

Outline for Class 4, End Times Church: Sardis and Philadelphia

Review from last time

The Seven Churches

They were seven actual churches at the time of writing

The themes and issues of each letter fit the circumstances of each church

Ephesus was the “darling” church that left its first love. It had tremendous apostolic teachers and had good doctrine but it held onto the tradition without the meaning.

Smyrna, the Myrrh church, was being persecuted by Rome and the Jews and Jesus clearly called this out in the letter.

Pergamum was the worldly church that caved to pressure in a pattern of compromise

Thyatira was the church that tolerated false teachers and pagan teaching

We still have to cover Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea

The churches were all in the area of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) near Ephesus

These 7 churches apparently show up as types of churches throughout the ages (“7” signifies a complete set)

Each letter has a specific theme

Ephesus: The Church that let love grow cold

Smyrna: The pure, persecuted church

Pergamum: The church that married the world

Thyatira: The church that tolerated sin and idolatry

Sardis: The dead church

Philadelphia: The missionary outreach church

Laodicea: The apostate church

The theme is evidenced by

The title used by Jesus

The name of the town

The history of the town

The nature of the problems and recommendations for solution

General Observations:

There is a general descent of health in the description of the churches that have problems – the problems get worse

The first three letters do not discuss the second coming of Christ

The last four letters do

Outline for Class 4, End Times Church: Sardis and Philadelphia

The Letter to the Church at Sardis – The Dead Church

The Text of the Letter

1 “To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and 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.’

Title for Jesus

He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars

Seven spirits of God sounds strange

Probably a reference to the sevenfold spirit of Isaiah 11

In Verse 2 the (1) Spirit of the Lord is described as the Spirit of (2) wisdom and (3) understanding, (4) counsel, (5) strength, (6) knowledge and (7) fear. The seven-fold Spirit describes the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His operation.

Has the seven stars

Reminiscent of the title for the persevering church in Ephesus, “The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand”.

Here He is not holding them in His hand – perhaps a bit more distant or aloof

Generally fairly positive – has the Holy Spirit and the Leaders (angels = stars), not as threatening as for Thyatira

Maybe this is what the ignored – the Holy Spirit and true, spirit-filled leadership.

The city of “Sardis”

Very ancient, rich city

First city to mint gold coins in the sixth century BC

Kings were fabulously wealthy, Croesus and Midas

Located atop sheer cliffs that were considered impregnable

Outline for Class 4, End Times Church: Sardis and Philadelphia

Twice in its history (Cyrus in 529 BC) it was conquered because it thought its position impregnable only to be scaled one-by-one by invaders

This false confidence in its reputation as a strong city was reflective of the church's main problem.

Woops – Nothing good said about Sardis

The correction – “but you are dead”

‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

They had a name (“denomination”) that bespoke of greatness but were really dead

Death speaks of sin (Eph. 2:1, “dead in trespasses and sin”; Rom. 5:12, “death by sin”)

Those who are spiritually dead are unregenerate, unsaved

This is a dead church that is being lead by spiritually dead leaders rather than the Holy Spirit

2 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.

They looked good on the outside; they “played church” but they were just going through the motions

They were “mostly dead” and didn’t have to die completely

The Remedy

3 So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent.

Again similar to the Ephesian church which was told to remember what they did at first.

This church didn’t really have the works but they had been given something to “keep” or obey

The Risk

Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

Is he talking about those spiritually dead people who will still be here after the Rapture (1 Th 5:2, “the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.”)?

A righteous remnant

4 But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

Garments speak of spiritual condition

These people have not soiled their garments but they are not spotless

Because they have kept their garments humanly clean, Jesus will give them clean garments from and for heaven

Outline for Class 4, End Times Church: Sardis and Philadelphia

Message to the overcomer

5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

The few people who have not soiled their garments need to overcome

In that day, they kept rosters in the cities and if one died or was put in prison, their names were taken out of the roles of the citizens of that city.

Prophetic viewpoint

If Thyatira represents the Roman Catholic Church then Sardis would symbolize the Reformation church

See if this fits:

Known by their name (or denomination) v. 1

Heralding back to their reputation, v. 1

Dead churches full of people going through the motions
(ordaining and marrying gays, forsaking the faith for the ways of the world)

Deeds weren't complete – they still had an amillennial view of the end times and didn't give Israel her proper place in scripture

There is a little fire but it is ready to go out

Only a remnant will be saved

Subject to excommunication (having their names taken out of the book of the supposedly saved)

What can they do?

Wake up – strengthen what remains

Remember what they had been given – the truth of salvation by grace with works to back it up (James 2:17). The apostolic writings had been collected by this time. Go back and see that you "keep" (obey) the truth of the scriptures.

Do not soil garments by forsaking the Spirit's leading and living in the flesh (In 1 Th 5, the chapter about the Rapture, they were admonished to not quench the Spirit or despise prophetic words. How fitting that this church that is largely set to miss the rapture is being instructed to pay attention to the sevenfold Spirit.)

Stop incomplete acts of worship and give yourselves fully to the worship of God and obedience to His call. Practice your faith with works.

Outline for Class 4, End Times Church: Sardis and Philadelphia

If these churches don't wake up, they will be thrust into the tribulation. Jesus will come like a thief and take what little they have (Mt. 13:12) and they will be joined to the one world church in the Tribulation in Rev. 17.

The Letter to the Church at Philadelphia – The Faithful Church

The Text of the Letter

7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:

8 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Title for Jesus

He who is holy,

He was Holy at His birth (Luke 1:35)

Holy at His death (Acts 2:27)

Holy in His present priestly office (Heb 7:25)

who is true,

"True": Alethinos, real, genuine; vs. alethes, truth in contrast to falsehood (Jn 17:3 "I am the way, the truth... none come to the father except through me"; 1 Jn 5:20).

who has the key of David,

For Key of David (Google found this)

21 ...I will entrust him with your authority,

And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.

22 "Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder,

When he opens no one will shut,

When he shuts no one will open.

Outline for Class 4, End Times Church: Sardis and Philadelphia

Also reminiscent of Jn 17:3

who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens

Jesus is the gate and the door to heaven

He dispenses access to Heaven and to heavenly blessings on earth

The city of Philadelphia

Rich agricultural area, lived in constant fear of earthquakes and volcanic activity

"Philadelphia" means brotherly love

John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments"

Philadelphia was an eastern outpost with a Greco-missionary role

Philadelphia was a gateway to the orient and was involved in promoting Grecian culture to the world

The Lydian language had yielded to Greek and was no longer spoken in Philadelphia

The positive – Jesus is pleased with this church

Nobody's perfect, and Philadelphia churches are not perfect either but they are pleasing to Jesus

8 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut

Jesus refers back to his title as one who opens doors

Elsewhere in the NT, an open door meant an opportunity to minister the word of God. (Col 4:3, "that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ"; Acts 14:27, "He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."; 1 Co 16:9, "a wide door for effective service has opened to me")

...because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

"Power" is translated from "dunamis" from which we get the word "dynamite". (In NAS, it's translated as ability 4, meaning 1, mightily 1, mighty 1, miracle 2, miracles 17, miraculous powers 3, power 83, powers 6, strength 2, wealth 1. It does not connote weakness)

They have power that Jesus knows will not get wasted so He gives them an open door of opportunity.

They have also been obedient ("kept My word") and loyal ("have not denied my name", the source of power)

9 Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie

Again the synagogue of Satan as for the church at Smyrna, the other good church

They were persecuting this little church at Philadelphia

Outline for Class 4, End Times Church: Sardis and Philadelphia

In our times, could this refer to those who believe that the Church is Israel?

...I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

These Jews-in-name-only will see the power of their testimony and will submit to the reality that Jesus was their Messiah

This was anathema to Jews who were promised that the world would come and bow down to them (Is 45:14)

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, writing a few years later than Revelation records that these Jews repented and were converted in contrition

10 Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

For the specific historical church, it meant that the persecution that Smyrna was experiencing was going to get much worse throughout the whole Roman Empire.

This church persevered with the perseverance of Jesus (submission, suffering and death – the gospel)

For the modern church, it seems to be a promise that the true church will not suffer the great tribulation (1 Th. 5:9-10, “9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.”)

They will be kept from the time or hour of the tribulation, not preserved through it.

The Rapture will happen to us as it did to Enoch (he was pre-flood)

“Those who dwell on the Earth” is code in Revelation for unbelievers – look it up

11 I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

They won't lose their salvation but they can lose their reward (1 Co 9:26-27, “26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

Interesting that they already have the crown – not a future event

The correction – hmmm, nothing bad said about Philadelphia

Smyrna, the persecuted church, was the only other church without a correction

Outline for Class 4, End Times Church: Sardis and Philadelphia

Message to the overcomer

12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

Pillars

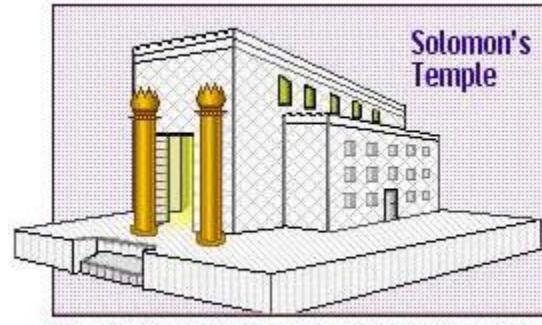
Stability, permanence – important to a region beset by volcanic earthquakes

Honor & maybe support, Boaz and Jachin were the two pillars by the portico of Solomon's temple supported nothing but were ornately decorated

New names

Write on him the name of My God... the city of My God... my new name

What honor is bestowed on the believer in God's kingdom and what intimacy that we get a new name for ourselves and a new name by which to call our Savior!



Prophetic viewpoint

What characterized the post Reformation church?

Missionary outreach to the whole world

Reestablished an understanding of the imminency of Christ's return to establish His kingdom
Great Book: The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd – had a big influence on John Wimber

Many evangelistic organizations formed in England and other European countries to bring the gospel to the Jews.

1842 Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among Jews

1876 the Mildmay Mission to Jews

1896, Kilburn Mission to the Jews

By the end of the nineteenth century there was one Christian missionary for every one thousand Jews in the British Isles.

"Little power" it eschewed the political machinations of the Roman Catholic Church (although not blameless in the treatment of American natives) but went in the power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

This church apparently will not go into the Great Tribulation (v. 10)

Thyatira was promised to go into the tribulation (except for a few) because of a refusal of "Jezebel" to repent

Outline for Class 4, End Times Church: Sardis and Philadelphia

Sardis was “mostly dead” so only a few would be raptured

The Rapture apparently happens between Chapters 3 and 4. Some say the “come up” statement in 4:1 signifies the same thing.

Will the church be involved in saving all Israel (c.f. Romans 11)?

What can we learn to be more like the Church at Philadelphia?

Missionary outreach (open door, converting the Jews)

Active ministry (open door)

Understand how prophecy can strengthen our commitment to Jesus

Be faithful to Jesus’ commands and to His Name (symbolizes everything that He is, Gen 32 when Jacob wrestled with God, when Jesus declared “I am he” in the garden)

Look for his soon coming and be filled with hope

Pray for Israel as the key to Jesus’ return (Luke 13:34-35, “... 34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! 35 Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘ Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

Time to Pray

Suggested Reading

1. Ephesus Acts 18-20; Ephesians 3; 5
2. Smyrna Acts 15
3. Pergamos Num 22-24; Balaam, Num 33; Acts 15; 1 Cor 6
4. Thyatira 1 Kgs 16; 21; Jezebel, Naboth’s vineyard; 2 Kgs 9:36
5. Sardis Galatians; Romans
6. Philadelphia Thessalonians
7. Laodicea Colossians