

**WEEK 6**  
**THE CHURCHES AT SARDIS AND PHILADELPHIA**  
**40 DAYS THROUGH REVELATION**  
**REVELATION 3:1-13**

In today's lesson, we focus attention on the strengths and weaknesses of the churches in Sardis and Philadelphia. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

**Revelation 3:1**

**“To the angel of the church” (3:1)** : Apparently the pastor of the church.

**“In Sardis” (3:1)** : Sardis is located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira, at the foot of Mount Tmolus, on the river Pactolus. The primary business of this industrial city was harvesting wool, dyeing it, and making garments from it. This city featured extensive pagan worship.

**“The words of him who has the seven spirits of God” (3:1)** : The seven spirits are apparently a metaphorical reference to the Holy Spirit in His fullness (seven is a number of completeness or fullness). Perhaps the Holy Spirit is mentioned because the Holy Spirit is the One who can bring new life to this lifeless church (see Galatians 5:22-23).

**“And the seven stars” (3:1)** : The seven stars are “the angels of the seven churches” (see Revelation 1:20). This likely refers to the pastors of the seven churches.

**“I know your works” (3:1)** : Christ, who has eyes “like a flame of fire” (Revelation 1:14), knows all the works of church members at Sardis.

**“You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead” (3:1)** : This church had no spiritual vitality even though it still had a few genuine believers (verse 4). The church members were similar to the Pharisees: Outwardly they appeared spiritual, but they were actually spiritually dead (Matthew 23:27-28).

**Revelation 3:2-3**

**“Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die” (3:2)** : Church members needed to awaken from their spiritual slumber and fan into a flame their dying embers of spiritual commitment (see Romans 13:11).

**“I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God” (3:2)** : The works of these believers fell short of what God required of them.

**“Remember, then, what you received and heard” (3:3)** : “Remember” is literally “keep in mind.” They were to keep in mind their rich spiritual heritage and return to the attitudes and activities their teachers had taught them earlier.

**“Keep it, and repent” (3:3)** : Repentance involves a change in thinking with a subsequent change in behavior (see Matthew 4:17; Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19). Christ required immediate repentance.

**“If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you” (3:3)** : If church members failed to rectify things, Christ would bring swift judgment at a time when they would least expect it.

### **Revelation 3:4-6**

**“Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments” (3:4)** : Garments in the Bible often metaphorically refer to a person's character. Soiled garments indicate a polluted character. This verse thus indicates that some people in the church had remained spiritually unstained (see Jude 23).

**“They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy” (3:4)** : The redeemed will be dressed in white (Revelation 6:11; 7:9,13; 19:8,14), indicating their imputed righteousness and purity.

**“Will be clothed thus in white garments” (3:5)** : This promise would have been especially meaningful to people who lived in a city where woolen garments were manufactured.

**“I will never blot his name out of the book of life” (3:5)** : The book of life is a heavenly record of the names of the redeemed who will inherit heaven (Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27; see also Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3). Believers will not have their names blotted out. This is a Hebrew literary device in which a positive truth is taught by negating its opposite.

**“I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels” (3:5)** : In the Gospels Christ promised, “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).

**“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says” (3:6)** : Believers must hear and obey this prophetic Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21).

### **Revelation 3:7-8**

**“To the angel of the church” (3:7)** : Apparently the pastor of the church.

**“In Philadelphia” (3:7)** : Philadelphia was a city in Lydia, located in western Asia Minor, about 28 miles from Sardis. Its major industry was wine. Its chief deity was the god of wine, Dionysus.

**“The words of the holy one” (3:7)** : Only God is holy (Isaiah 6:3), and Jesus is “the holy one” (compare with Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69), so Jesus is here portrayed as God.

**“The true one” (3:7)** : Jesus is also called true. Unlike the false gods of paganism, Jesus was genuinely God.

**“Who has the key of David” (3:7)** : The key of David represents the authority to open and shut the door that leads to the Davidic kingdom—Christ’s future millennial kingdom (see Isaiah 22:22; Matthew 1:1).

**“Who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens” (3:7)** : An open door is an opportunity for ministry (see Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3).

**“I know your works” (3:8)** : Christ, who has eyes “like a flame of fire” (Revelation 1:14), knows all the works of church members at Philadelphia.

**“I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut” (3:8)** : Jesus sovereignly gave the church at Philadelphia an opportunity to serve in ministry, and no one can thwart this opportunity (see Acts 16:6-10).

**“I know that you have but little power” (3:8)** : God’s strength is more than able to make up for human weakness (see 2 Corinthians 12:9).

**“You have kept my word and have not denied my name” (3:8)** : The Jews, who rejected Jesus Christ, probably tried to force church members to deny Christ’s name. But these believers stood firm.

#### **Revelation 3:9-11**

**“I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie” (3:9)** : These were Jews by lineage, descendants of Abraham. Having rejected Jesus Christ (see John 8:31-59), however, they became tools of Satan.

**“I will make them come and bow down before your feet” (3:9)** : Eventually these Jewish antagonists would be forced to admit their error. This may take place at the great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

**“They will learn that I have loved you” (3:9)** : Contrary to Jewish exclusivism, everyone will see that God has loved these Gentile believers who were faithful to Jesus.

**“You have kept my word about patient endurance” (3:10)** : Church members kept Christ’s word—that is, they were obedient to it and patiently endured all the trials and persecutions they encountered.

**“I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth” (3:10)** : Many Bible expositors believe this verse looks beyond Philadelphia and is a promise to deliver the entire church from the tribulation period by means of the rapture. Notice the definite article—“the hour.” The church would be kept from the actual hour of testing, not just the testing itself.

The Greek preposition (ek) translated “from” carries the idea of separation from something. Believers will be kept from the hour of testing in the sense that they will be completely separated from it by being raptured before the period even begins. This makes sense because the church is not appointed to wrath (Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 5:9).

**“I am coming soon” (3:11)** : We do not know when this will occur, so we must always be ready, living in righteousness and purity (Titus 2:13-14).

**“Hold fast what you have” (3:11)** : Christ encouraged the believers to stand strong and not to give up or weaken in their resolve.

**“So that no one may seize your crown” (3:11)** : The rewards Christians will receive from Jesus at the judgment seat of Christ are often described as crowns (1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4). Christ exhorts these believers not to act in such a way as to forfeit their reward at the judgment seat of Christ.

## **Revelation 3:12-13**

**“The one who conquers” (3:12)** : Christians conquer by being faithful and obedient.

**“I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God” (3:12)** : Magistrates were honored in Philadelphia by having a pillar placed in a temple in their name. Jesus indicated that faithful believers would be honored (see Revelation 21:22).

**“Never shall he go out of it” (3:12)** : In contrast to earthly temples, in which pillars eventually decay and fall over, believers will continue forever in the temple in heaven—the new Jerusalem.

**“I will write on him the name of my God” (3:12)** : In Bible times, imprinting a name indicated ownership. God writes His name on Christians to show that they belong to Him, they are His redeemed property, and they are in His eternal family.

**“The name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem” (3:12)** : The new Jerusalem is the heavenly city in which the saints of all ages will eternally dwell (see John 14:1-3; Hebrews 11:10).

**“Which comes down from my God out of heaven” (3:12)** : After God creates the new heavens and new earth, the new Jerusalem—the eternal city where believers will dwell forever—will come down out of heaven and rest on the renewed earth (see Revelation 21:2,10).

**“My own new name” (3:12)** : A person's name in the Bible often points to his or her character, so Christ's new name may indicate that believers in heaven will have the opportunity to behold the full wonder of Christ's glorious character.

**“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (3:13)** : Believers must hear and obey this prophetic Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21).

## **Major Themes**

### **The rapture (Revelation 3:10)**

The rapture is that glorious event in which the dead in Christ will be resurrected, living Christians will be instantly translated into their resurrection bodies, and both groups will be caught up to meet Christ in the air and taken back to heaven (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

### **Character and clothing**

Scripture often relates character to clothing (as in Revelation 3:4). For example, 1 Peter 5:5 exhorts, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.” Colossians 3:12 exhorts, “Put on...compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (see also Romans 13:14).

## **Digging Deeper with Cross-References**

### **The rapture**

John 14:1-3; Romans 8:19; 1 Corinthians 1:7-8; 15:51-53; 16:22; Philippians 3:20-21; 4:5; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:19; 4:13-18; 5:9,23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1,3; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7-9; 1 Peter 1:7,13; 5:4; 1 John 2:28-3:2; Jude 21.

### **The second coming**

Daniel 7:9-14; 12:1-3; Zechariah 12:10; 14:1-15; Matthew 13:41; 24:15-31; 26:64; Mark 13:14-27; 14:62; Luke 21:25-28; Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 2:8; 1 Peter 4:12-13; 2 Peter 3:1-14; Jude 14-15; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-20:6; 22:7,12,20.

## **Life Lessons**

### **The imminence of the rapture**

“Imminent” literally means “ready to take place” or “impending.” The rapture is imminent—that is, no more prophecies must be fulfilled before the rapture can occur (1 Corinthians 1:7; 16:22; Philippians 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7-9; 1 Peter 1:13; Jude 21). This reality ought to motivate us to live in purity (Romans 13:11-14; 2 Peter 3:10-14; 1 John 3:2-3).

### **Avoid hypocrisy**

Hypocrisy is the pretense of having a virtuous character, religious beliefs, or moral principles that one does not really possess (see Revelation 3:1). Jesus spoke sternly against the religious hypocrisy of His day (Matthew 23:28; Mark 12:15; Luke 12:1).

## **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

Is there any discrepancy between who you are on the inside and how you appear to others externally (Revelation 3:1)?

Does the fact that you will one day appear before the judgment seat of Christ motivate you in your spiritual life?

Just as Christ knows all that goes on in the churches, so He knows all that goes on in each of our lives. Does that reality please you or scare you? Why?