

## **The Church in Sardis**

*Revelation 3:1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. 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. 4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. 5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. 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.”*

## **The City of Sardis**

More than six hundred years before this letter was written, Sardis had been the capital of the kingdom of Lydia, being one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. In addition, the strategic position it occupied had made it an active commercial city. To which must be added the enormous amounts of gold that were extracted from the nearby Pactolus River. However, at the time

of writing Apocalypse, of that glory of the past only the memory remained, since stagnation and decadence had taken hold of it. The contrast between what had been and what was could not be greater. It seems that the ease with which Sardis could enrich himself was the reason for his weakness.

Another interesting detail is that the city was built on a hill so steep that its defenses seemed impregnable, however, it was captured by Cyrus the Persian (549 BC) and by Antiochus (218 BC). Curiously, on both occasions this was possible because its inhabitants were surprised by their enemies as they were excessively confident in the resistance of their fortress. The fact that a city that seemed so powerful was so easily conquered had made it an object of ridicule.

3: 1 *"Write to the angel of the church in Sardis: He who has the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this:"*

*"The one who has the seven spirits of God."* As we will see later, the Lord tells the church in Sardis that he is dead (Rev 3: 1). Surely this is why the Lord presents himself as "the one who has the seven spirits of God." This expression describes the infinite spiritual resources that the Lord has, and that they were precisely those that this church needed to return to life. Isaiah 11: 2 *"And*

*the Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him; spirit of wisdom and understanding, spirit of counsel and power, spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jehovah.”*

2. *“And the seven stars”*.

Next he tells us that he also has "the seven stars", which as we remember, were the angels or messengers of the churches, probably a reference to their leaders (Rev 1:20). They also appear here under the control of Christ. We can say that both the Holy Spirit and the spiritual leaders of the church are in the hand of Christ and are channels of blessing for the church.

Christ rebukes the church from him.

### **Christ rebukes his church**

3: 1 *“I know your works, that you have a name that you live, and you are dead.”*

1. "I know your works." Again we are reminded that there is nothing that can remain hidden from the eyes of Christ.

Regarding this church, it is noteworthy that unlike others, here the Lord does not begin by saying anything good about her, in fact, he goes directly to make the most severe condemnation that we hear in these letters.

## 2. *"You have a name that you live on."*

The same thing happened to the church of Sardis as to the city: they lived on their memories of the past, of what they had been at some point in their history, but all that had been left behind and did not correspond to their present moment. Perhaps it was a church that enjoyed a good reputation in the midst of society, but that did not matter to the Lord. After all, the church does not exist to please men but to please God.

## 3. *"You're dead."*

How terrible! Having a reputation for being alive but may the Lord say: "You are dead!"

Perhaps for this reason the church in Sardis, unlike other churches in the area, had not suffered persecution like those in Smyrna or Pergamum. They were a perfect example of a "harmless" Christianity. They had accommodated themselves to the world and did not have to pay any price for their faith in Jesus Christ. Why should Satan bother persecuting a dead church? But a church that is alive and that preaches the Word of the Lord will always be under attack by the enemy.

## **A call to repentance**

3: 2-3 *"Be vigilant, and affirm the other things that are to die; because I have not found your works perfect before God.*

*Remember, then, what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. For if you do not watch, I will come upon you like a thief, and you will not know what time I will come upon you. "*

1. *"Be vigilant."*

Now Christ is addressing the faithful remnant of true Christians in Sardis who were in grave danger of extinction. The Lord begins with an exhortation to "be vigilant." This recommendation had a special meaning for the church in that city, because the city of Sardis had twice been captured precisely due to a lack of surveillance. Perhaps it happened to the church like its ancestors in Sardis, who felt safe trusting in the protection offered by its walls. And it is true that the believer is protected by better defenses than any city can raise, but this should not lead us to relaxation or carelessness in our spiritual life, but to be constantly warned, since temptation can appear in any time where we least expect it.

2. *"Affirm the other things that are to die."*

It seems that not everything was completely lost, there were still things that "were to die." But if the embers were not quickly fanned so that the flame would rise again, they would eventually go out. In that church there were some true believers, but even they were in danger in the midst of this suffocating environment.

In that situation they could not be indifferent or go with the flow. They should start by correctly evaluating the situation from the perspective that the Lord was giving them, then they would have to confront sin and error, and influence the community with their example and word.

It is interesting to note that the Lord does not command these faithful Christians to leave church and start a new work in another part of town. God left them there in order to call the remnant who had wandered back to faithfulness to the Lord.

3. *"Because I have not found your works perfect before God."* In Sardis the complaint of the Lord Jesus Christ to his church is because his works did not conform to God's criteria. They had not persevered in developing spiritually, they had grown cold and lost their enthusiasm for advancing in Christian maturity. This verse makes us see that Christ expects something concrete in the life of each of his children. He is looking for evidence of our loyalty and love for him. We must take this very seriously, because normally the believer has a tendency to focus on himself and expect God to help, support and comfort him in every circumstance of life, and we often forget that he is also waiting for proof from us to show our love, loyalty and service to him.

4. *“Remember, then, what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent”.*

The faithful remnant in Sardis were to "remember," "take into account," or "remember" what they had received and heard. That is, they needed to return to the truths of God's Word that they had heard and had led to their conversion. It was imperative that they "keep" it in their hearts and practice it in their lives.

5. *“Well, if you don't watch, I will come upon you like a thief and you will not know what time I will come upon you.”* Once again we have a call from the Lord to “watch”, something that as we have already pointed out, they would understand very well after what had happened in their history, when their enemies had literally come as thieves in the night and surprised them.

We also find a warning about the coming of the Lord: "I will come upon you." Surely we should not understand it as an allusion to the Second Coming of him, but as an anticipated coming in judgment on the church in Sardis. This coming could take place in different ways. We know that in the church at Corinth some who were living in disorder were sick and others had died (1 Cor 11:30). Therefore, we have here another of the great faults of this church: they were not waiting for the Second

Coming of Christ. Their life had become neglected and they were not looking forward to the glorious future with Christ.

### **A promise to the victors**

3: 4-5 “But you have a few people in Sardis who have not stained their garments; and they will walk with me in white garments, because they are worthy. He who overcomes will 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. ”

1. *"But you have a few people in Sardis who have not stained their garments."*

Although the church had a reputation for being alive, in reality only a small number of its members were. They were the faithful remnant. And this is a concept that is repeated over and over again in the Bible: Only eight people were saved in the flood; of the twelve spies that Moses sent to scout the land, only two came to possess it; Of the five thousand who ate the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes that Jesus did, only twelve stayed with him when the others left him.

This faithful remnant were the "who have not stained their garments." In the Old Testament, if someone touched a dead



body, the person was contaminated or stained. There are many ways to contaminate yourself with the "dead." Here we must understand it as a figure to express that they had become contaminated with the paganism of their culture and had gone astray following doctrines or practices that displeased the Lord. Let's not forget that it is easy to become spiritually contaminated when we enter into communion with the world, and this does not please the Lord.

2. *"And they will walk with me in white garments, because they are worthy."*

This faithful remnant "will walk with the Lord," suggesting intimate and personal fellowship with him. This really was the problem with this church: they had stopped walking with the Lord and this is what keeps us alive in our daily walk. Then he adds that they will have "white garments, because they are worthy." These white robes suggest the purity and holiness produced by justification of sins through the work of the Cross. These people are those whom the Lamb washed from his sins with his blood (Rev 1: 5) (Rev 7:14). On the other hand, this purity is necessary in order to be in the presence of God. We will need it to enter heaven, because the guests at the wedding of the Lamb are dressed in "fine linen, clean and shining" (Rev 19:

7-9). They are the garments required to enter the wedding feast of the king's son that the Lord recounted in (Mt 22: 1-14).

3. *"He who overcomes will be clothed in white garments."*

The Lord continues to speak of the faithful remnant, those true believers who were within the church at Sardis. He now describes them as "over-comers" and to them the Lord promises that He would clothe them in "white garments." Here we see more clearly what we said above; that these garments are given to us by the Lord and that we do not get them on our own merits.

Here the white robes represent the victory that the Lord gives to the believers together with him. When the Lord appears in this world to judge him, he will come surrounded by heavenly armies dressed in fine, white and clean linen to enjoy together with him his victory (Rev 19: 14-15).

4. *"And I will not erase his name from the book of life."*

The name of true believers is recorded in the "book of life" (Phil 4: 3) (Rev 13: 8) (Rev 17: 8) (Rev 20:12) (Rev 21:27). And in this verse it is guaranteed that the name of true believers will not be erased from the book of life. It is true that some see here the possibility of the loss of salvation, when what is really affirmed is the opposite. This "I will not erase" is equivalent to the "will

not come to condemnation" of (Jn 5:24). Nowhere in the bible do we find God writing the name of a new convert in the book of life. What we can see is that he already wrote the names.

5. *"And I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."*

And finally, a new promise from the Lord Jesus Christ that guaranteed the full acceptance of this faithful remnant before the Father and his angels. Christ is presented here as an Advocate who intercedes for believers. Matthew 18:10 *"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."*

### **An appeal to hear**

3:6 *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* Men are again called to heed what the Spirit says to the churches.