

SARDIS (3:1-6)

It may have seemed foolish to attack Sardis because of their natural protections, but Sardis had been taken twice by sneak attack (Cyrus in 549 B.C., Antiochus in 218 B.C.). This *may* explain Jesus’ warning that he will “come like a thief” if church does not wake up.

What stands out to you as significant or instructive here? In what ways might we see manifestations of this church’s failings and successes today?

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PHILADELPHIA (3:7-13)

Homer Hailey notes, “Philadelphia had so many temples and festivals to the pagan deities that it was often called “Little Athens” (Hastings).”⁶⁶

What stands out to you as significant or instructive here? In what ways might we see manifestations of this church’s successes and difficulties today?

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⁶⁶ Homer Hailey, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, 149

LAODICEA (3:14-22)

One of the wealthiest cities in this part of the world, Laodicea turned away imperial help when an earthquake damaged portions of their city in A.D. 61 (unlike Philadelphia who received help after an earthquake in A.D. 17). Many suggest that Laodicea's lack of cold or hot water leads to Jesus' depiction of the church as "lukewarm." Gorman explains the significance of this image:

"Lukewarmness is not an ancient metaphor for indifference. The text, therefore, does not present a spectrum with two extremes — hot (for Jesus) and cold (against Jesus) — and a wishy-washy middle. ... Both of these are pleasing and beneficial, while lukewarm water is precisely the opposite, disgusting to taste and not salutary."⁶⁷

What stands out to you as significant or instructive here? In what ways might we see manifestations of this church's successes, threats, and failures?

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In conclusion, I offer two of the questions Gorman asks with respect to the seven churches:⁶⁸

In your experience, what are the most prominent forms of cultural accommodation in the Christian churches today?

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With which of the seven churches do you, or might your Christian community, most identify? What might be the concrete message of the risen Christ to your community?

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⁶⁷ Gorman, 96.

⁶⁸ Gorman, 101