

TO THE CONQUERORS

OCTOBER 18, 2026 / CLASS 6 / STUDENT HANDOUT

Revelation 3:1-13 – Sardis and Philadelphia

Part I. The classroom argument

1. Who held the key?

Revelation 3:7; Isaiah 22:15–25; Revelation 1:13.

- Jesus is "the One Who has the key of David, Who opens and no one will shut" (3:7).
- **Before Him, in Isaiah 22:**
 - Shebna, the steward "over the household" of David's kingdom (22:15).
 - God: "I will thrust you from your office" (22:19).
 - Eliakim receives:
 - Shebna's robe and sash (22:21)
 - his authority (22:21)
 - "the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut" (22:22)
 - Then the peg "fastened in a secure place will give way, and it will be cut down and fall" (22:25).
- **The robe and sash are Jesus' clothes** in John's vision: "a robe reaching to His feet, with a golden sash around His chest" (1:13).
- **In the 60s AD** the keys of God's house sat with the high priest, the Temple, and Jerusalem's leaders. Jesus says He holds them.

2. "I am coming": to whom, and when?

Revelation 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 10–11.

- Every "I am coming" in the letters is aimed at a church:
 - **Ephesus:** "I am coming to you, and I will move your lampstand out of its place" (2:5).
 - **Pergamum:** "I am coming to you soon, and I will make war with them" (2:16).
 - **Thyatira:** "Hold fast to what you have until I come" (2:25).

- **Sardis:** "I will come like a thief, and you will never know what hour I will come upon you" (3:3).
- **Philadelphia:** "I am coming soon. Hold fast to what you have" (3:11).
- **The hour:** "about to come on the whole inhabited world" (3:10).

3. Sardis: "You have a name for being alive, and you are dead"

Revelation 3:1–3; Ezekiel 37:14.

- **The city:** old capital of Lydia, under a high citadel; earthquake AD 17; Tiberius excused its taxes for five years.
- **The title:** "the seven spirits of God and the seven stars" (1:4, 16).
 - The seven spirits = the Holy Spirit (1:4; 4:5; 5:6).
 - The only title of the seven with both the Spirit and the stars.
- **Alive and dead:**
 - Smyrna's title was the reverse: Christ "was dead and came to life again" (2:8).
 - Ezekiel saw the Spirit come to the dead: "I will put My Spirit within you, and you shall live" (Ezekiel 37:14).
- **"Name" four times:**
 - "a name for being alive" (3:1)
 - "a few names in Sardis that didn't soil their garments" (3:4)
 - "I will never wipe his name out of the book of life" (3:5)
 - "I will confess his name before My Father" (3:5)
- **What was wrong:** not named. The church knew.
 - "I haven't found your works complete before My God" (3:2).
- **What to do:**
 - "Watch out! and bolster up the things that remain" (3:2).
 - "Remember the way you received it and heard it — and keep it, and repent" (3:3).

4. "I will come like a thief... upon you"

Revelation 3:3; 16:15; Matthew 24:2, 34, 42–44; Luke 12:35–40.

- **Jesus' own words** from the Mount of Olives:
 - "stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming... if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake" (Matthew 24:42–43).
 - The discourse began with the Temple: "there will not be left here one stone upon another" (24:2).

- He bounded it: "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (24:34).
- **3:3 has the same three:** the watching, the thief, the hour no one knows.
- **A condition and an address:** "If you don't watch out... upon you."
 - A coming upon the church at Sardis.
 - Ephesus heard the same kind (2:5).
- **Luke 12:35–40:** the thief and the knock in one paragraph.
 - Sardis gets the thief (3:3).
 - Laodicea gets the knock, the open door, the meal (3:20).
- **16:15** joins both letters: "Behold! I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who is watchful and keeps his garments, in order that he may not walk naked and have them see his shame."

5. The high priest's clothes

Revelation 3:4–5; Zechariah 3:1–5.

- **Sardis:** "a few names in Sardis that didn't soil their garments, and they will walk with Me in white, because they are worthy. He who conquers will be clothed like this, in white garments" (3:4–5).
- **Zechariah 3:**
 - Joshua the high priest "clothed with filthy garments," Satan at his right hand to accuse him.
 - "Remove the filthy garments from him."
 - "I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments."
 - The same vision has the lampstand and the "seven eyes" of the LORD (Zechariah 3:9; 4:1–10) = "the seven spirits of God" (Revelation 5:6).
- **The letter's frame:** it opens with the seven spirits and closes with the garments.
- **White garments through the book:**
 - the elders (4:4)
 - "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14)
 - the bride's fine linen (19:8)
- **"They are worthy"** twice in Revelation: the faithful few at Sardis (3:4); the persecutors, "worthy" of blood to drink (16:6). Every other "worthy": God and the Lamb.
- **The name confessed:** "everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father Who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

6. Philadelphia: the open door

Revelation 3:7–8; Isaiah 22:21–25.

- **The city:** below Mount Tmolus, vineyard country; hit by the same earthquake of AD 17.
- **No charge against the church.** Only Smyrna shares that.
- **Isaiah 22 runs through the letter:**
 - The key (22:22) → "an open door before you, which no one is able to shut" (3:8).
 - "I will give him your crown" (22:21, Greek Old Testament) → "no one takes your crown" (3:11).
 - The peg that falls (22:25) → "a pillar in the sanctuary of My God, and he will never go outside again" (3:12).
 - The key comes from Isaiah's Hebrew (the Greek Old Testament has no key there); the crown from the Greek.
- **"A little power":** "you kept My word and didn't deny My Name" (3:8).
- **The open door:**
 - Into God's presence: the next door in the book is "a door standing open in heaven" (4:1).
 - For the word: "a wide door for effective work" (1 Corinthians 16:9).

7. "I will make them come and bow down at your feet"

Revelation 3:9; Isaiah 60:14; 49:23; 43:4; Ezekiel 37:27–28; Genesis 27:29; 12:3.

- **3:9:** "Behold! — I am giving you those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews but are not, but are liars — Behold! I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you."
- **Isaiah's promise to Zion:**
 - "The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 60:14).
 - "With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you... Then you will know that I am the LORD" (49:23).
 - "You are precious in My eyes, and honored, and I love you" (43:4).
- **Turned around:** those who say they are Jews bow at the church's feet, and learn whom God has loved.
- **Who they are:**
 - Smyrna: "those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (2:9).
 - Philadelphia adds "but are liars."
 - Jesus' people are Israel. Whoever rejects Him is not.

- **Isaiah 60:14 behind three parts of the letter:**
 - "the Holy One of Israel" → "the Holy One" (3:7)
 - the bowing → 3:9
 - "the City of the LORD" → "the name of the city of My God" (3:12)
- **"They will know"** is Ezekiel's sentence:
 - "You shall know that I am the LORD," more than seventy times, most often after God judges His own people.
 - Jesus says it to all the churches (2:23) and here.
 - "Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore" (Ezekiel 37:28).
- **Abraham's blessing:**
 - Isaac to Jacob: "may your mother's sons bow down to you... blessed be everyone who blesses you!" (Genesis 27:29).
 - God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3).
 - Kept in Jesus' church.

8. The hour of testing

Revelation 3:10–11; John 17:15; Acts 11:28; Luke 2:1; 21:26, 35.

- **3:10:** "Because you kept My word about endurance, I will also keep you out of the hour of testing that is about to come on the whole inhabited world, to test those who dwell on the earth."
- **Kept, not taken out:**
 - "I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15).
 - The only two places in the New Testament with "keep out of."
- **"About to come."**
- **"The whole inhabited world"** = the Roman world: "a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered" (Luke 2:1).
- **Agabus:** "a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius)" (Acts 11:28).
 - The same words as 3:10: "about to," "on the whole," "inhabited world."
 - Fulfilled within one emperor's reign.
- **Jesus:** "what is coming on the world"; a day that "will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Luke 21:26, 35).
- **"I am coming soon. Hold fast to what you have"** (3:11); Thyatira heard the same (2:25).

9. "I will make him who conquers a pillar"

Revelation 3:10–12; 1 Kings 7:21; Galatians 2:9; Zechariah 6:14; Isaiah 62:2; 65:15.

- **Solomon's pillars had names:** Jachin and Boaz (1 Kings 7:21).
- **Jesus makes the conqueror a pillar**, and writes names on him.
- **"Pillars":** Paul called James, Cephas, and John, the man who wrote Revelation, those "who seemed to be pillars" (Galatians 2:9).
- **"He will never go outside again."** The peg in Isaiah 22 fell; the conqueror's place stands.
- **Endurance, crown, sanctuary:** the Greek Old Testament of Zechariah 6:14, "the crown shall be for those who endure... in the house of the Lord."
 - "My word about endurance" (3:10)
 - "no one takes your crown" (3:11)
 - a pillar in the sanctuary (3:12)
- **Three names on him:**
 - the Name of My God
 - the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem
 - My own new Name: "a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give" (Isaiah 62:2); "another name" (65:15)
- **The new Jerusalem:**
 - Named here, in a letter to a living church, eighteen chapters before John sees it come down (21:2).
 - The city is the people of God.
 - It came at Pentecost; it stood as God's only covenant people when the old Jerusalem fell in AD 70; it comes in its fullness at Christ's return.

Part II. Background and further study

1. The cities

- Maps and background: "The World of the Seven Churches," on the church app.

2. The thief and the Mount of Olives

Matthew 24:33, 42–44; Luke 12:35–40; 21:26, 34–36; 1 Thessalonians 5:2–6.

- John's Gospel has no Olivet Discourse. Revelation uses it again and again:
 - the thief: 3:3; 16:15 (Matthew 24:43)

- "what is coming on the world," "all who dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Luke 21:26, 35): the hour of testing (3:10)
- "He is near, at the very gates" (Matthew 24:33): "I stand at the door" (3:20)
- Paul: "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night... let us keep awake" (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 6).

3. The book of life

Exodus 32:32–33; Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1; Malachi 3:16; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27.

- Moses: "please blot me out of Your book." The LORD: "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot out of My book" (Exodus 32:32–33).
 - The Greek Old Testament's words there are the words of 3:5.
- Daniel: "everyone whose name shall be found written in the book" (12:1).
- Jesus: "rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).
- In Revelation the book of life is "of the Lamb" (13:8; 21:27).
- The only other thing wiped away: "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7:17; 21:4).