have as in to possess or own. In the time of the first century Greek philosophers this word was used with abstract terms as in fellow-shipping with their false gods or even spirits. For Christians our fellowship was (and is still seen to be) with God and other Christians. Application of these ideas come into view here in Revelation 3:1 where Christ has the (as we shall see) 7 Spirits of God and hence has the authority to command them – we see them “sent out” in Revelation 5:6. So in short Christ possesses, controls, owns 2 groups of 7:

the seven Spirits of God, - The 7 Spirits are referred to in Lesson 4. Allow me to overview what we previously learned: Now many come to this and scratch their heads and wonder I thought there was only ONE Holy Ghost, but now there's SEVEN? No not seven spirits. This is a cry back to the MINISTRIES OF THE Holy Ghost. So what are they? Turn to Isaiah 11:2 And the 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;

1. "The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him." The Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity went forth in the power of the Spirit. When He comes again, He is going to rule in the power of the Spirit.
2. "The spirit of wisdom." He has been made unto us wisdom ([1Co 1:30](#)). He is the only One who

can lead and guide you and me through this life. We are no match for the world today. The Lord Jesus Christ could say "... for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" ([Joh 14:30](#)). Satan cannot find anything in Christ, but he can always find something in us. We need the Spirit of wisdom, and the Lord Jesus Christ is that Spirit of wisdom.

3. The spirit of "And understanding," which means spiritual discernment. It is distressing to find that so few Christians have any discernment at all. I am amazed the way some people will follow a certain man purely on a human basis. They like his looks or the sound of his voice, and they never really comprehend what he is saying or if what he is saying is true to the Word of God. Christians need the Spirit of understanding. That is one thing for which I have always prayed, and I seem to need it more today than ever before. We need to be aware of who is for the Lord and who isn't. Recall John 14:17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. (And) John 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.
4. "The spirit of counsel." All of us need counsel. Did you ever notice that the Lord Jesus Christ never asked anyone for advice? He never asked for counsel; He *gave* it.
5. The spirit of "Might"—that is, power. Oh, how we need power. Paul says, "That I may know him, and the *power* of his resurrection ..." (Philippians 3:10, italics mine). We need that today.
6. "The spirit of knowledge" I think this comes through a reading and absorption of the Word.
7. The spirit "of the fear of the LORD." The fear of the Lord relates to respect of Him. I think this comes through a study of the Word of God and then an obedience to it."

and the seven stars; - Here is another idea we have covered in Lessons 18 and 22. There is one specific reference outside of Revelation to "seven stars." Some Revelation "scholars" have attempted to link both references as a means of interpretation. Let us examine what this Old Testament reference is: Amos 5:8 "Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name:"

We see in Amos 5:8 the reference to "the seven stars" along with the statement about Orion. Now, if we look up Orion we find references in Job 9:9 and Job 38:31. In both of these verses we find the word Pleiades in connection with Orion. This then has determined the meaning of this Old Testament reference: In Amos 5:8, the seven stars refers to the open cluster called the Pleiades. This open cluster of up to 14 to 36 stars is easily seen to the right of the Constellation Taurus the Bull and underneath the Constellation Perseus. The Greeks called it the Seven Sisters and it was known by all ancient cultures. This cluster was classified as Charles Messier's list as M45 in 1771.

So how can we know Christ isn't referring to the Pleiades? In Revelation 1:20 Christ tells us: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." Thus the 7 Stars in Revelation is symbolic of the 7 Pastors of the churches. Greene says this: "The stars are the lightbearers of the local assemblies. Their responsibility is to shine for Christ, to reflect the light of Christ and of Heaven to the people in the assembly and the community who live in darkness...the darkness of this world...All light and all ministry proceed from Christ. Jesus gives to us the ministry we are capable of handling, and it will be a happy day in the lives of the ministers and Christian workers when we are ready to recognize that God knows what He is doing when He places us in a particular ministry. If we will faithfully discharge our duties and faithfully minister in the capacity he gives us, we will have our time so filled that we will have no time left to covet nor to criticize another man's ministry. Whatever may be the ministry in the Church, if it is successful and as it should be, it proceeds from the Lord Jesus Christ." So it is beloved that Christ possesses the stars and controls their ministries. Only those "wandering stars" control their own ministry and as such they no longer abide in the Master's Hand. Make sure you're in His hands!!