

# ***STUDIES IN REVELATION***

**TOPIC: The Messages to the Churches at  
Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea**

**SCRIPTURE: Revelation 3**

**MEMORY VERSE: Revelation 3:20**

**Lesson 4**

**Revelation 3**

**INTRODUCTION:** In this chapter we come to the last three churches that the Lord writes to in the book of Revelation. These churches were local, visible, independent churches that actually existed in John's day, but also represent the last three periods of local church history before the second coming of Christ.

## **I     THE CHURCH AT SARDIS - THE DEAD CHURCH     v 1-6**

- A.**     The Lord identifies Himself as being the One Who is sending this letter v 1 (Revelation 1:4, 16)  
          **SARDIS - “red ones” or “escaping ones”**  
          **ANGEL - “messenger” (the pastor of this church)**  
          The Lord knows the works of this church. They had “*a name*” (a good reputation) for being a going church, but they, in reality, were “*dead*.” They still continued the outward form of worship, maintaining a building and carrying out the functions of a church, but though they had plenty of outward activity, they had no spiritual activity. (I Timothy 5:6; Matthew 5:13)

**NOTE:**     Notice these things about Sardis:

- 1)**     Sardis lies about 30 miles south from Thyatira on the road to Philadelphia.
- 2)**     The city had a history of great tragedies and was known as the “*City of Death*.” It had suffered two disastrous invasions, one by Cyrus in 534 B.C. and another by Antiochus the Great in 214 B.C. Many were killed in an earthquake in Sardis in 17 A.D.
- 3)**     The patron goddess of Sardis was *Cybele-the mother of gods*. The worship of Cybele included speaking in gibberish or “*tongues*.” One of the priests of this goddess named Montanus brought this heathen practice into the false churches, and is today still practiced by the Pentecostal or Charismatic movement.
- 4)**     The church at Sardis represents the period of local church history from about 1000-1600 A.D. This was a bloody period of church history when many churches turned from the truth, but the faithful few (the

Albigensians, Waldensians, Anabaptists, etc) held fast for the faith and suffered violent persecution.

- B. The Lord instructs this church to do three things v 2-3
- 1) **watch** (v 2) - "*Be watchful*" - A church looking for the Lord's return will be a living church. (I Thessalonians 5:6)
  - 2) **work** (v 2) - "*works*" - This church had let many things slip away and almost die that they should have been doing. (Hebrews 2:1)
  - 3) **wait** (v 3) - "*hold fast*" - The Lord tells them to repent and recover the things they had let slip away, or He would come "*as a thief*." A thief comes to remove that which is of value and the Lord promises to do the same things to this church. The church at Sardis apparently never repented for today the Sardis church is gone. (Jude 3)
- C. The Lord encourages the faithful few in this church v 4-5  
There is a faithful few in every church, then as well as now. They are the ones who do most of the work. They are the ones who are there every service, separated from the world, and take part in every activity possible of the church. God promises a special reward to these faithful Christians in the church. (I John 5:4; Revelation 19:14; 20:4-6)
- D. The message to the church at Sardis is given so that other churches may learn from it also v 6

## II THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA - THE CHURCH WITH AN OPEN DOOR v 7-13

- A. It is the Lord who is sending this message to the church v 7  
**PHILADELPHIA** - "*brotherly love*"  
**ANGEL** - "*messenger*" (the pastor of the church)  
The only One that is holy and true is the Lord, and on Him alone rests the "*key (authority and power) of David*." (Isaiah 22:22; Luke 1:32-33; Revelation 15:4)

- NOTE:** Notice these things about Philadelphia:
- 1) The city was located about 28 miles southeast of Sardis.
  - 2) The city was built by Tiberius Caesar following the great earthquake of 17 A.D.
  - 3) The church at Philadelphia was probably started during the three years that Paul spent at Ephesus. (Acts 19:10)
  - 4) The church at Philadelphia represents a period of local church history from about 1600-1900 A.D. This was a period of evangelistic and missionary zeal. It was at the beginning of this period of church history that the King James Bible was published in 1611 A.D. This was a

period of great revival after a period of “*deadness*.” (Sardis) The next period of local church history is noted by a closed door. (Revelation 3:20) The new translations of the Bible begin to come out at the end of the Philadelphian age, and bring about the Laodicean period of church history.

- B. The Lord commends this church for their good works v 8**  
The Lord set before this church an “*open door*.” Open and shut doors represent opportunities for service. (I Corinthians 16:9; II Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3) The Lord mentions three reasons why He set before this church an open door:
- 1) “*thou hast a little strength*” (v 8) - This church was apparently small in number but had great potential. (Isaiah 40:29) *Little is much when God is in it!*
  - 2) “*hast kept my word*” (v 8) - This church was obedient to the Word of God. (John 14:21)
  - 3) “*hast not denied my name*” (v 8) - They were faithful to uphold Christ before the world. (Matthew 10:32-33)
- C. The Lord promises five things to this faithful church v 9-12**
- 1) The enemies of this church will be humiliated (v 9) - There were some false teachers claiming to be “*Jews*,” God’s favored people, who were really of the devil. (II Corinthians 11:13-15; Ephesians 5:25)
  - 2) This church is promised to be kept from the “*hour of temptation*.” (v 10) - The “*hour of temptation*” is the Tribulation Period from which the saved will be raptured to be with Christ before this period begins. (II Thessalonians 2:7-9; Matthew 24:37-44)
  - 3) The Lord promises this church “*Behold, I come quickly*.” (v 11) - It is possible to lose rewards that you have gained because of unfaithfulness. (II John 8; I Corinthians 3:11-15)
  - 4) The Lord promises to make them “*a pillar in the temple of my God*.” (v 12) - A pillar is an emblem of strength. (I Timothy 3:15; Galatians 2:9) Nations in ancient times erected pillars of columns in honor of their heroes. (II Samuel 18:18)
  - 5) The Lord promises to “*write upon him the name of my God*.” (v 12) - The writing of a name indicates ownership and identification. (Revelation 22:4)
- D. The message to the church at Philadelphia is written so that other churches may learn from it also v 13**

### III THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA - THE LUKEWARM CHURCH v 14-22

- A. The Lord identifies Himself as the One sending this letter v 14  
LAODICEA - "*rights of the people; the people rule*"  
ANGEL - "*messenger*" (the pastor of the church)  
The Lord Jesus truly is "*the Amen*" (the "*confirmation*" or "*so be it*") of God. (Revelation 1:8; Colossians 1:18)

NOTE: Notice these things about Laodicea:

- 1) The city was located about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia and 40 miles east of Ephesus.
  - 2) The city was built by Antiochus II of Syria who named it after his wife Laodike in around 250 B.C.
  - 3) Laodicea was a large banking and manufacturing center. They were famous the world over for their fine black wool and their medicines. They made a special eye powder from the thermal springs that were nearby the city, and a soothing ointment for the ears. All of these things brought much wealth into the city of Laodicea.
  - 4) The church at Laodicea was probably started during the three years that the Apostle Paul spent at Ephesus. (Acts 19:10) Epaphras had been very concerned for this church at Laodicea. (Colossians 4:12-13, 15)
  - 5) The church at Laodicea represents the period of local church history from about 1900 A.D. - Rapture.
- B. The Lord rebukes this church for being "*lukewarm*" v 15-17  
This church was working for the Lord, but their works were simply indifferent works. Outwardly, this church must have appeared strong and prosperous, but spiritually they were poor, miserable, wretched, blind and naked. A church with no enthusiasm, so urgency and no compassion is a sickening sight to the Lord. Just as lukewarm water can cause the stomach to become nauseated, so a lukewarm church makes the Lord sick to His stomach. **This is the church age we are living in today.** (II Timothy 4:3)
- C. The Lord warns this church of chastening to come unless they repent v 18-19 Notice that the Lord uses terms that these merchandise-minded people at Laodicea will understand:
- 1) "*buy of me gold tried in the fire*" (v 18) - The Laodiceans had gold and riches but needed the real, pure, divine righteousness that would stand every test. (Isaiah 55:1-3)
  - 2) "*white raiment*" (v 18) - The Laodiceans had their black wool but needed the Lord's "*white raiment.*" (Revelation 19:8)
  - 3) "*anoint thine eyes with eyesalve*" (v 18) - The Laodiceans had

their “*Phrygian eyepowder*” to sell but needed spiritual eyesight. (John 4:35)

- D. The Lord promises a reward to those members of this church who will open the door of fellowship to Him v 20-21  
This is not spoken by the Lord to the lost, though it may apply to them also, but here is spoken to the lukewarm church member who is already saved. Notice the Lord is on the outside of this church and they do not even know it! The church at Smyrna was the poor church that God called *rich* but this church is the rich church that God called *poor*. Though we live in a lukewarm age, we can still have revival and see great things done for God if we as individuals will open the door to the Lord.
- E. The message to the church at Laodicea is given for the other churches to learn from also v 22

**TEACHERS’ TIP:** MANY CHURCH MEMBERS ARE NEATLY STARCHED AND IRONED, BUT THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN WASHED.

**NEXT MEMORY VERSE:** Revelation 4:11

