

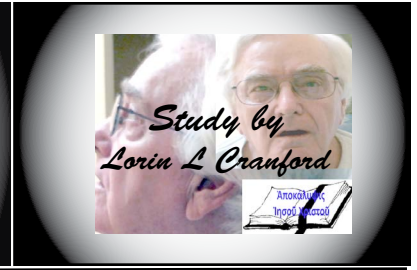


THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 10

Text: Rev. 3:1-6

All rights reserved ©



1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἀποστόλου ἡμετέρου ἧν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἐκκλησίαις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γένησθαι ἐν τῷ ἔτι, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἂν τὰς ἐκκλησίας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου οὗτος πρὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τὴν ἐν Σάρδεσσιν, 2 ἡ μαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀκούσκων καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οἱ ἀκούοντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὅ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

QUICK LINKS

1. What the text meant.

Historical Aspects:

External History

Internal History

Literary Aspects:

Genre

Literary Setting

Literary Structure

Exegesis of the Text:

A. Command to write, v. 1a

B. Situation of the church, vv. 1b-4

C. Admonition and promise, vv. 5-6

2. What the text means.

MESSAGE TO SARDIS

Greek NT

3 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψων·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας· οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὄχι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ. 2 γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὔρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. 3 μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἶληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. ἔαν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποῖαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοι εἰσιν.

5 Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ. 6 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

La Biblia de las Américas

1 Y escribe al ángel de la iglesia en Sardis:

“El que tiene los siete Espíritus de Dios y las siete estrellas, dice esto: ‘Yo conozco tus obras, que tienes nombre de que vives, pero estás muerto. 2 ‘Ponte en vela y afirma las cosas que quedan, que estaban a punto de morir, porque no he hallado completas tus obras delante de mi Dios. 3 ‘Acuérdate, pues, de lo que has recibido y oído; guárdalo y arrepiéntete. Por tanto, si no velas, vendré como ladrón, y no sabrás a qué hora vendré sobre ti. 4 ‘Pero tienes unos pocos en Sardis que no han manchado sus vestiduras, y andarán conmigo vestidos de blanco, porque son dignos.

5 ‘Así el vencedor será revestido de vestiduras blancas y no borraré su nombre del libro de la vida, y reconoceré su nombre delante de mi Padre y delante de sus ángeles. 6 ‘El que tiene oído, oiga lo que el Espíritu dice a las iglesias.”

NRSV

3 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. 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 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. 6 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

NLT

1 “Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis.

This is the message from the one who has the seven-fold Spirit of God and the seven stars: I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive -- but you are dead. 2 Now wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is at the point of death. Your deeds are far from right in the sight of God. 3 Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly and turn to me again. Unless you do, I will come upon you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief. 4 “Yet even in Sardis there are some who have not soiled their garments with evil deeds. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

5 All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine. 6 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

INTRODUCTION

With the message to Sardis we come to the fifth of these seven messages to the churches. For some unclear reason the last three messages were placed in a separate chapter when the chapter and verse markings were added in the seventeenth century. Evidently, this shift was motivated by realizing that the message to Sardis is almost identical to the one to Ephesus in 2:1-7.

The city of Sardis itself enjoyed a long history of prosperity during the early Christian era after suffering a catastrophic earthquake in AD 17.¹ The Christian church in the city existed along side one of the largest Jewish synagogues in the ancient world. The combination of great affluence and religious toleration very likely contributed mightily to the problems identified by Christ in the church that prompted His stern rebuke to them.

Consequently, we who live in a similar cultural climate have a lot to learn from Christ's message to this ancient Christian congregation.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

As is always the case, the historical and literary background issues play an important role in legitimate

¹“Sardis or Sardes (Lydian: *Sfard*; Greek: Σάρδεις, Sardeis; Persian: سارس, Sārd) was an ancient city at the location of modern Sart (Sartmahmut before 19 October 2005) in Turkey's Manisa Province. Sardis was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia,¹ one of the important cities of the Persian Empire, the seat of proconsul under the Roman Empire, and the metropolis of the province Lydia in later Roman and Byzantine times. As one of the Seven churches of Asia, it was addressed by the author of the Book of Revelation in terms which seem to imply that its population was notoriously soft and fainthearted. Its importance was due, first to its military strength, secondly to its situation on an important highway leading from the interior to the Aegean coast, and thirdly to its commanding the wide and fertile plain of the Hermus.” [“Sardis,” *wikipedia.org*]



interpretation of the scripture text. Rev. 3:1-7 is no exception.

Historical Aspects:

Here both the external and internal histories are important to examine.

External History. In the hand copying of 3:1-6 over the first eight or so Christian centuries, several variations of wording surface among the now existing manuscripts containing this passage.

The editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) considered on one of them as having enough impact on translation in order to include it in the text apparatus of this printed Greek New Testament. This is the adverb οὕτως, **thus**, in verse five.² A few manuscripts read οὗτος, **this one**, or αὐτός, **himself**. But the overwhelming weight of evidence favors the adverb οὕτως.³

In the text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.), one will find seventeen places where variations in wording appear in known manuscripts of these six verses.⁴ Again, careful examina-

²{B} οὕτως κ* A C 1006 2329 2344 2351 it^{ar}, g^{ig}, t^{vg} sy^{ph}, h^h cop^{sa}, bo arm eth Primasius // οὗτος κ² 205 209 1611 1841 1854 205³ Byz [P 046] Andrew // αὐτός 2050.

³“Instead of οὕτως, the *Textus Receptus*, in agreement with a few uncials and most minuscules, reads οὗτος (this one), referring to ‘the one who conquers’ (ὁ νικῶν). The reading οὕτως has superior manuscript support. In addition, οὕτως seems to be unnecessary and may have therefore been corrected by copyists to οὗτος. The sense of the reading in the text is that the one who conquers will be dressed in white in the same manner as the few people in Sardis who shall walk with Christ in white (v. 4). Compare NRSV1: ‘If you conquer, you will be clothed like them [οὗτος] in white robes.’ It is also possible that οὕτως refers primarily to the preceding ὁ νικῶν (the one who conquers) ‘in which case it would emphasize only the idea of overcoming itself: ‘the one overcoming—by overcoming’—will inherit the following promises’ (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 278).²” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 529-30.]

Offenbarung 3,1

* τω 046 sy^h (τῆς is replaced by τῷ)

* κυριος 172 (κύριος is inserted before ὁ ἔχων)

* 181. 2015 pc (ἑπτὰ is omitted)

* και 1006. 1611. 1841. 2344 M^K (ὄτι is replaced by καὶ)

Offenbarung 3,2

* τηρησον 1611. 2344 pc sy^h (στήρισον is replaced by τήρισον)

* ημελλες αποβαλλειν 1006. (1611). 1841 M^K (sy^{ph}, bo)

(ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν is replaced by ἡμελλες ἀποθανεῖν)

| txt κ A C 1854. 2050. 2053. 2329. (2351) M^A latt sy^h sa

* † A C pc (τὰ is omitted)



tion of each of these variants reveals no substantive change in meaning. They mostly reflect efforts at stylistic improvement; a few reflect careless copying methods.

Consequently, we can exegete the adopted reading of the passage in full confidence that it reflects the original wording of this passage.

Internal History. The major time and place marker inside the passage that relates to a background historical issue is the designation of the city of Σάρδεσιν, *Sardis*.

The city had a long and rich history, somewhat dotted with tragic events over the centuries.⁵ It was crushed by the Persians in sixth century BCE, and destroyed by an earthquake in AD 17. The city was noted for its wealth from the time of Croesus, king of Lyd-

ia from 560 to 546 BCE. Even after the Muslim occupation of the city in AD 716, the Christian community continued to grow and remained prominent inside Christianity across the Mediterranean world. A Melito (died c. 180 AD) who was the spiritual leader in Sardis during much of the second century became famous in Christian circles and wrote extensively against the rival Jewish synagogue in the city. In the OT, it was known as *Gog* (cf. Ezek. 38-39) from the Assyrian *Gugu* or *Gyges*.

The Jewish synagogue, a portion of which still stands, is one of the largest in the ancient world, and reflects a cultural accommodation to surrounding attitudes that possibly suggests some of the background for the problems found in the Christian church.⁶



Numerous references in 3:1-6 will play off of various aspects of the city's history and culture. These will be noted in the exegesis portion of the study.

Literary Aspects:

The literary aspects continue to play the dominant role in proper interpretation of each of these messages, and the one to Sardis is no exception. Additionally, the literary patterns remain essentially the same as with the previous letters. And in particular a closer parallel to the message to the Ephesians in 2:1-7 emerges. This evidently provided the basis for the chapter division in the post middle ages.

Genre: As noted in the first study of these messages, the general pattern of all seven messages is more of an imperial decree issued by the King of Kings to each of the churches. The component elements remain exactly the same as with all the other

⁶Hemer argued that Jews lived in Sardis in the 4th cent. bce. They came for commercial reasons. Josephus writes that Antiochus III resettled 2,000 Jewish families there (*Ant.* 12.149). Jewish persons became integral members of society politically and financially. They built a large synagogue as well as a GYMNASIUM for the education of their sons. An unusual feature of the synagogue is the presence of Lydian religious reliefs. This type of assimilation of religious traditions, as well as the Greek-style education of their sons, indicates a level of accommodation by some Jews with their surrounding community." [Thomas Slatter, "Sardis," *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, online at *Ministry Matters*.]

| txt & M

*1 M^A sy^{ph} sa^{ms}; Prim (μου is omitted)

Offenbarung 3,3

* & 69. 2329 gig t sy^{ph}; Prim (οὖν is omitted)

* 1006. 1841 M^K (καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει is omitted)

* μετανοησῆς &*; Prim (γρηγορήσῃς is replaced by μετανοήσῃς μηδὲ γρηγορήσῃς)

| μετ. μηδε γρηγ. 2050 t bo

* επι σε & 1006. 1841. 2050. 2344 M^K it vg^{cl} sy sa^{ms}; Bea (ἐπί σε is inserted before ὡς κλέπτῃς)

* γνώσῃ & 1006. 1841. (2050). 2329. 2344. 2351 M^K (γνώσῃς is replaced by γνώσῃ)

| txt A C 1611. 1854. 2053 M^A

Offenbarung 3,4

* 1006. 1841 M^K (The sequence of ἔχεις ὀλίγα is reversed)

* οἱ M (ἄ is replaced by οἱ)

Offenbarung 3,5

* ουτος &† M (οὗτος is replaced with either οὗτος or αὐτός)

| αυτος 2050

| txt &* A C 1006. 2329. 2344. 2351 al latt sy co

* εμπροσθεν & 1611 (ἐνώπιον is replaced with ἔμπροσθεν)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 637-38].

⁵Sardis (sahr'dis), the regional capital of Lydia in the province of Asia Minor and one of the seven churches addressed in Revelation (Rev. 1:11; 3:1, 4). The city was founded in Seleucid times (third century B.C.) and Greek was as widely used as the native dialect. The Lydian kings revered the Greek gods, were benefactors of Hellenic sanctuaries, and consulted the oracle at Delphi.

"In the sixth century B.C. the Lydians controlled most of the coast of Asia Minor and the islands offshore. Its wealth, especially that of Croesus, was legendary. The influence of Lydian dress, turbans and soft leather boots, and musical innovations based on the seven-stringed lyre could be seen in Athens at the end of the sixth century. However, Croesus challenged the might of the Persian Empire and was defeated. Sardis was made the center of the regional satrapy.

"In Roman times Sardis was the center of the imperial cult in the region. The cult was administered by a provincial council. See also Revelation to John, the."

[Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 907.]

message. It is in the content of each sub-form where the distinctives surface.

These include

1) **Adscriptio (v. 1a)** with the command to write:

Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

2) **Τάδε λέγει with the formula picture of Christ taken from chapter one** (v. 1b): Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας·

3) **οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα** (v. 1c) which introduces the **Narratio** (vv. 1c-2) followed by the **Expositio** (vv. 3-4).

4) **The victory formula** (v. 5): Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ.

^{3.1} And

86 to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

87 These things says the One possessing the seven Spirits of God
and
the seven stars:

88 I know your works
that you have a name
that you live
and
you are dead.

89 ^{3.2} Become alert,
and
90 strengthen what remains
which is about to die

For
91 I have not found your works
complete
before my God.

^{3.3} Therefore
92 remember
how you received and heard
and
93 keep (it)
and
94 repent.

Therefore
if you do not wake up,
95 I will come
like a thief,
and
96 you will absolutely not know
what hour I will come
against you.

5) **The Hearing command** (v. 6): Ὁ ἔχων οὐς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Although the pattern is reproduced, the content is altered in order to fit the individual situation of the Christian community at Sardis.

Literary Setting: This message comes as the fifth one in the series of the seven. The sequencing of this message is based primarily on geography as is illustrated in the map to the right.



Literary Structure: The diagram below highlights the internal connection of the core ideas within the passage. This, along with the literary patterns, forms the basis for the exegesis of the passage.

3.4
 97 But
you have a few names
 in Sardis
 that have not stained their clothes,
 and
 98 **they will walk**
 with me,
 in white
 because they are worthy.

3.5
 99 **The one overcoming will so be clothed**
 in white garments
 and
 100 **I will not ever blot out his name**
 from the book of life
 and
 101 **I will confess his name**
 before My Father
 and
 before His angels.

3.6
 102 The one having an ear
let him hear
 what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure:

The Adscriptio (#86) follows the standard form. It is followed by the Τάδε λέγει section (#87) with the portrait of Christ in chapter one supplying the title that is the verb subject.

The οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα (#88) introduces first the narratio (#s 88 - 91) and then the dispositio (#s 92- 98). This is followed by the victory formula (#s 99-101), and the hearing command (#102).

The thought progression remains the same from the previous letters. Instructions are given to John to write down the words supplied by Christ. This begins with an affirmation that Christ fully understands the situation at Sardis (#s 87-91). On that basis demands are made with warning in the Dispositio (#s 92-98). The message ends first with the promise of victory (#s 99-101) and then the command to hear (#102).

Exegesis of the Text:

The most natural outline of the text for exegetical purposes comes from the above rhetorical analysis. It will serve as the organizing foundation of our exegesis of the passage.

A. Command to write, v. 1a

Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψων·
 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

This message is directed to the Christian community in the ancient city of Sardis.⁷ Its famous history as

⁷A city in Asia Minor located some 100 kms (38°28'N; 28°03'E) inland from Smyrna and Ephesus, most famous in antiquity as the capital of the Lydian empire (ca. 680–ca. 547 b.c.) and for the legendary king Croesus (ca. 560–ca. 547 b.c.). Following

the capital of the Lydian empire centuries before the beginning of the Christian era produced a sense of pride and elitism that combined with its enormous wealth with the consequence of generating an atmosphere of complacency and toleration that proved deadly to the church in the city. More moderate estimates



Melito of Sardis

of population place the number of residents between 60,000 and 100,000 people.⁸ The later history of Christianity in the city begins with the well known Melito who served as spiritual leader in the city during the second century (165-175 AD).⁹ After Constantine in the 300s

the Lydian empire, the city served in turn as the seat of a Persian satrap, as an administrative center for the Seleucids, and as a leading city of the Roman province of Asia. Its only explicit reference in the Bible is in the book of Revelation (Rev 1:11; 3:1, 4).” [The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary, SV. “Sardis.”]

⁸“While earlier over-generous estimates put the population of Sardis at ca. 200,000 (D. Magie, *Roman Rule* 1:585), a more realistic estimate is probably somewhere between 60,000 and 100,000.” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 219]

⁹“A well-known bishop of Sardis in the 2d century is Melito, who substantiates accounts of the persecution of Christians recorded in a letter from Antoninus Pius to the council of Asia in a.d. 161 (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 4.13. 1–8). A prolific writer, Melito produced tracts, treatises, and homilies, of which the *Homily on the Passion* is the only one to survive almost in its entirety (Kraabel

church buildings began to be constructed in the city, a major one on the ruins of the temple to Artemis.¹⁰ Thus from every indication Christianity continued to make gains from the end of the first century onward.

B. Situation of the church, vv. 1b-4

1b Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας· οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ. 2 γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἐμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὕρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. 3 μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτῃς, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποῖαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. 4 ἀλλ' ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

1b I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. 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 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας, these things says He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars (v. 1b): With the standard introduction of authority Christ begins to speak by giving His title. The tone is authoritative and imperial.

The two elements used here come from

1:20. τὸ μυστήριον τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀστέρων οὐς εἶδες ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας τὰς χρυσαῖς· οἱ ἑπτὰ

1971:76–85; Bonner 1940). Melito was a Quartodeciman, i.e., he celebrated Easter on the same day as Jews celebrated Passover, on whatever day of the week Passover fell. In spite of this ‘Judaizing’ practice, later pronounced a heresy by the Church, Melito attacked the Jews vigorously as being responsible for the death of Christ; almost a third of the text of the *Homily on the Passion* is preoccupied with the condemnation of ‘Israel.’ Yet Melito was faced not only with a prosperous and large Jewish community in the city, but also by other Christian sects and pagan survivals; it is in this context of the struggle for adherents that his outbursts may be explained.” [The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary, SV. “Sardis.”]

¹⁰“Churches began to be constructed as the Christianization of the city gathered pace following the conversion of Constantine. In the middle years of the 4th century, a large basilican complex was built outside the city walls to the W, and a small chapel was constructed against the SE corner of the Temple of Artemis before a.d. 400. The latter was evidently thought of as hallowing the sanctuary of Artemis and providing a chapel for the large cemetery nearby (Hanfmann et al. 1983:195). The remains of a huge domed basilican structure, unexcavated, lie to the E of the gymnasium-synagogue complex; this is thought to be of Justinianic date and to have been the cathedral of the city.” [The Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary, SV. “Sardis.”]

ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαί αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσίν.

As for the mystery of **the seven stars** that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: **the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches**, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

1:4b. χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος καὶ **ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ**

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and **from the seven spirits who are before his throne**,

One interpretive issue here is whether two distinct entities are intended or whether two ways of referring to one entity is the point of this double expression.¹¹ Some indication seems to point to a ‘two sides of the same coin’ perspective, but the evidence is not substantial. Christ as the authority figure speaking here to the church possesses control over the churches and also is linked to the Spirit of God in powerful connection. Consequently His words take on a level of authority that the church dare not neglect or ignore. The appropriateness of this image of the risen Christ to the message will become clearer with the exegesis of that message.

Narratio:

οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ (v. 1c): The initial affirmation of Christ knowing exactly what the church at Sardis is doing comes at the same point in the message as does this identical phrase in all seven messages. But the defined content of what Christ knows is spelled out in greater detail in the ὅτι-clause that stands in apposition to σου τὰ ἔργα.

The focus of His knowledge is two fold. The church is known in Christian circles as being an ‘alive congregation’ (ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς). But in actuality it is spiritually lifeless (καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ). Exactly what Christ means by this second accusation is spelled out further in subsequent statements.¹² This is a serious charge against

¹¹“Thus says the one who has the seven spirits of God, namely the seven stars.’ Here καί, ‘namely,’ can be understood exegetically, since the seven spirits of God constitute a heavenly reality, while the seven stars are a symbol of a heavenly reality. Thus the seven stars are angels, just as the seven spirits are angels (see Comment on 1:4). The ‘seven spirits which are before the throne’ were mentioned in the epistolary prescript in 1:4. These seven angels are probably understood by John as identical with the seven archangels who stand in the presence of God (see 8:2). The seven stars have already been mentioned in 1:16, where they are seen by John in the right hand of the exalted Jesus, and in 1:20, where they are identified as “the angels of the seven churches.” Thus the seven spirits of God are indirectly identified by John as the angels of the seven churches (a possibility mentioned by Andreas of Caesarea on Rev 3:1; Schmid, Studien 1/1, 36). The mention of the seven stars is an intentional allusion to 1:16.” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a, Revelation 1-5, p. 219]

¹²1) τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἐμελλον ἀποθανεῖν (v. 2), **the remaining things**

the congregation.

The picture is of a church with a good reputation in larger Christian circles, but with a reputation not reflecting what was the actual spiritual condition present in the life of the church. Had you asked Christians at Ephesus about the church at Sardis, they would have praised the church is doing well. The same image was present among the other churches.

But the perception of Christ was radically different! His saw lack of life rather than life present at Sardis. What was the basis for this negative critique? The following assessments and warnings provide some insight into the deficiencies at Sardis.

γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, *Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death* (v. 2a): The first two emphases call for a spiritual inventory to occur among the church members. How these ideas are set up is both fascinating and puzzling to modern commentators. The present paraphrastic imperative construction γίνου γρηγορῶν stresses ongoing responsibility, while the Aorist imperative στήρισον stresses punctiliar completed action.¹³ The second person singular spelling of both verbs issues the commands to τῷ ἀγγέλῳ in v. 1 as representing the entire body of believers in the city.

Very crucial in this mixture is what τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν refers to in this context. Normally the neuter plural is taken to refer to aspects of the Christian faith, namely the level of commitment to Christ, that have weakened to a point of nearly passing away. A very real alternative meaning is that this refers to the remaining folks in the church.¹⁴ If so, then the

at the point of death.

2) οὐ γὰρ εὑρήκᾳ σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. (v. 3), *I have not found your works complete before my God.*

3) μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει (v. 3), *remember then how you received and heard, and obey.*

¹³In the background mostly likely stands an interesting history of the city of Sardis. “Some have speculated that this injunction to be vigilant, together with the threat of an unexpected day of reckoning in v 3b, reflects the Croesus tradition (Ramsay, *Letters*, 357–59; Hemer, *Letters*, 131–33). After an initial battle with Cyrus, Croesus withdrew to the supposedly impregnable citadel at Sardis, not suspecting that Cyrus would march against Sardis (Herodotus 1.76–77). Cyrus, however, marched to Sardis quickly and unobserved (1.79). Sardis was captured after a two-week siege (Herodotus 1.76–84). The moral lessons derived from this series of events (one must avoid pride, arrogance, and over-confidence and be prepared for unexpected reversals of fortune) became a topos for later historians and moralists (Hemer, *NTS* 19 [1972–73] 94–97).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 220].

¹⁴“The neut. pl. phrase τὰ λοιπὰ refers here to people rather than things (i.e., the assumption that neut. adjs indicate only non-living things is incorrect; cf. 1 Cor 1:27–28; Heb 7:7; Demosthenes, *Or* 8.41); see 2:24, where τοῖς λοιποῖς can be masc. or neut. and is similarly following by a defining relative clause (BDR § 138.1; Mussies, *Morphology*, 124; Delebecque, 172).” [*Word Bib-*

charge to the church is to address the weakened faith of those in the church who are seriously spiritually deficient. In either case, serious issues of failed Christian commitment was calling into question the salvation of such individuals.¹⁵

What is then called for is for the church to both wake up to these dangers and also to stay awake to them. Constant vigilance is absolutely essential. Then within such a framework of alertness to what is developing, the church must do all that is possible to correct these deficiencies, whether generally within the congregation or else focused in a small percentage of the congregation.

οὐ γὰρ εὑρήκᾳ σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου (v. 2b): This causal clause provides both the basis and the motivation to take action. Clearly the language used here is judicial and implies divine judgment, especially at the last day. The perfect tense verb εὑρήκᾳ stresses an ongoing evaluation that has led to the conclusion of σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα. That is, their initial commitment and enthusiasm for Christ has grown lethargic and they have not followed through on it.¹⁶ Evidently the social pressures of the city led to a compromising of that commitment so that these believers were not living out their Christian faith, especially in ways that presented the Gospel to their pagan neighbors.

That indictment has a very modern ring to it, doesn't it?

Dipositio:

μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον (v. 3a): The conjunction οὖν

lical Commentary, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 217].

¹⁵“Possibly these professing Christians are in danger of losing their salvation, to which they are barely hanging on. However, it is preferable to see them as analogous to the people ‘who say they are Jews, and are not, but lie’ (3:9; cf. 2:9). These false Jews prove they are not genuine, faithful Jews by their ungodly lifestyle (e.g., by persecuting the church). Likewise the so-called Christians of Sardis are living in such a way as to call into question whether or not they possess true, living faith in Christ. Does the name Christian genuinely apply to them? The church in Ephesus was in the very same danger (see above on 2:4).” [*The New International Greek Testament Commentary, The Book of Revelation*, p. 274]

¹⁶“Certainly the language of this phrase is based on the juridical metaphor of standing in the presence of God and having one's works finally evaluated (cf. a similar metaphor in 3:5). Here εὑρίσκειν is based on juridical language, i.e., ‘finding’ someone guilty or innocent, frequently in the passive voice (Sir 44:17, 20; Theod Dan 5:27; Acts 5:39; 23:9; 1 Cor 15:15; 2 Cor 5:3; 1 Pet 1:7; 2 Pet 3:14; cf. Rev 2:2: ‘you found them [i.e., the so-called apostles] false,’ and Theod Dan 5:27: θεκελ, ἐστάθη ἐν ζυγῷ καὶ εὐρέθη ὑστεροῦσα, ‘Thekel, it was weighed in a scale and was found wanting’).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 221].

picks up on perceived implications from what Christ has just stated. Even though some admonitions have been inserted into the Narratio section (γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον), now the thrust shifts to three demands made upon the entire church in rapid succession: μνημόνευε...καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον (*remember, keep, and repent*). The first two are present tense imperatives signaling ongoing responsibility, but the third one is an Aorist imperative calling for a decisive action of repentance. The sequence of these three commands is somewhat challenging, especially the second and third ones which we would logically expect in reverse order (repent ==> keep). But this is a western logical expectation that falsely assumes that a first century mind works like a modern western mind.

First, the church (note 2nd singular commands) must get into a ‘remembering mode.’ But remembering what? πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας. Usually this is translated as “*what you received and heard.*” But the interrogative adverb πῶς is manner and not information oriented.¹⁷ What Christ demanded that the folks remember was not just that they made a commitment to Christ in their conversion. But equally important was to remember all the circumstances and emotions connected to the making of that commitment. This idea is very similar to the recapturing of the ‘first love’ by the Ephesians (cf. 2:4-5).

Second, the church was not just to recalled those beginning days of Christian commitment, but they also were to obey it. There needed to be the institution of ongoing obedience to that professed commitment: τήρει. Professed commitment without follow through is no conversion! Consistency of commitment is what matters to Christ.

Third, how could the church do this? It would not be possible without a decisive action of repentance: μετανόησον. The emphasis of this verb is a turning around of one’s mind and thinking. That is, the church needed to get serious about genuine commitment to Christ that is lived out consistently day by day.

ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσης, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποίαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ (v. 3b): Again we encounter the co-ordinate inferential conjunction οὖν that makes clear perceived implications from the preceding statements.

Here we see Christ issuing a stern warning to the church. It is couched on the possible situation of ἐὰν μὴ γρηγορήσης, *if you do not become alert*. The third class conditional protasis here assumes that failure to

¹⁷“Interrog. reference to manner or way, in what way? how?” [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Third Edition, p. 901]

The idea of ‘what’ was expressed in ancient Greek by one of the following: τί, ὅ τι, ὅ. In indirect questions such as here the most appropriate form would have been τί.

heed the demand to become watchful is possible, but it is not assumed that the church will ignore Christ’s demand. What He presents is the possible scenario of them not waking up to what was happening. The use of γρηγορήσης and not τηρήσης as might be expected focuses attention on the broader responsibility put forth in γίνου γρηγορῶν (v. 2). Obedience must grow out of a heightened awareness of the larger picture of spiritual danger.

The threat of Christ is centered in ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, *I will come like a thief*. The threat or the promise of Christ’s coming is frequent in these seven letters (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11), and can be either a promise (2:25; 3:11) or a warning (2:5, 16; 3:3). A close parallel exists in Rev. 16:15 in an allusion to the Parousia of Christ.¹⁸ But here the emphasis is not on the end of times return of Christ, but instead on a temporal judgment against the church for failure to heed His warning.¹⁹ The image of a thief

¹⁸Rev. 16:15. Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης. μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῆ καὶ βλέψωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ.

(“*See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, a not going about naked and exposed to shame.*”)

¹⁹“The motif of the coming of Christ occurs several times in the proclamations to the seven churches (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11), using two synonymous verbs for coming, ἔρχεσθαι and ἦκειν. However, there appear to be two types of ‘coming’ involved, a coming in judgment, which has negative connotations (2:5, 16; 3:3), which is apparently distinct from the return of Christ, which has positive connotations (2:25; 3:11). This saying has a close parallel in Rev 16:15: Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης, ‘Behold I come as a thief,’ and indicates that the metaphor of an unexpected nocturnal break-in by a robber, used of the Parousia or second coming of Christ, could be applied to Christ’s ‘coming’ in other ways. In 1 Thess 5:2, the unexpectedness of the coming of the Day of the Lord is compared to the unexpected arrival of a thief: ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτης ἐν νυκτὶ οὕτως ἔρχεται, ‘the Day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night.’ The same phrase occurs in 2 Pet 3:10: ἦξει δὲ ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτης, ‘But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief.’ In both these passages, which share a common tradition (i.e., the latter is presumably dependent on the former), the Day of the Lord, not Christ, is compared to the unexpected coming of a burglar. In the parable of the Watchful Householder from Q (Matt 24:42–44 = Luke 12:39–40; see Stroker, Extracanonial, 111–12), the necessity of the householder to be watchful in case a thief comes unexpectedly is interpreted as an exhortation to watchfulness for the unexpected coming of the Son of Man. The reference to the Son of Man is widely (and correctly) regarded as a secondary addition to the tradition (Lindars, *Son of Man*, 97–98; Jeremias, *Parables*, 48–49; Fitzmyer, *Luke* 2:985; Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q* 149; Koester, *Gospels*, 153; Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 250–51); i.e., it is probable that an earlier version of Q lacked the application of the unexpected coming of the thief with the unexpected Parousia of the Son of Man. In Gos. Thom. 21, no christological application is found (Jeremias, *Parables*, 49): ‘Therefore I say: If the lord of the house knows that the thief is coming, he will stay awake before he comes and will not let him dig through into his house of his kingdom to carry away his goods.’ A parallel saying occurs in Gos.

is heightened further with καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποίαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. The church absolutely could not predict when Christ would take judgment action against the church, and thus do a ‘quick fix’ just before He came. In light of such uncertainty, the best thing was for it to take His demands to correct the problem immediately rather than later. Again, in the background is the past history of the city with being over confident in its ability to ward off enemy attacks. The church must not fall into the same disaster that the city had many years before.

ἀλλ’ ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν (v. 4a): In sharp contrast to some members being so spiritually sick that their salvation was in question, others in the church receive a strong commendation from Christ. The phrase ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν alludes to these members of the church at Sardis.

These folks had not followed the other path by ‘soiling their garments’: ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν. This OT terminology of dirty clothes from texts such as Zech. 3:1-5 alludes to one’s moral and spiritual condition.²⁰ See also Rev. 7:13-14 and 22:14. The concept of defiling one’s garments, ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, has implications of not only immoral compromises with paganism but religious defilement by participation in pagan temples.²¹

Thom. 103: ‘Blessed is the man who knows in which part of the night the robbers will come, so that he will rise and collect his [] and gird up his loins before they come in.’ A comparison of these texts indicates the hermeneutical interest in interpreting the metaphors used in the sayings of Jesus and makes it probable that the identification of the thief with the Son of Man (Matt 18:44; Luke 12:40) is a later development of the Q tradition, which has in turn influenced the formulation of the ‘I’ sayings in Rev 3:3 and 16:15, though the insertion of the Son of Man saying was unknown to our author.” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a, Revelation 1-5, p. 222].

²⁰“Here ‘clothes’ is a metaphor for an individual’s moral and spiritual condition (see also 7:13–14; 22:14). In Zech 3:1–5, Zechariah is depicted as wearing dirty clothes while standing before the angel of the Lord, a metaphor for the sins of both the priest and the people (the removal of these dirty clothes explicitly represents the removal of guilt; cf. Zech 3:4). In *1 Apoc. Jas.* 28.16–17, James says to Jesus, referring to his teflon-like clothing (tr. J. M. Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 263): ‘You walked in mud, and your garments were not soiled.’ Again in *Great Pow.* 44.25–26, which is part of an apocalyptic scenario, it is said of the archon of the west that ‘the defilement of his garments is great’; i.e., he is a wicked person. Similarly, *Teach. Silv.* 105.13–16 (tr. J. M. Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 389) exhorts the reader to ‘strip off the old garment of fornication’.” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a, Revelation 1-5, p. 222].

²¹“As already mentioned in regard to the letters to Pergamum and Thyatira, these Christians were probably succumbing to the temptation not only of maintaining a low profile as Christians in such contexts, but also of paying token acknowledgment to the pagan gods (whether to Caesar or the patron gods of the guilds). As also in the other churches, the motive for this was probably fear of persecution, especially economic ostracism.” [New International

καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοι εἰσιν (v. 4b): Christ’s promise to these folks ‘wearing clean clothes’ is that they will “walk with me.” The image is that of close fellowship with Christ, most likely in this life as well as in the life to come.²² The reason is ὅτι ἄξιοι εἰσιν, **because they are worthy**. Although elsewhere in Revelation ‘worthiness’ pertains only to God or Christ (cf. 4:11; 5:2, 4, 9, 12), elsewhere in the NT ἄξιος and cognates are found stressing a consistent commitment to Christ in obedience to His will (cf. Jhn. 12:35; 1 Jhn. 1:6-7; 2:6, 11).

C. Admonition and promise, vv. 5-6

5 Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ. 6 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. 6 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Victory Promise: Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ. Here the image of white garments is clearly eschatological: περιβαλεῖται. The adverb of manner οὕτως extends the previous mention of ἐν λευκοῖς (v. 4) to a future getting dressed for eternity. As with all the

Greek Testament Commentary, The Book of Revelation, p. 277.]

²²“The notion of ‘walking’ with the exalted Christ while wearing white garments means to enjoy a close relationship to him. The specific manner and place in which the author thought that this promise would be fulfilled is difficult to imagine. There is a parallel in Rev 14:4 that refers to the 144,000 following the Lamb wherever he goes, utilizing the language of discipleship. The verb περιπατεῖν is frequently used in the NT with the meaning ‘behave,’ and occasionally one finds the parallel expression περιπατεῖν ἀξίως, ‘to behave worthily,’ e.g., 1 Thess 2:12: περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ, ‘to behave in a manner worthy of God’ (see Col 1:10; Eph 4:1; Pol. Phil. 5:1). Elsewhere in Revelation the notion of ‘worthiness’ is attributed only to God or Christ. Normally the adjective ἄξιος is used in Revelation only of God or Christ, but in other early Christian literature ἄξιος and cognates occur more frequently, particularly in Ignatius (e.g., Eph. 4:1; Magn. 2:1; 12:1). Further, περιπατεῖν can be used as a synonym for ‘discipleship,’ as in John 8:12: ‘the one who follows [ἀκολουθῶν] me will not walk [περιπατήσει] in darkness but will have the light of life’ (see John 12:35; 1 John 1:6–7; 2:6, 11). The language of Rev 3:4 is very possibly influenced by Gen 5:22 and 6:9 (both P Document) where it is said of both Enoch and Noah that they ‘walked with God’ (which the LXX renders weakly by ‘pleased God,’ using the verb εὐαρεστέω), which similarly appears to mean that they enjoyed an unmediated relationship to God. Similarly, Abraham is commanded to ‘walk before’ God (Gen 17:1).” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52a, Revelation 1-5, p. 223].

other victory promises, Ὁ νικῶν refers to salvation as reflected in consistent commitment to Christ lived out in daily life. The term ἱματίοις λευκοῖς, *white garments*, can signify a range of ideas connected to purity and acceptability.²³ Here the image centers on being granted eternal life with God.

The second promise is καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς, *and I will not blot your name out of the book of life*. In the background here is both the Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions of a 'citizen registry' maintained in both cultures.²⁴ In the an-

²³“White garments symbolize a range of positive meanings that center on the concept of ritual and moral purity (see *Hermas Vis.* 4.3.5). Heavenly messengers are frequently described as wearing white garments (2 Macc 11:8; Matt 28:3 = Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; Rev 4:4; 19:14; *Hermas Vis.* 4.2.1; T. Levi 8:2; Lucian *Philops.* 25), and in Dan 7:9; 1 Enoch 14:20, God is described as wearing white (just as deities in the Greco-Roman world were thought to wear white). Priests in the ancient world often wore white (Exod 28:4; Lev 16:4; Jos. Ant. 11.327, 331; 20.216–18; J. W. 2.123, 137 [Essenes habitually wore white; see Hippolytus Ref. 9.19]; Lucian *Alex.* 11; Ps.-Lucian *De dea Syria* 42), as did worshipers who participated in sacrifices and processions (Acts John 38). By the first century a.d., the dead were buried in white in Judaism (see Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie* 1:550 n. 212; Ps.-Philo Bib. Ant. 64.6), a practice found in the Greco-Roman world (Plutarch *Quaest. Rom.* 26.270D–F), and perhaps based on this custom the notion developed that white garments will be awarded to the righteous after judgment as a heavenly reward (b. Šabb. 114a; Rev 6:11; 7:9, 13; *Hermas Sim.* 8.2.3; see Lucian *Peregr.* 40 [Peregrinus is seen wearing white garments after his suicide]). The term ‘garment’ was used as a metaphor for the physical body (2 Cor 5:2–4; Asc. Isa. 10.35), often implied with the use of ‘put off’ and ‘put on’ language (Col 2:11; 2 Pet 1:14; 4 Ezra 2:45) and perhaps by extension as a metaphor for a heavenly reward (Rev 3:4, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13; Asc. Isa. 8.14–15; 9.24–26; 10.40) and a symbol of salvation or immortality (Acts of Paul 38; Apoc. Thom. [NTA 2:802], which speaks of the garment of eternal life, i.e., the garment that is eternal life; 5 Ezra 2:39; Dial. Sav. 143.11–15). In the story of the Transfiguration, Jesus’ garments suddenly become bright white (Mark 9:2 = Matt 17:2 = Luke 9:29).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 223].

²⁴“This may be an allusion to Exod 32:32 (where Moses intercedes for Israel): ‘But now if you will forgive their sin—and if not, blot me out of the book which you have written.’ The motif of a Book of Life in which the names of the saved are written and the motif of the erasure of a person’s name from such a Book are extremely widespread in the OT and early Judaism, sometimes used together and sometimes separately. The possibility of having one’s name erased from the Book of Life suggests that fidelity to God rather than any type of predestinarian system is the reason for having one’s name inscribed in the Book of Life in the first place (see Rev 17:8). The traditional character of this pronouncement in Rev 3:5 is evident in the close parallel to vv 5a and 5b in Odes Sol. 9:11, where the two motifs of conquering and of having one’s name inscribed in a heavenly book are combined in a positive formulation (tr. Charlesworth, OTP): ‘Put on the crown in the true covenant of the Lord, And all those who have conquered will be inscribed in His book.’ In Judaism and early Christianity, the primary setting of the Book of Life motif was the judgment scene in which

cient world three types of ‘heavenly books’ surface in the literature.²⁵ In Rev. 20:12, the Books of Deeds and the Book of Life²⁶ are distinguished from one another. The promise of Christ here is that there is no possible

God is seated upon his throne surrounded by heavenly courtiers (Dan 7:9–10; Rev 20:12–15; 1 Enoch 47:3; 90:20). The origin of this metaphor is certainly that of the ancient Near Eastern royal court, where records were made available to the king for dispensing justice (Ezra 4:15; Esth 6:1), though the idea itself goes back to Sumerian and Akkadian literature (Paul, *JANESCU* 5 [1973] 345–53).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 224].

²⁵“There is a small ‘library’ of at least three types of heavenly books referred to in the OT and in early Jewish and early Christian literature:

“(1) The Book of Life functioned as a heavenly record of those who were considered righteous or worthy (1 Enoch 108:3; Jub. 30:22; T. Jacob 7:27–28; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27; 1 Clem 53:4 [quotation of Exod 32:32]; *Hermas Vis.* 1.3.2; Man. 8.6; Sim. 2.9; Apoc. Pet. 17 [Hennecke-Schneemelcher, NTA 2:683]; Clementine Hom. 9.22; Gos. Truth 21.3–5; Koep, *Himmliche Buch*, 68–89; H. Balz, “βιβλίον,” *EWNT* 1:512–24).

“(2) The Book of Deeds serves as a record of the good and bad deeds a person had performed (1 Enoch 89:61–64; 90:17; 104:7; 108:7; 2 Enoch 19:3–5 [Rec. J and A]; 53:2 [Rec. J and A]; Jub. 5:12–13; 23:30–32; 30:20–23; 32:21–22; Asc. Isa. 9.21–23; see Koep, *Himmliche Buch*, 46–68). In Judaism this is often conceived of as two books, one for the deeds of the righteous and the other for the deeds of the wicked (Jub. 30:22; 36:10; b. Ta’an 11a; Lev. Rab. 26 [on 21:1]; Gen. Rab. 81 [on 35:1]).

“(3) The Book of Destiny, or the ‘heavenly tablets,’ records the history of the world (4Q180= 4QAgnes of Creation frag. 1, line 3) and/or the destinies of people before they are born (Ps 56:8; 139:16; Jub. 5:12–19; 16:9; 23:32; 1 Enoch 81:2; 93:1–3; 106:19; 107:1; 2 Enoch 22:12 [Rec J and A]; 53:2 [Rec. J]; T. Asher 2:10; 7:5; T. Levi 5:4; see the Prayer of Joseph [Origen Comm in Gen.; PG XII.73B]: ‘I have read in the heavenly tablets everything that will come to pass upon you and your sons’; 4Q537= 4QApocryphon of Jacob frag. 1, lines 3–4 [tr. García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 265]: ‘[And I took the tablets and read. There were written all my privations] and all my troubles and all that was to happen to me.’). Access to this book signifies a knowledge of hidden teaching or future events (*Hermas Vis.* 1.3.3–4; Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 6.38).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 225].

²⁶“The motif of having one’s name erased from, or blotted out of, the Book of Life is a metaphor for judgment (Exod 32:32–33; Ps 69:27–28; 1 Enoch 108:3; Jub. 30:22), based on the notion of expulsion or disenfranchisement from the record of citizenship. Originally, however, to be blotted out of the Book of Life meant ‘to die’ (Exod 32:32–33; Ps 69:27–28; Isa 4:3). The phrase ‘Book of Life’ occurs six times in Revelation in two forms: (1) ἡ βίβλος τῆς ζωῆς, ‘the book of life,’ occurs twice in Revelation (3:5; 20:15 [var. lect. τὸ βιβλίον Byzantine]), and (2) a synonymous phrase, τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς, ‘the book of life,’ using the faded diminutive τὸ βιβλίον, is found four times in Revelation (13:8 [var. lect. βίβλος; see Notes on 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27 [var. lect. ἡ βίβλος fam 16112050 Andreas h-2302 Andreas 1]). The textual evidence suggests that the author used both forms interchangeably (for the special problems in Rev 10, see Notes on 10:2, 8, 9, 10).” [*Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 52a, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 225].

way that He will remove Ὁ νικῶν from this book of life.

The third promise to Ὁ νικῶν is καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. This is the only use of ὁμολογήσω in Revelation, and it reflects an earlier Jesus tradition found in Luke 12:8 and Matthew 10:32.

Luke 12:8-9. 8 Λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν, πᾶς ὃς ἂν ὁμολογήσῃ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, **καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁμολογήσει ἐν αὐτῷ ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ θεοῦ.** 9 ὁ δὲ ἀρνησάμενός με ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρνηθήσεται ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ θεοῦ.

8 “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, **the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God;** 9 but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.

Matthew 10:32-33. 32 Πᾶς οὖν ὅστις ὁμολογήσῃ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, **ὁμολογήσω κἀγὼ ἐν αὐτῷ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν [τοῖς] οὐρανοῖς.** 33 ὅστις δ’ ἂν ἀρνήσῃταί με ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀρνήσομαι κἀγὼ αὐτὸν ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν [τοῖς] οὐρανοῖς.

32 “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, **I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven;** 33 but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Clearly John feels the liberty to reshape the tradition for his own purposes, but does draw from that teaching of Jesus.

The eschatological nature of this confession by Christ is obvious from the context. In final judgment, Ὁ νικῶν will be clothed with white garments, affirmed to have his name in the Book of Life, and be confessed to the Heavenly Father. All of these stand as assurances of eternal life.

Hearing Command: Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Thus the message ends in the typical manner of the others. Every person in all of the seven churches needs to hear and heed what the Holy Spirit is trying to say through this message to the church at Sardis.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

Is there a lesson for us today in this message? Clearly the answer is yes. Christ controls the life and destiny of every congregation. He stands between us and the ministry of the Holy Spirit enabling the Spirit’s presence and ministry to His churches.

We need to be extremely cautious in measuring spiritual life in our church. We can have a reputation of being a really dynamic congregation in the eyes of other Christians, and even non Christians. But, at the same time we face the danger of being spiritually dead in Christ’s eyes. Measuring instruments such as emo-

tional excitement about church, attendance numbers etc. don’t really reveal anything about genuine spirituality in the congregation. What reflects the positive situation that Christ sees comes from fidelity to our initial commitment of surrender to Christ. Only a life lived out daily in surrender to Christ matters ultimately.

We face serious repercussions from Christ when we drift from this unconditional surrender to Him. He promises to come against us like a thief with no warning. No congregation wants Christ to ‘come against it’ for such action spells trouble and not blessing.

To Ὁ νικῶν comes the threefold eschatological promise of eternal life described as being dressed in white robes, having one’s name affirmed in the Book of Life, and being publicly confessed by Christ to the Father. Wow! That’s some promise! But additionally, comes Christ’s promise to walk with us daily as we are already dressed in white now by the quality of our obedience.

Sardis sends us a wonderful message of hope along with a warning to never grow lax in our commitment to our Lord.