

couldn't get at them inside their birdnest fortress. Cyrus army was easy prey down in the steep canyons for bombardment from above. So it was a stand-off with the Lydians at an advantage up high.

Then the story goes that one moon lit night a child, perhaps a shepherd boy, wound his way down among the rocks, a secret pathway, and then Cyrus army knew how to get in.

And one night, silently, the army went up and took Sardis - unexpectedly - "like a thief" in vs. 3. They were so secure up there, they didn't even post a watcher. This was in 549 B.C.

Antiochus the great did the very same thing in 195 B.C.

Sardis continued to decline and decay until when this letter was written, it was no longer an important city. It had a name that bespoke of a past glory, but that glory was gone.

In pax romana, (roman peace) it became a center for wool production and dyeing, much like Thyatira.

*Vs. 1 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:
He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this:*

The introduction: As in all of the letters, the introduction comes from chapter one. And like all of the introductions, the picture chosen speaks to the situation at the place.

The seven spirits of God is a reference to the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit. If the seven fold reference confuses you, have me send you the notes from our first study at the introduction. Chapter 1 Vs. 4.

The seven stars are the seven messengers. Seven ministers, pastors.

How does this introduction relate to Sardis. Think about it. What does every dead church NOT have, and every vibrant living church HAVE?

The Holy Spirit brings life. There is only deadness when a place is

devoid of the Spirit. And secondly, a godly leader. Churches that are alive have Godly leadership, and the presence of God's Spirit in their midst. Remove either one, and there is just deadness.

The Lord Jesus supplies both. The Lord Jesus supplies both. *He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this:*

There is NO commendation. Only this;

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

Sardis is like 1,000 churches we've driven by. (and/or been in) Stone quarry's. With a lit sign out front that says "First Wesleyan Church of Such and such"

I'm not picking on Wesleyan churches. It could be the First Presbyterian Church, The Episcopal church of So n So, The First Baptist church, and so on. But Wesleyan is a good example

There was a time in the 1760's - 90's when "Methodism" originally a derisive term for the ordered and holy life that the Wesley's led and taught, was on fire. They sought to waken and reform the church of England. They were all about Holy living and Spiritual fervor.

But 200 years later, they are for the most part, stone quarry's. Dead! The sign out front is clean and lit, but they're dead. Why?

You look at every movement of God, and time goes by, and . . why is it so hard to keep something living and vibrant.

All of the main line denominations in the USA; dead. Why? Why the insidious near impossible to avert, march to decline?

I think the answer, if we want it, is right here. I want you to want it! I'm doing my best to infect you with enthusiasm for LIFE! My problem is I've been inside the churches that are alive, and I can't settle for less. Most of my 30 years in Tonopah, I've had to settle.

Look at the progression in the last 3 churches we've covered. Pergamos. Thyatira. Sardis. I think if we can see the progression of what happened in those 3 windows, you'll see why the Spirit departs.

Pergamos. They compromised with sin. Just like Israel did with the moabite women. We're strong enough to handle it. It won't cause any difference. They let sin come in. Gonna watch it! Gonna keep a lid on it! We've got this under control. Besides.....who says it's wrong, anyways.....'that's your interpretation!'

You're way too stern brother. Way too cheerless. God doesn't intend for us to go around with mopey faces. Look how lively these moabite women have made things. Give and take, give and take, you've got to give a little brother. Lighten up! You'll smother the church and it'll die. You'll put the fire out. Let a little sin in! Oh, I've heard it all.

Thyatira. They tolerated sin. Just lived side by side with it. No renewal. No effort to separate themselves from the whore. Sin is a whore.

Sardis. Dead as a board. People going through the motions, but dead. No life. They're laying face up on a slab with silver dollars on top of their eyelids. Dead!

Where do you think the Spirit departed? I'll give you a clue. When Jesus warns Pergamos, He's still inside the church. When He warns Thyatira, He's outside.

I want to read some portions of Ezekiel 10 and 11. Nobody understands what Ezekiel saw, but I want you to see something there anyways. The scene is the temple in Jerusalem at the time of the captivity. Just listen because i'm skipping around quite a lot;

Ez. 10:1Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim something like a sapphire stone, in appearance resembling a throne, appeared above them. 2And He spoke to the man clothed in linen and said, "Enter between the whirling

wheels under the cherubim and fill your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim and scatter them over the city.” And he entered in my sight.

3Now the cherubim were standing on the right side of the temple when the man entered, and the cloud filled the inner court. 4Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD. 5Moreover, the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when He speaks.

15Then the cherubim rose up. They are the living beings that I saw by the river Chebar. 16Now when the cherubim moved, the wheels would go beside them; also when the cherubim lifted up their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels would not turn from beside them. 17When the cherubim stood still, the wheels would stand still; and when they rose up, the wheels would rise with them, for the spirit of the living beings was in them.

18Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. 19When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD’S house, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them.

Ch.11:22Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. 23The glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city. 24And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God to the exiles in Chaldea. So the vision that I had seen left me. 25Then I told the exiles all the things that the LORD had shown me.

What you just saw, mixed in that vision with a lot of other stuff we don't understand, the part we DO understand is the most sad and frightening vision in perhaps all of the Bible.

God's Glory, filled the temple, moved to the threshold, moved up over the east door, and hovered for a time, then moved up over the mount of Olives for a time, then left.

Ichabod. Remember the story of the Philistines capturing the ark of the covenant. A runner comes and tells Eli the priest that Hophni and Phinehas his two sons had died in the battle, and Eli fell backwards and broke his neck and died, and Phinehas' wife who was pregnant went into labor from the shock of it all and died giving birth, and the midwife named the child Ichabod. The glory has departed.

That's what happens to all of these movements.

Godly leadership and the Holy Spirit, and a group of people catch on fire! Oh God, let us be that group! And they burn brightly for Jesus for a time, and then, in their strength, (their strength, not God's) they compromise a little bit with sin, and then more time goes by and they don't deal with sin, they just tolerate it and live along side of it, and somewhere in there, the spirit departs. The glory departs.

What you see, over and over again is that this phenomenon is tied to Godly leadership. You'll see a great movement that burns brightly for 40 years, a lifespan of a Godly leader who won't dally with sin, and then when he's gone, sometimes the people are lucky and another good Godly leader takes his place, but often, the slipping begins.

IN 1922 L. E. Maxwell started a Bible Institute on the prairies in Canada. When I visited 50 years later he was still going strong. But by that time the world, and I dare say, even the church was poking fun at the womens dress code. Long dresses, nothing showy, down below the calf's, and no adornment was the order of the day at PBI in 1972.

The world had moved on. Even christians were saying this is legalism. But the legacy of that single Godly leader was missionaries all over the world who knew how to crucify themselves and burn brightly in the field for Jesus. He died in 1975.

MacArthur has burned brightly at Grace since 1969. 43 years. That church is solid! He is a rock.

Both of these men are like flint. Sin can brush up against them and all you get is sparks. Faithful. Flinty. Not popular. Derisive to the world. God's men.

But you go and study all of the main line denominations and they had men like that . . . and then they had committee's . . . and then they joined the World Council of Churches . . . and now they have women preaching and homosexual support groups.

John Calvin! Martin Luther! John Knox! John and Charles Wesley! Flinty stern men! Hard for the world to like . . . men. They burned bright. They left. Their congregations that bore their names compromised with the world. Sin came in. The glory departed. Death ensued.

But it gets worse. After death, the churches keep going. At least when we die, we get buried before the stink sets in. Not so churches with names on them.

They die, and then they keep on going, and going, and going like the dead energizer bunny, like phantoms in a scary movie, marching on and spreading their death.

What happens is sin comes in. Glory departs. Church dies. Then invariably, theology goes haywire. Liberal christianity. Devoid of the Spirit. Devoid of life. And then they start compromising theology. And it all starts with the "Book". Is it inspired? Really? What about the errors? What about higher criticism. We're smarter than all that now, eh? We know which parts are full of errors. Most of it is just a poem. Make of it what you will. And on and on it goes until you've de-mythologized it and there's about 74 verses left.

My daughter Tina's mother-in-law, Phil's mother, is senior pastor of a congregation in Oregon. They had split off from some other dead congregation and didn't have a building, and set their eyes on another

old dead stone quarry with 3 old members and sort of did a hostile takeover. Now she isn't the preaching pastor except when the lesbian lady who is the preaching pastor is gone that week, then Phil's mom preaches. And the sign out front says Presbyterian. Dead-as-a-board!

You don't know whether to laugh at that or cry. I think weeping is the better choice.

Anyways, now I'm preaching. Jesus shows up and writes them a letter and He says; "You're dead."

Vs. 2 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die;

This rarely happens. When the Spirit is gone, when the Glory has departed, it's rare for a church to return from its slumber. Still, that's the Lord's council. Wake up!

What happens at revival's. True revival's. People wake up. That's why you can google spiritual awakenings in America and come up with dates and places where revivals have brought churches back from the dead.

One recent story worth mentioning was at SBTS in Louisville Ky. I remember Ara Gheghusian, a presbyterian pastor sent to Tonopah to revive that denomination 20 years ago (failed) telling me that the Southern Baptists would indeed have women preachers. Not in Paul Ray's generation, he said, but perhaps the next one.

And he was nearly right! Except for a group of folks who cared about the SBTS which had fallen to the liberals (ya can't get no respect unless you're a liberal in the higher education fraternities) and installed one man, Al Mohler, as president of that institution. Al Mohler, almost singlehandedly, fired the men who wouldn't sign the school's original faith covenants. All the professors left. The school nearly closed. Then one by one, faithful men stepped up to fill the vacancies, and I have to say, I'm proud for the first time in my life, to be associated with the Southern Baptists. Bravo Southern Baptists.

They've got other problems, but at least their school is back! They woke up! (btw, for the mordant among you) it was after reading Al Mohler's book, *He is not Silent*, that I finally left the Southern Baptist church.

Vs. 2b for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.

That is just loaded. What happens almost immediately when the glory departs and the authority of the Word of God is challenged? Atonement is gone. Salvation is gone.

How does atonement for sin take place in the Catholic church? How about the liberal church? Nobody's even asking the question! There's a picture of Jesus in the stained glass window, but nobody remembers what it's about.

I think this statement in vs. 2 is a direct reference to atonement for sin. This is a salvific issue. Dead doctrine stops short of atoning grace. The whole church is full of corpses. Like the ship in Samuel Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Full of dead men rowing. Nobody's alive. No sin is removed. As MacArthur aptly puts it "this is the First Church of the Tares"

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

What was Mr. Obama's slogan this time? Forward! The world wants to go forward. Jesus says; go backwards.

Remember the doctrine received. Go *backwards* to that doctrine.

When Al Mohler was re-taking the SBTS, he didn't have to write a new covenant for the men to sign. The school had a perfectly excellent covenant from the 1800's. What he did was tell the professor's, if you can't sign that covenant, in good faith, you need to leave. He did just exactly what this verse says to do.

That works in almost every case we've talked about in mainline

denominations. If they would go back to what their founders believed and taught, with spiritual power, they'd be restored. Repent! Then do it.

So many times, that's the recipe for revival. Remember. Repent. Restore.

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.

This is true on every level possible. Individual dead Sardis type people, Sardis type churches, and on a grander scale, Sardis type denominations that the world sees as connected somehow to christianity, wake up.

There's a time to do this, and then there isn't. Once that time of grace is gone, there's nothing left but an angry God and hell.

This would have had special meaning for the folks of Sardis. Two times in their history, they were sleeping and the thief came in and plundered them. They were safe, secure, slumbering and Bam, the enemy was shaking them awake. Too late for action!

Don't plan on waking up tomorrow. The thief may come tonight.

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.

I've approached the church at Sardis as sub-christian. Their deeds fell short of salvation. The first church of the tares. No commendation at all.

But here's a little group that stands apart, distinct from the mainstream. Even at Sardis there's a little remnant. And the language is totally salvific.

*'have not soiled their garments; and,
will walk with Me in white,
and they are worthy.*

There is nothing but salvation here. Nothing but atonement. We all

start out with soiled garments. David famously says, *In sin did my mother conceive me*. We're born into that disease.

So these ones that Jesus is talking about have died in Him and been made alive together with Him. That's the only way He can say these things. Real Christians. Alive believers.

Usually we picture a nice field of wheat with a few tares. Here we have a giant field of tares with just a few plants of wheat.

Well, the obvious question is what's going to happen to that tiny bit of wheat when the farmer burns this worthless field. Does the wheat get burnt up along with the tares. Nobody can even see it's there.

5 'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments;

The promise to the overcomers is two-fold. First to those who are dead. If you'll wake up, and remember, and repent, and be restored, you can have white garments like these. Salvation is still possible. There's still time to be clothed in white, to be worthy, and to walk with the Saviour.

And then there's this play on words.

Everyone gets all worked up about names being erased from the book of life, and is that possible, and blah blah blah.

Go back to the second verse. You have a name, but you're dead. Sardis had a name but it was already erased. Sardis was dead. BUT, if you overcome, just the opposite is true.

*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.*

Sardis' name was about to be removed from its lampstand, but he who overcomes, will have a name that the Lord Jesus will confess to His father.

Mine! Jim is mine. He belongs to me. You angels. This is Jim. He's

mine. He belongs to Me.

Sardis name which wasn't a name, may get removed, but my name will never be removed. Even if I live in a place like Sardis. Even if the only place I have available to go to church is like Sardis. He says He will NOT erase my name.

1Jn. 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

Sardis was dead, but I'm alive, born of God. That makes me an overcomer.

6 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

We pass over this, again and again. I've been shouting at us to 'wake up'. This is the Spirit shouting at us. Wake up!

You've heard the old saying, "I wouldn't be caught dead." The thief is coming. Don't be caught dead.