

The Twitter Commentary on Revelation
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Revelation Chapter 3

Rev 3 (Introduction)–

The division between chapters 2 and 3 is an artificial one, the seven messages of 2-3 are one vision.

Rev 3:1-6 (Introduction)–

By the time Revelation was written, the glory of Sardis was largely a thing of the past. The history of Sardis was reflected in the condition of the church that gathered in that city.

Sardis in John's day was largely at the base of the acropolis.

Rev 3:1–

The faithful in Sardis are described in third person, so the message is addressed to the problematic mainstream.

The name of the city echos the precious stone, the sardius (Rev 4:3), promise of the church's mission to reflect the character of God.

The "seven stars" recalls the original vision of Jesus (Rev 1:16, see also 1:20 and 2:1).

The "works" that Jesus knows in this verse are detailed in the rest of the verse.

The NT often refers to sin in terms of death (Eph 2:1, 5; Rom 6:13; Luke 15:24; 1 Tim 5:6).

Rev 3:2–

In this verse both sleep and death are metaphors of the church's spiritual condition. Instead of continual, spiritual death Jesus advises them to become continually awake spiritually.

Sardis was captured by Cyrus because an "impregnable" section of wall was left unguarded.

"That which remains" is neuter and probably parallels "your works" in the latter part of the verse.

Most of Sardis is living in a way that calls into question whether or not they have a genuine faith in Christ.

Both Sardis and Thyatira are encouraged to hang on to what they have, but Sardis has even less than Thyatira.

Rev 3:3–

The church at Sardis knew the gospel intellectually but had forgotten its life-changing power.

“Received” comes before “heard” because the Sardians didn’t need to hear the gospel again, they needed to receive it with the heart.

The words “received” and “heard” together recall the gospel as defined by Paul (1 Cor 15:1-5) and John (1 John 1:1-3).

Sardis needs to continue to hold on to the gospel, but combine that with repentance.

The second half of this verse addresses the consequences of not following the advice of the first half.

The conjunction in the middle of this verse is often translated “but,” however, a better translation is “therefore.”

The “not watching” of Sardis means they were ignoring the teaching of Jesus (Matt 24:42-43; Mark 13:37; Luke 21:34-36).

The word for “thief” in this verse applies to the burglar, who steals silently when no one notices, not a “mugger.”

Those who do not repent will be absolutely clueless when Jesus’ return approaches.

Rev 3:4–

This verse is in strong contrast with the preceding three, it addresses a “faithful remnant” in Sardis.

The use of “names” for “people” here is a veiled reference to the Book of Life, the list of heavenly citizens (see verse 5).

The garments here represent the life and character of a person. A few in Sardis have kept themselves free from the prevailing corruption.

“Walking” is a metaphor for the entire life and behavior, “white” represents Christian faithfulness and the purity of the gospel.

To be “worthy” (Greek: *axios*) is to be deserving or qualified for a position or a reward.

Rev 3:5-6–

What those in Sardis most need to overcome is spiritual deadness and imperfection.

The Greek adverb *houtôs*, following “overcomes,” connects the following with the white dress of verse 4.

The word for “white” (Greek: *leukois*) is the same in verse 5 as in verse 4, but verse 5 adds the Greek word for garment.

To have one’s name removed from the Book of Life meant exclusion from the heavenly kingdom.

Those who overcome will absolutely not (Greek double negative) be erased from the Book of Life.

The Book of Life was reminiscent of ancient citizenship rolls. Names would be removed when a person died or left town.

The fact that a name can be erased from the Book of Life goes counter to the idea of “once saved always saved.”

Jesus knows the name of every of every believer who is saved, a sign of how important we are to Him.

“Before my Father” echos the language of Matt 10:32-33 and Luke 12:8-9. Much of the letter to Sardis echos the gospels.

Rev 3:1-6 (Spiritual Lessons)–

God can fully approve of a religious movement, yet it can lose its way.

In the Gospel of John the Baptist is spoken of in more muted terms than in the other three gospels.

In the time of Revelation many continued to follow the Baptist as if he had never pointed them to Jesus.

The church at Sardis had a great name but was spiritually dead.

The first step in combating spiritual burnout is a willingness to change.

Spiritual burnout requires a radical and firm decision, a complete turnaround.

Dealing with spiritual burnout should include reviewing the highlights of God’s work in your past life.

A final way to deal with spiritual burnout is affirming that all our actions are accountable to God in the judgment.

Judgment accountability is positive as well as negative. Our good deeds have meaning in eternity.

Rev 3:1-6 (Church History Reading)–

Sardis best fits the time of Protestant Scholasticism (roughly 1600 to 1750 AD).

From 1600-1750 people were more interested in arguing theology and doctrine than in living the faith.

Rev 3:7-13 (Introduction)–

The name “Philadelphia” is based on the Greek words for “familial love” and “brother,” hence “brotherly love.”

The letter to Philadelphia is much more positive than the letters to Sardis or Laodicea.

The city was named after King Attalus Philadelphus (220-138 BC), who demonstrated remarkable love for his brother.

Philadelphia was founded as a “missionary city” to promote Greek language and culture in the area around it.

Rev 3:7–

The combination “holy and true” is not found in chapter one (an exception to the rule for Jesus’ self-introductions in 2 and 3).

“Holy and true” is found in Rev 6:10, where it applies to God the Father rather than to Jesus.

Jesus as “holy and true” takes upon Himself two of the OT designations for Yahweh.

The key of David is an allusion to Isa 22:20-22. It is the key to the king’s storehouse.

The Son of David has supplanted the proud one (Isa 14:12-19; Ezek 28:12-19) who usurped this key in the garden (Rev 12:9; Gen 3:1-6).

The key of David belonged to each successor of the line of David, with Jesus as Messiah at the end of the line.

The key of David is a metaphor for the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ and the access we can have to God through Him.

Rev 3:8–

Unique among the seven letters, Jesus here is doing something in the present, not just pointing to the future.

This verse takes up the metaphor of the key from the previous verse and speaks about an open door no one can shut.

The word “open” is a perfect participle, meaning the door was already open when Jesus placed the church before it.

Scholars have offered at least five different opinions about the meaning of the open door in this verse.

The open door is probably a door of missionary opportunity, as in Acts 14:27, 1 Cor 16:8-9, 2 Cor 2:12-13 and Col 4:3.

The city of Philadelphia was built as a “missionary city” for the spread of Greek language and culture.

The three characteristics of the church in this verse are the ground for the open door Jesus has set before them.

Philadelphia received an open door because they had little strength on their own.

The “little strength” likely refers to smallness in numbers and resources rather than lack of spiritual power.

The last two phrases of this verse are a contrasting pair, one focused on doctrine and the other on Jesus.

Evidently the members of Philadelphia had faced a public trial of their faith in the past and held firm.

Rev 3:9–

This is a two-part sentence with the second verb picking up on the first.

This verse is the second of three actions that Jesus performs for the church at Philadelphia.

Some among the “synagogue of Satan” are won over in the end.

Revelation’s cosmic conflict lies behind all the conflicts people experience on earth.

The Greek word for “fall down” here is the same word translated “worship” in Revelation 13:15.

The connection between this verse and Rev 13:15 is one of the few between the churches the final battle of Rev 12-18.

“Synagogue of Satan” is probably a satirical reference to Jews who had rejected Jesus.

In spite of opposition, the church at Philadelphia would eventually be vindicated.

Rev 3:10–

In this verse the reason for Jesus' promise comes before the promise.

"Patience" means "remaining under," staying under a heavy burden rather than trying to escape it.

The patience referred to here is that of Jesus, as exhibited at the cross, which the Philadelphians are encouraged to emulate.

The Philadelphians are not removed from the end-time persecution, but they are kept safe as they pass through it.

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The word for "patience" here implies suffering and persecution, hence Philadelphia doesn't escape the trials of the End.

The word for "trial" can mean test or temptation in the NT. Here the noun form (first) means "test" and the verb "temptation."

The hour of trial on the whole world suggests an end-time role of some kind for the "church at Philadelphia."

Rev 3:11-13–

Philadelphia has strong evidence of God's acceptance, but not "once saved always saved."

The temple is a place that is safe from danger. This is a strong assurance of God's approval in the judgment.

Rev 3:11–

"I am coming soon" occurs five times in Rev. Here a clear reference to the Second Coming, as in Rev 22:7, 12, 20.

The Philadelphians are encouraged to hold fast what they have, they have kept Jesus' word and not denied His name (v. 8).

The crown that the Philadelphians are to hold on to is the Greek word for victory crown, like an Olympic gold medal today.

"Let no one take your crown" is a metaphor to encourage diligent effort to maintain one's relationship with Jesus.

There is a Jewish tradition of stolen crowns that would be restored in the Messianic Age.

In the Bible, tasks from God that people reject are given to someone else and the first person loses the blessing.

Rev 3:12–

Philadelphia has six overcomer promises, one in verse 10 and the other five in this verse. Pillars represent stability and security, they cannot be removed from a building while

the whole building stands.

Believers are stones in the heavenly temple (1 Pet 2:5), being pillars suggests a leadership role for Philadelphia.

The reference to temple here connects with Rev 7:15 (day and night in His temple) and the “no temple” of Rev 21:22.

As a metaphor and a teaching tool, sanctuary imagery can be both present and absent to make a point (Rev 7:15, 21:22).

The pillar in the temple implies that once believers have entered the heavenly temple, they are permanently secure.

Several promises relate the name of God, God’s city, and Jesus being inscribed on believers. This has a long history.

Names on the forehead imply both belonging to God and reflecting the character of God.

Writing the name of the city of God on the forehead relates to citizenship in the New Jerusalem.

Rev 3:12-13–

It is not clear what Jesus’ “new name” is, but it is certainly earned by His work on behalf of humanity.

Rev 3:7-13 (Summary and Conclusion)–

Though the church has little strength in human terms, no one can shut the door Jesus opened for them.

Jesus coming in judgment to Philadelphia is a blessing rather than a threat.

Even though they may be weak in human terms, great opportunities are available to those who are faithful.

Even in the midst of suffering and rejection, experiencing the hand of God brings comfort.

The OT promises of God are available to all in Christ.

Rev 3:7-13 (Church History Reading)–

Within the larger scheme of church history, the best fit for Philadelphia is the 18th and 19th Centuries.

The 18th and 19th Centuries were the period of greatest Christian missionary expansion in history.

Rev 3:14-22 (Introduction)–

The word Laodicea means “judgment of the people” in Greek.

Laodicea was about 50 miles southeast of ancient Philadelphia and near to Colossae (letter to the Colossians).

Laodicea’s water was lukewarm in temperature, with a high mineral content, not very palatable.

Laodicea was wealthy because of its location, when times changed, the site was abandoned.

The corporate pride of Laodicea seeped into the local church, but Jesus didn't quit on them.

Rev 3:14–

The connection between Jesus' self-introduction and the first chapter is not as direct as in the other letters.

Amen, faithful and true can all be expressed by the same Hebrew word, an evidence John was thinking in Hebrew.

"Amen" means all the promises of God are fulfilled to those who are in Christ (1 Cor 1:20; Rev 3:21).

The "faithful and true witness" is actually saying the same thing as "The Amen" in more detail.

To be a witness one must have seen and heard, be competent to tell it, and be willing to do so.

Is Jesus the beginning or the ruler of God's creation? The Greek word archê can go either way, as in monarch and archeology.

Both the "beginning" and the "ruler" of God's creation point back to Genesis 1:1.

"Firstborn" in the Bible is more about pre-eminence than it is about order of birth.

As the Second Adam, Jesus exhibited the same three basic relationships as Adam (Gen 1:26-28).

The original Adam had a basic relationship with God, with Eve and with the environment (Gen 1:26-28).

Jesus perfectly relived Adam's three relationships: with God, with others and with the environment.

Rev 3:15–

It is not clear in this text if the cold represents something positive or negative from a spiritual perspective.

If the cold is positive, Laodicea is in an undesirable middle. If it is negative Laodicea has not gone far enough.

Cold is better than lukewarm, because even if negative, it is relatively honest and committed.

If cold means someone who hasn't heard the gospel, cold is more promising than one who has heard and turned part-way back.

Laodicea's water supply came from the hot springs of Hierapolis, hence it was lukewarm when it got to town.

Laodicea is a church that is neither rebellious nor faithful in the battle between good and evil.

Rev 3:16–

Implications of the masculine, it is the angel, rather than the church as a whole, that is called lukewarm here.

The words for hot, cold and lukewarm are masculine (like Greek for angel) not feminine (like Greek for church).

The Greek word for “spit out” is actually “vomit” or “throw up.” This is a very graphic rebuke of Laodicea’s condition.

The fact that Jesus is “about to” vomit Laodicea out, means there is still time to turn the situation around.

Rev 3:17–

Laodicea’s core problem is inauthenticity. What she says and what she is are two different things.

Each of Laodicea’s three boasts is more self-confident than the one before, it is an intentional gradation.

The opening word “because” (or “for”) connects the attitude expressed by Laodicea here with the “vomit” of verse 16.

The Greek *hoti* (because) is used twice more in this text to introduce comments, one direct and one indirect.

The “riches” Laodicea boasts about are more likely spiritual than material. Spiritual pride is often associated with wealth.

The second item in Laodicea’s self-assessment focuses on the process by which she got wealthy, she did it herself.

The Laodiceans are content and self-satisfied with a spiritual attainment that has not been obtained through Christ.

In the light of Jesus analysis, Laodicea’s self-analysis proves to be a self-deception.

All five words of Jesus’ analysis are linked together into a single summary of Laodicea’s condition.

“Wretched” focuses on the condition of the church, “pitiable” focuses on how others look at that condition.

Jesus’ last three statements in 17 correspond to the three remedies He suggests in verse 18.

The Laodiceans were poor, blind and naked, and they did not know it.

Rev 3:18–

The three remedies that Jesus offers Laodicea are clearly metaphorical rather than material or literal.

There are four major parallels between Rev 16:15 and Rev 3:18: words of seeing, shame, nakedness and clothing.

The Greek word for “buy” is related to the ancient word for market place. To be taken metaphorically.

In the market place of Jesus, the goods are freely given, but they cost us our pride and ambition.

The gold Jesus offers was melted down in the fire, free of any alloy or impurity.

In 1 Peter 1:7, gold is a metaphor of tested, trustworthy faith that can last until the end (of life or the world).

The irony here is that Jesus uses the same word for wealth that the Laodiceans used in v. 17.

White represents the things of God in Revelation, dark represents ignorance and sin.

The call to walk in white echoes Rev 3:4 and 16:15. This is evidence Laodicea is particularly relevant at the end of history.

Laodicea has plenty of clothes, but it does not have the one garment that will enable entrance to the Kingdom of God.

Clothing provides warmth and protection for the body, it beautifies and adorns, but it also serves for decency and modesty.

At the Second Coming, the brightness of God's presence will make spiritual nakedness glaringly obvious to all.

There was a medical school in Laodicea well-known for its "Phrygian power" to treat eye ailments.

Laodicea prided itself in its spiritual insight, but its blindness could only be remedied with the eye-salve that Jesus gives.

If the "eye" is the conscience, the salve would be the gospel/Holy Spirit/Scriptures, which provide spiritual discernment.

Rev 3:19–

This verse is strongly parallel to Heb 12:6, one of the few references to love in the book of Rev.

The love of Jesus is expressed to Laodicea in terms of confrontation and discipline, so-called "tough love."

In spite of its indifference, Laodicea is still a church, still part of God's family, and still the object of His love.

Jesus' disciplinary actions arise from love and are intended to change Laodicea's metaphorical heart and bring her back to Jesus.

The word translated "rebuke" (*elengchô*) combines persuasion and disciplinary action.

In Greek "discipline" can mean instruction, correction and in severe punishment in different contexts.

"Rebuke" and "discipline" are two ways of saying the same thing, these words are a summary of verses 15-17.

The words for "zealous" and "hot" are linguistically related in the Greek, a word play.

Rev 3:20 (Introduction)–

This verse contains a clear allusion to SoS 5:2-6, the language of marital intimacy.

The allusion to the Song of Solomon does not suggest a positive outcome for Laodicea.

The perfect of "I stand" implies that Jesus has been knocking for a long time. His commitment to them is unshakable.

By contrast, in the gospels Jesus is the door (John 10:1-10) and the disciples are to knock at God's door (Matt 7:7; Luke 11:9; 13:25).

The mention of "door" reminds the reader of the end-time sermon of Jesus in Matt 24:33; Mark 13:29; Luke 12:35-38.

Knocking implies two things: the desire of the one to gain admittance and the freedom of the other to open the door or not.

The subjunctives of "hear" and "open" mean the invitation is to all who read the message.

The voice means the those inside the house know who is knocking, so a decision to open the door is a free choice.

Jesus leaves no doubt in His reaction, He **will** come in and dine with anyone who "opens the door."

This meal of mutual fellowship implies intimate relationship with Jesus and forecasts the heavenly wedding banquet (Rev 19:7-9).

The singular language of this verse can be interpreted in two ways. First option, it is calling for an individual response.

A second option for the singular language is to see it addressing the church collectively through its "angel."

The meal Jesus offers in this text may be an allusion to the Lord's Supper and also the breakfast by the sea (John 21:9-13).

Rev 3:21 (Introduction)–

Laodicea receives the most amazing promises of all the seven churches, to sit with Jesus on His throne.

The future reward of the overcomer is grounded in the prior achievement of Jesus.

Though the thrones of Father and Son seem separate, they are united into one in Rev 22:1.

After the millennium, the two thrones of this verse become one (Rev 22:1).

"He who overcomes" is extremely continuous. Overcoming is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process of relationship.

Joining Jesus on His throne is a promise made to Laodicea in future tense, "I will give."

The Greek has "in" my throne rather than "on" my throne, suggesting a uniquely intimate relationship with Jesus.

In this verse the overcoming of Jesus is the model for the overcoming of the believer in Laodicea.

The overcoming of Christ is a point in past time. Rev 5:5-6 confirms that point in time was the cross.

Jesus joining the Father on His throne refers to the enthronement of Christ in the heavenly throne room (Rev 5:5-6; Phil 2:9-11).

The superlative promise to Laodicea is the climax of the increasing number of promises to each of the first six churches.

This promise is both the climax of the seven churches and the introduction to the seven

seals.

Rev 3:22–

The seven admonitions to listen to the Spirit mean each of these seven messages are intended for all who read or hear the book.

Rev 3:14-22 (Church History Reading)–

Laodicea represents the final era of church history, the time of the final gospel call (Rev 16:15).

In Rev Jesus fulfills the whole experience of God's OT people.

As the second Adam Jesus both redeemed Adam's failure and reaped the consequences of Adam's sin.

"Ruler of God's creation" is the way Rev brings the whole second Adam theme into play here.

If you recognize yourself in the message to Laodicea, take the advice of Jesus in verse 18.

Our natural state is inauthenticity and our greatest need is accurate knowledge of our own depravity.

Truth is costly, it can cost you your job, your reputation, even your life, but truth is worth that much.

Our own authenticity is encouraged by the biblical stories, flawed people used by God.

Journaling brings out insight into my true condition that I don't learn any other way.

When we know the truth about ourselves, we can become more honest and open with God.

Laodicea shows that knowledge and orthodoxy are no substitutes for relationship with God.