

# The Sad Saga Of Sardis

Conrad Baker

[www.MaranathaMedia.com.au](http://www.MaranathaMedia.com.au)

The Protestant Churches Of The Reformation  
How And Why Did Pass From Triumph To Defeat?  
An Exposition Of Revelation 3:1-6

“To the angel [leader] of the church in Sardis write”

It is generally agreed among students of Revelation that Sardis is associated with the churches of the Protestant Reformation and covers the period approximately from 1517-1750 AD. There is a minority that holds that the Sardis period extends until 1798 AD and even beyond (See Appendix 1)

## The Titles Christ Employs

“These things said he that has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.” Verse 1

The term “seven Spirits” is shown under Revelation 4:5 to represent the third person of the Godhead in his continuity and fullness. (1) Why does Christ in addressing Sardis remind his people that He Has the Holy Spirit?

1. To declare his Godhead. As God the Son, He is equal with the Father in his person but in office or position, he is the second person of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit, likewise, as the third person of the Godhead, is equal with the Father and the Son, but in office or authority, he is third; He is subject to the Father and the Son. Thus, Christ having the Holy Spirit, He may send him where so ever he and the Father determine.

“I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever” John 14:16

“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father-he shall testify of me.” John 15:26

2. The seven Spirits represent the Holy Spirit in his fullness and only through the power of the Spirit would it be possible to bring spiritual life to Sardis. However, because Christ has the Spirit in his fullness - he is able to bring hope and comfort to the Sardians.

## “And the Seven Stars”

The stars are the angels or leaders of the church. Christ has the leaders in his right hand according to Revelation 1:20. Here it simply reads, “he that has the seven stars”. Probably it means “in his right hand” meaning in the place of strength and authority. This is encouraging to the leaders of a church that is dying. If a leader is faithful to Christ he will be sustained by divine power.

In this period the question of the deity of the Holy Spirit was to be seriously questioned and attempts made to banish the truth of the deity of both Christ and the Holy Spirit. Thus the emphasis on the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit was most timely.

### **Christ's Complaint**

This is one of the most serious complaints of all the seven churches. Christ has nothing by which he can commend this church. Seeing this is the period commencing with the Protestant Reformation, such a complaint is quite devastating. "Thou hast a name that thou lived and art dead." Verse 1. Did the Protestant churches have a name for being spiritually alive? What were the churches of the Reformation?

The first church was the Lutheran; next was the Anglican or Church of England and thirdly the Reform Church established by John Calvin. These three were the main religious bodies of the Protestant Reformation that broke with the Church of Rome early in the sixteenth century.

In England the Anglican church was composed of two main schools of thought - the Anglicans and the Puritans or Presbyterians. The Puritans were finally forced to separate by the Act of Uniformity under Charles II when in 1662 nearly 2000 clergy, one fifth of the English clergy, were driven from their parishes as non-conformists. These were the most learned and active of their order. Under the oppressive laws enacted by an Anglican parliament, great suffering befell the non-conformists. These comprised not only Presbyterians but also Independents who later were called Congregationalists as well as Baptists [including Seventh-day Baptists] and Quakers. Thousands languished in the loathsome prisons, the most famous being the Baptist, John Bunyan.

The Presbyterians with the rest of the non-conformists now comprised such a large number that persecution could not continue and English statesmen were obliged to pass the Toleration Act [1689 AD] (2) This granted freedom of religion by law, for the first time in England.

The Lutheran Church comprised most of the Protestants in Germany, Denmark, Scandinavia and part of Holland. The Protestant faith in Sweden was accepted by the royal family with the result that most of the country became Protestant. This brought spiritual and political strength to the kingdom. Later in the Thirty Years War in which Rome endeavored to regain ascendancy in Protestant areas of Europe, it was Swedish arms under the able Protestant Gustavus Adolphus that came to the aid of the beleaguered Protestants of Germany and saved the Protestant cause.

The third main body of the Reformation churches was the Reform Church. This commenced with Ulrich Zwingli of Zurich and was established by John Calvin at Geneva. This group included the Protestants of Switzerland, France [Huguenots] many in Holland and probably all the Protestants of Scotland led by the great John Knox. In England the Puritans were of the Reform Church in doctrine and practice, although many adhered to the Anglican church.

On top of these three groups were the Independents and non-conformists of England, as mentioned heretofore and the Anabaptists who rose in Switzerland spread through Germany and Europe and even England. While some may have been classed as extreme the evangelical Anabaptists were probably closer to biblical truth than any other group of that period. (3) Many Anabaptists were later called Mennonites after Menno Simons, an outstanding Dutch Christian. Finally the Anabaptists in Europe were crushed or driven out by Catholic and Protestant persecution to the disgrace of the Protestants.

All the above groups at their rise were unquestionably led by the Spirit of God and were mightily used of heaven to shed the light of truth to mankind. How, then, did the churches of the Reformation begin to lose their spiritual life and decline? It is considered that there were five causes of decline of the church of that period. These were -

1. The union of the main church bodies with the state.
2. The formation of rigid creeds.

3. Their adherence to certain unscriptural doctrines.
4. The influence of the Counter-Reformation
5. The rise of Deism or the Age of Reason

## 1. The Union of the Church and State

When a church looks to the state for support it hinders the spiritual development of that church. Faith and spirituality come by the exercise of faith and self-sacrifice. State aid nullifies this and thus the church becomes spiritually impoverished. Its ministry becomes subservient to the state and thereby the will of Christ is made secondary. This undermines effective preaching of the Word of God whereby the church is made spiritually strong.

“The Primates [leaders] of the English Church have always been selected for their willingness to be the passive instruments of the government.” (4)

Being united with the civil power the church was enabled to enforce its dogmas. In this setting, with the spirit of intolerance that dominated the minds of men of that age, intolerance flourished. The Sardis period was a period of Protestant intolerance and persecution of fellow Protestants.

Even the Protestants themselves who were the victims of persecution generally believed [the Baptists excepted] that it was “the official duty of princes and magistrates to suppress and root out, by their authority, all false ministries to enforce all their subjects whether ecclesiastical or civil to do their duties to God and men.” (5)

“Ecclesiastical intolerance in the clerical order is generally co-existent with negligence in the performance of religious duties.” (6)

“All times of persecution, and all ages which have been distinguished by an intemperate zeal for external uniformity, have been marked by the prevalence of notorious immorality.” (7)

## 2. The Reformation Churches Became Bound by Their Man-made Creeds

It is understandable why churches form creeds. They help to keep unity. Under the Protestant principles of the Bible being its own interpreter and of every believer being a spiritual priest, the way is opened for numerous differences of opinion. Where there is intolerance and a failure to discern between fundamentals and peripherals, between major truths and minor, serious disruption and confusion can result. This is what led to the formation of their creeds. However, creeds can cause spiritual sterility. A man-made creed could be erroneous in some areas of belief. Truth is always advancing and what may appear through lack of light to be a fundamental today could be discovered to be unscriptural tomorrow.

“The path of the just is a shining light that shines more and more until the perfect day.” Proverbs 4:18

“But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 3:18

As true believers continued to grow in the knowledge of Bible truth they began to discover that some of the fundamental doctrines of their creed did not measure up with scripture. This called for a revision of the creed. But the Reformation churches failed to react aright. Instead of investigating scripture, they stuck to tradition. As the official Lutheran catechism declares:

“God’s word and Luther’s Doctrine pure, Shall to eternity endure.” (8)

By refusing to accept the light of truth a church is placing the opinions of men before the Word of God. This is disloyalty to Christ.

“If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed.” John 8:31

A church must continue to advance in truth. Failure to do so finally means spiritual death.

### 3. The Fruitage of Erroneous Theology

These were the false doctrines of -

- (a) Sacramentalism
- (b) Predestination
- (c) Original Sin
- (d) False Justification
- (e) Antinomianism

#### (A) Sacramentalism

This is the belief that by partaking of holy communion, salvation is administered to the believer. This is in contrast to the evangelical view which holds that salvation is obtained by faith in Christ as our Savior through the proclamation of the gospel and that the Lord's supper is a memorial of Christ's death. Sacramentalism discourages evangelistic endeavor and thereby is destructive of spiritual life in the church.

#### (B) Predestination

This belief comes from paganism and was introduced by Catholic Augustine into Catholicism and continued into Protestantism through Luther and Calvin who had been Augustinian monks. It is the belief that even before birth one is either chosen to eternal life or to eternal torment. The individual has no choice. It denies individual freedom of the will regarding salvation. This view was held by the majority of Protestant believers in the Sardian period. It is also destructive of evangelistic endeavor because one's destiny is already decided.

Therefore there is no urgency to proclaim the gospel of salvation to the lost. May be this explains why the Protestant church of the Reformation period had little or no compulsion in regard to foreign missions - a sign of spiritual death.

#### (C) Original Sin

This is the belief that at birth all infants are guilty of Adam's sin and are deserving of God's wrath and curse. This belief misrepresents God and makes him a monster. Scripture holds that infants are counted innocent (9) until they reach the age of understanding (10).

Original sin is a false concept of sin. Sin is the deliberate or willful transgression of God's law. Original sin holds that "sinful nature" is itself sin whether one chooses to sin or not. Original sin demands that the infant be cleansed from its sin. This is the reason for infant baptism. Once the rite is performed, the person is assured of salvation. This belief militates against spiritual growth for it tends to lessen the need for the personal acceptance of the gospel and to live a holy life.

The doctrine of original sin holds that because all are born depraved it is impossible even by the grace of God, for any man to fully obey God. It amounts to salvation in sin, instead of "salvation from sin."

"He shall save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21

It hinders the believer from aspiring to holy living which is obedience to all that God commands. "For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments." 1 John 5:2, 3

In contrast to the general belief of the day, the General Baptists of Somerset, England, in 1691 agreed upon a Confession of Faith.

"In this Confession the doctrine of original sin, considered as an inherent taint, or as a sufficient cause of eternal condemnation, is denounced as both unscriptural and irrational. The doctrine of reprobation [i.e. no

opportunity of salvation for some] is also abjured. The grace of God is declared to extend to the whole world, and if any man fall short of salvation, it is not because God, but because the man himself has so willed it; while the perseverance of the saints is declared to be dependent on their own conduct.” (11)

This Confession was a rejection of the Calvinistic belief which permeated all the churches of the period.

“Personal conversion, even in the case of the ministers of the gospel, seems not to have been expected. Baptism, administered in infancy, was supposed to have magical efficacy in procuring salvation; and the partaking of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper was supposed to be a means of grace even in cases of the most immoral and irreligious. The spiritual forces that were involved in the great Anabaptist movement had been crushed out. (12)

### **(D) An Erroneous View of Justification by Faith**

This was emphasized by Calvinists in particular. It teaches that justification by faith is forensic only - that the believer is declared judicially to be righteous but it does not involve any inner change within the believer. Biblical justification or pardon teaches that when one accepts Jesus Christ as his substitute for sin, there also occurs an inner change

“Be you transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 12:2 “A new heart [or mind] also will I give you” Ezekiel 36:26

Calvinism also teaches that in justification by faith, one is judged righteous and that therefore there is no need of any future judgment for the believer. His view also holds that once one experiences justification by faith that it cannot be lost. Justification covers his past sins and also his future sins. In principle it is “once saved, always saved”. The above views of justification play spiritual havoc with those who espouse them. This was another cause of spiritual decline of the churches of the Reformation.

### **(E) Antinomianism**

This means anti-law or no-law. It is the belief that Christians have no need of the law. This is the natural outcome of particular tenets of Calvinism. While Christ by his atoning death delivers man from the curse or penalty of the law, he does not deliver us from the obligation to keep the law. It is the divine standard for the Christian.

While we are not under the law’s condemnation, we are still under its direction. Commandment keeping does not save us from sin’s guilt, but it is the outward sign that we are saved by grace.

“If you love me, keep my commandments.” John 14:15

“For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not grievous” 1 John 5:2, 3.

Another aspect of Calvinism is that it is impossible for believers, even by God’s grace, to keep his commandments, nor is it necessary because Christ has kept the law for us. This deadly doctrine was probably one of the chief causes of the appalling spiritual decline of the Reformation churches.

“The spiritual declension which had been manifest in England just before the time of Wesley, was in great degree the result of antinomian teaching.” (13)

## 4. The Influence of the Counter-Reformation.

This was a powerful, concerted effort by Rome to destroy Protestantism. This movement involved five steps -

- A) The recognition and employment of the Order of the Jesuits
- B) The convening of the Council of Trent
- C) The invention of false interpretations of Bible prophecy in order to remove the stigma from Rome as the Antichrist
- D) The establishment of the Index of prohibited books.
- E) The renewal of persecution.

The main agency employed in the Counter-Reformation was the Society of Jesus - the Jesuits. This organization originated with Ignatius Loyola of Spain, who was inspired by occult powers, with the express purpose of destroying the enemies of the Catholic church, especially Protestantism. (14)

“The Jesuits maintain ignorance and oppose light. They know but one law they call ‘authority’. To a superior they submit life and conscience. To their order they sacrifice individuality-They have but one family, one fortune, one end, and all three are included in the word ‘community’. And this ‘community’ as its whole history attests is nothing less than ‘a universal conspiracy’ against all rights and every power in the world!” (15)

When this society is examined it is indisputable that it is the most diabolical system ever invented and the appalling feature of it is that it is garbed in the pure and lowly robes of Jesus Christ.

While the Jesuits led in all five steps, the one that did most damage was the invention of false interpretations of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. These were deliberately designed to shift the stigma of “Antichrist” from the Papacy to someone else at some other time.

Two schools of thought were invented regarding Antichrist by the Jesuits. These were termed Preterism and Futurism. Preterism proclaimed that Antichrist applied to someone in the past such as the emperor Nero, etc. Futurism projected Antichrist away into the future, near the Second Advent of Christ. It was the powerful proclamation by the Protestant Reformers that the Antichrist was the Papacy, that impelled millions to forsake Mother Church.

“It was this united Protestant stand on the Papacy that became the spring of their reformatory action. It was this clear understanding of the prophetic symbols that led them to protest against Rome with such extraordinary courage and effectiveness, nerving them to break with her and to resist her claims, even unto death.” (16)

Rome was desperate to counter the Protestant thrust. She therefore invented these false interpretations in order to counter the Protestant attack. The Jesuits then began a campaign of infiltration at which they are superbly efficient. They entered the universities, seminaries and churches of the Protestants under disguise and popularized the Jesuit interpretations of prophecy and scripture and undermined with remarkable success the true biblical interpretations of prophecy especially concerning the Antichrist. As Dr. Froom sadly records,

“The Jesuits became entrenched in the universities. They were among the best teachers in the land and held public disputations. Even Protestants began to send their children to them because of the scholastic progress they could make. Thus the great Reformation began to be outflanked in its own fastnesses and its conquests were checked.” (17)

The natural outcome of the Jesuits’ clever counter was that the promulgation of Rome as the Antichrist declined.

“When the Jesuits came to the rescue of the Papacy, they found it in extreme peril: but from that moment the tide of battle turned. Protestantism, which had during a whole generation carried all before it, was stopped in its progress and rapidly beaten back from the foot of the Alps to the shores of the Baltic.” (18)

5. The fifth cause of the decline of the Reformation churches was the advent of the Age of Reason. In the religious realm it began with the reception of Unitarianism [one person in the Godhead] or the rejection of the Trinity. It appears that this was an extreme but natural reaction to the breaking of Anglican church authority over the minds of men [1720 AD] and was “the first form which rationalism took after mental freedom had been finally secured.” (19)

“There was no class in England which did not feel relief from the removal of the weights which had been placed on the free movement of human thought. In no direction was this more visible than in theology. Men everywhere felt that they were at liberty to think for themselves. The natural and immediate result of this feeling was the apparently sudden growth at this period of Unitarianism in England.” (20)

This departure from the orthodox thinking spread not only through Anglican ranks but also through the ranks of the dissenters or non-conformists.

“Unitarianism spread with unexampled rapidity.” (21)

“The doctrines of the great founders of Presbyterianism could scarcely be heard from any Presbyterian pulpit in England. The denomination vanished as suddenly as it had risen; and excepting in literature, has left little visible trace of the greatness of its power.” (22)

“Religion, whether in the Established Church or out of it never made less apparent progress. The churches were characterized by a cold indifferentism. The zeal of Puritanism was almost as unknown as it was unimitated. Everything was changing and until the change was completed they seemed half paralyzed.” (23)

“If they thought much of the deadness, ignorance and corruption around them, they never thought of removing it. Nothing that required great exertion or great sacrifice was either attempted or done during this period.” (24)

At this time [1723] it was admitted by the Baptists that “There was a ‘great decay’ of the Baptist interest in some parts of England.” (25)

By 1700 Rationalism reached its highest development. Under the term of “Deism” the Christian faith came under concerted attack by men of great intellectual ability, high attainments and of true virtue. Their doctrines found thousands of willing believers. It was the fashionable creed. This resulted in the employment of the best Christian thinkers of England to defend the faith of Christ and the Bible as the Word of God. This they did with unrivalled success.

“With such an exhibition of power and scholarship arrayed against it, it is not surprising that Deism, as an intellectual theory, was quickly beaten from the field of controversy and that practical and vital religion did not gain from its defeat. They forgot the internal evidences of the truth of Christianity. They neglected to a lamentable extent, one of the chief means of ‘saving souls’ of treating Christianity as an intellectual creed, a system of morals and a means of virtue. Christian preachers exercised little influence on either the morals or the religion of the people ... faith as a vital power scarcely existed in less degree, preaching-was cold and heartless.” (26)

“As it is impossible for Nonconformity- to live and extend without its adherents possessing in an unusual measure personal piety and the spirit of self-sacrifice, its comparative decline, under the influences of the age of reason, was very obvious.” (27)



### CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO HIS DYING CHURCH

“Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God.” Revelation 3:2

This immediately indicates that though dying there was hope for Sardis. “The gates of hell shall not prevail against” the church of Christ. [Matthew 16:18] What are “the things that remain”?

No doubt this referred to the elements of true Christianity that still existed in the minds of some of God’s people. The Christian faith as held by the Protestant churches had received a buffeting, but all was not lost. Christ calls them to remember how they had been led initially into the light of truth.

“Remember therefore HOW thou hast received and heard and hold fast and repent.”

Probably this was a call to remember how the churches of the Reformation began. How the light of the gospel beamed through the darkness of error. Of their simple faith in the word of God and their wholehearted acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord. Of how Christ came first in everything.

“Hold fast and repent”

Hold fast to the word. Repent of any departure from it. Repent of the neglect of their personal relationship with Christ which hindered spiritual growth and ended in dead formalism.

### WARNING OF JUDGMENT FOR FAILURE TO TAKE HEED

“If therefore thou shall not watch, I will cane upon thee as a thief and thou shall not lam what hour I will come upon thee.” Verse 3

This means that unexpectedly Christ would visit the believers in Sardis in judgment or punishment if they failed to respond to Christ’s call. This expression is sometimes applied to the Second Advent of Christ, but its primary application is to the church period when believers were on the point of spiritual death. It represents judgment or punishment. It could apply to the Second Advent only in a secondary sense, but out of context.

God’s people were instructed not to expect the Second Advent until AFTER “the man of sin” - the Papacy - had reigned in the Christian church. [2 Thessalonians 2:1-5] This reign ended in 1798 and that date marked the commencement of “The Time of the End00 or the last days. (28)

“You have a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.” Verse 4

To whom could this description apply in the Sardian period? Some believe that the description applies chiefly to the latter end of the period when the church was experiencing spiritual decline, but this tendency was prevalent throughout most of the Sardian period, as group after group experienced spiritual stagnation. We suggest the following as representing the few names that walked in white. These were the overcomers in this trying period of controversy and intolerance.

1. The faithful evangelical Anabaptists who laid down their lives rather than reject truth and disobey God.
2. The Early Puritans
3. The Brownists who later became the Congregationalists. These included the Pilgrim Fathers.
4. The Baptists, including Seventh-day or Sabbatarian Baptists (29)
5. Those of the Pietistic Movement in Germany.

“The name of Pietists was given-by its enemies, as a term of ridicule, like that of “Methodists” somewhat later in England. . .The Lutheran church.. .by the 17th century had become a creed-bound theological and sacramentarian institution-with almost the absolutism of the Papacy. Christian faith had been dismissed



from its seat in the heart, where Luther had placed it, to the cold regions of the intellect-dogmatic formularies usurped the position-assigned to the Bible alone, and as a consequence-the Bible was neglected in the family, the study, the pulpit and the university. Instead of ...the priesthood of all believers, the Lutheran pastors had made themselves a despotic hierarchy. In the Reformed church..[there was] a dogmatic legalism which imperiled Christian freedom and fostered self-righteousness.

As forerunners of the Pietists.. [were] powerful voices-bewailing the shortcomings of the church and advocating a revival of devout and practical Christianity. Amongst than were Johann Arndt [author of] “True Christianity” and other theologians inclined to practical Christianity. The direct originator was Philip Spener. (1635-1705) He was influenced initially by Arndt’s writings. At Geneva he was greatly moved by the preaching and piety of the Waldensian professor, Antoine Leger.” (30)

Spener laid down six proposals for religious reform -

1. The study of scripture in private meetings
2. The laity sharing in church government
3. The practice of Christianity must attend knowledge of it
4. A sympathetic and kindly treatment of dissidents and unbelievers.
5. Re-organization of theology training in universities, giving prominence to devotional life.
6. A different style of preaching. Instead of pleasing rhetoric, the implanting of Christ in the new man by faith.

Spener deeply offended Lutheran theologians and pastors but some adopted his proposals. The fundamental difference between Lutheranism of the day and Pietism was their conception of Christianity. Pietism held that it chiefly consisted of a change of heart and holiness of life while the orthodox held that it consisted mainly in correctness of doctrines. August Franke succeeded Spener and the Pietists spread over all middle and northern Germany. They shunned all common worldly amusements, such as dancing, the theatre and public games.” (34)

The new university at Halle under Franke and other Pietists became Pietism’s educational centre and wielded great spiritual influence. Count Zinzendorf [1700-1760] was converted to Pietism at Halle. He set up a Pietistic centre at Herrnhut where the persecuted Bohemian and Moravian Brethren found refuge and revival. These were the remnant of the Hussites of Bohemia who had been driven out of their country by cruel and prolonged Catholic persecution. They formed the United Brethren and in then was witnessed the greatest example of the survival of the Church of Sardis. They promulgated the gospel among non-Christians and heathen such as had not been seen for centuries. They founded mission stations in Greenland, West Indies, South Africa and America. Eternity will reveal the true extent of their influence. Pietism produced other great Christian leaders who helped revive the faith of Sardis. With them the study of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation was revived. (31)

Around 1700 AD many Pietists migrated from Germany and settled in Southern, Russia, Transcaucasia, Hungary and Rumania. (32) By 1735 persecution broke out against the Pietists and Moravians in Germany from the Lutherans. This led many to migrate. A colony settled in Georgia, America and later with the Moravians were expelled from Germany [1740] large numbers arrived in Pennsylvania where they established their some of these in their spiritual advance were led into the observance of the seventh day Sabbath, including Zinzendorf himself. (33)

“Pietism had run its course before the middle of the 18th century [it] could claim to have contributed largely to the revival of Biblical studies in Germany and to have made religion once more an affair of the heart and the life and not merely of the intellect. It likewise vindicated afresh the rights of the laity in regard to their own beliefs and the work of the church against the assumptions and despotism of an arrogant clergy. It was-the last great surge of the waves of the ecclesiastical movement begun by the Reformation; it was the completion and the final form of the Protestantism created by the Reformation.” (34)

In other words, it closed the Sardian period.

“He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.” Verse 5

The white raiment.

According to verse 4 the white raiment appears to represent moral purity - undefiled. This is the general significance of white in scripture. This involves the righteousness of Christ with which the believer is spiritually clothed. It may also represent the literal clothing of the

saints in the kingdom. This is described as a garment of light [Psalm 104:2] and is a part of the spiritual body which the saints shall possess in eternity. [1 Corinthians 15:42-44. Philippians 3:20,21]

“The book of life”

What are these books that are mentioned throughout scripture? They contain the records kept by heaven concerning the great controversy upon earth. The form of these books need not concern us. Scripture emphasizes that a divine record is kept. The different books are described -

1. The book of life. [Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 20:15] This is the birth register of all who are born again as sons or daughters of God. [Luke 10:20]

2. The book of death. This is the sin record of Earth’s inhabitants. The wages of sin is death [Romans 6:23] indicating that he whose record is not erased, receives the ultimate penalty.

“Mine iniquity is marked before me, said the Lord.” Jeremiah 2:22

“Write it before them in a table and note it in a book, that it maybe for the time to cane” [margin “the latter day”] Isaiah 30:8, 9.

“Behold it [Israel’s sin] is written before me.” Isaiah 65:6

The book of remembrance. This is the record of righteousness of the saints only. There is no record of the righteousness of anyone who is not a true believer. (John 3:18)

“A book of remembrance was written before God, for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name.” Malachi 3:16

“Put my tears into thy bottle, are they not in thy book?” Psalm 56:8

Why a record? Not because the Creator needs it, but for the sake of intelligent beings whom God has created. The records will be required when this world comes under judgment. The Old Testament source from which John borrows his imagery is Daniel which means “God is Judge.”

“I beheld till the thrones were cast down, [or placed] and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame and his [its] wheels as burning fire. Thousand thousands [of angels] ministered unto him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set and the books were opened.”

“And behold one like the Son of man [Jesus Christ] came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of days [the Father] and they [the clouds] (35) brought him [Jesus] near before him.” Daniel 7:9, 10, 13

This is a judgment scene enacted after the reign of the four beasts [or kingdoms] of prophecy, i.e. Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome and the Little Horn. It will be shown later that the Little Horn reigned from 538 - 1798 AD. (36) This judgment is one that involves the people of God, i.e., those whose names have been recorded in the book of life. It is a process of investigation of the records of the saints to determine the faithfulness of each professor of the gospel.

“For-judgment must begin at the house of God [the church] and if it first begin at us, [believers] what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God.” 1 Peter 4:17

Other scriptures give glimpses of Christ’s ministry in this judgment. (37). One major feature of this pre advent or investigative judgment of God’s professed people is the procedure of “blotting out” of the records. For the overcomer there is only one “blotting out” in this judgment. For the non-overcomer there are two “blottings out”. With the overcomer his “sins are open beforehand [by confession] going before [or ahead] to judgment” 1 Timothy 5:24

His sin record is blotted out, through the priestly ministration of Christ.

“He that overcomes, I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.” Revelation 3:5

“If he [the believer] thin from his sin and do that which is lawful and right-he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he has committed shall be mentioned [remembered] unto him.” Ezekiel 33:14-16

“Repent you therefore and be converted, that your sins [sin record] may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” Acts.3:19

With the non-overcomer, however, his sin record is retained but his name and record of righteousness are blotted out of the book of life and the book of remembrance. Concerning the record of his righteousness scripture declares:

“The righteousness of the righteous [professing Christian] shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression if he commit iniquity [and does not repent and forsake) all his righteousness shall not be remembered” Ezekiel 33:12, 13.

“He that denies me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.” Luke 12:9

Concerning his sin record, it is retained and he will be punished according to that record in the final judgment.

“When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall even die thereby.” Ezekiel 33:18

“Forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin [record] from thy sight!” Jeremiah 18:23

“Cover not their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee.” Nehemiah 4:5

Concerning the name of the non-overcomer whose name had been originally registered in the book of life, his name will be blotted out from that register.

“Let them be blotted out of the book of the living [of life] and not be written with the righteous” Psalm 69:28

“Whosoever has sinned [and not repented and forsaken] against me, him will I blot out of my book” Exodus 32:32

“Let their name be blotted out” Psalm 109:13, 14

“Let me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven.” Deuteronomy 9:14

“The Lord shall blot out his name [who turns from Christ to other gods] from under heaven.” Deuteronomy 29:20

All the above procedure is a part of the heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ in the final phase of his priestly ministration in the heavenly temple. This is the significance of the promise to the overcomer of Sardis. In the sobering investigative judgment his name will not be blotted out of the book of life but Christ will confess his name before God and the attendant angels. Whoever Christ pleads for before God, that one is assured of acceptance. However, his sin record will be blotted out for eternity.

In the light of the truth of the pre advent judgment it may be relevant to discuss the two phases of the blotting out of sin. Confusion has come in this area. The above concerns the blotting out of the sin RECORD by Christ in the heavenly assize.

However scripture also emphasizes another blotting out of sin. This concerns the GUILT of sin. To men, this is more important and more vital and must precede the blotting out of the record of sin, significant as that is. When a man accepts the truth of the gospel, admits himself a hopeless sinner and receives Christ as his Savior and substitute for the penalty of sin and is born again, his guilt is blotted out.

“If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanses us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7

This cleansing from sin’s guilt is immediate and is also likened to a “blotting out” of sin’s guilt. As King David, in his penitential psalm, wrote under inspiration:

“According to the multitude of thy tender mercies, BLOT OUT my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean: wash me and I shall be whiter than snow-hide thy face from my sins and BLOT OUT all mine iniquities.” Psalm 51:1, 2, 7, 9 (38)

There is a present or current “blotting out” of sin from the believer.

“I am he that blots out [present tense] thy transgressions for mine own sake and will not remember thy sins!” Isaiah 43:25 (39)

“I have blotted out [past tense] as a thick cloud thy transgressions and as a cloud thy sins” Isaiah 44:21, 22 (40)

Maybe the procedure could be termed as a spiritual blotting out of sin now at conversion and a literal blotting out in the pre advent judgment. The two phases of blotting out are also indicated by St. Peter. His statement has two applications.

“Repeat you therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when [Greek “so that.”] the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” Acts 3:1.9 (41)

We suggest that the first application was to Peter’s day to the blotting out of the guilt of sin and secondly to the judgment. (42) Other scriptures confirm the comforting and marvelous truth that God blots out the - guilt of our sins when we surrender to Christ.

“He delights in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and YOU WILL CAST ALL THEIR SINS IN THE DEPTH OF THE SEA.” Micah 7:19

“He has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. FOR AS THE EAST IS FROM THE WEST, SO FAR HAS HE REMOVED OUR TRANSGRESSIONS FROM US.” Psalm 103:8-13 (43)

“He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said to the churches.” Verse 6

## APPENDIX I

What of the claim that the Spirit of Prophecy applies the Sardian church period to the Protestant churches prior to 1844. Of the thirty-six references checked regarding Sardis, thirty-five are applied to the Laodicean church or to individuals in the church period of Laodicea.

Only once does the Spirit of Prophecy apply Sardis to the Protestant churches prior to 1844 and that was to the local churches of North America in 1780 AD. These comprised only a minority of the Protestant churches of the period. The bulk of Protestantism was situated in Great Britain and northern Europe. At that time the great Evangelical Revival was in full bloom and the remarkable era of missions was about to begin. This condition was exactly the opposite of the Sardian period. The application of "Great Controversy" pages 309, 310 was only to a local situation but not to the Protestant churches in general. For an accurate application of the Church of Sardis, see pages 251-257 of "The Great Controversy". This was the period prior to the great Evangelical Revival.

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5. Ibid page 27.
6. Ibid page 87.
7. Ibid page 9.
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20. Ibid. page 235-236.
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22. Ibid. page 248.
23. Ibid. page 250.
24. Ibid. page 251.
25. Ibid. page 257.
26. Ibid. page 264-265
27. Ibid. page 266
28. See the Author's "The Angel of Time" page 9.
29. Emmerson "The Reformation and the Advent Movement" pages 89-165
30. Encyclopedia Britannica [1911 Edition] Volume 21, page 593.
31. L. E. Froom "Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers," Volume 2, pages 696-703, 709-719.
32. Ibid. Volume 2, page 713.
33. W. L. Emmerson "The Reformation and the Advent Movement" page 176.
34. Encyclopedia Britannica [1911 Edition] Volume 21, pages 593,594.
35. Clouds are sometimes employed in scripture to represent the angels of God. See the author's "A Glimpse of God on the Throne," pages 21, 22.
36. See the Author's "Antichrist 666."
37. See the Author's "The Angel of Time" and "God's Final Ultimatum."

38. For Spirit of Prophecy confirmation of this application of Psalm 51, see “Spirit of Prophecy” Volume 4, page 381. Review & Herald, April 16, 1889; March 16, 1890. August 25, 1891, March 14, 1893.
39. For Spirit of Prophecy confirmation see “Signs of the Times,” April 9, 1894, Review & Herald, July 1, 1915; March 19, 1895, April 21, 1910
40. For Spirit of Prophecy confirmation see Review & Herald February 17, 1885, March 17, 1890; December 16, 1890; July 14, 1891; March 25, 1915; January 19, 1911; October 3, 1914.
41. See S.D.A. Bible Commentary. Volume 6, pages 158, 159.
42. L. B. Kostenko “The Blotting Out of Sins” Andrews University, M.A. Thesis.
43. At least 15 times the Spirit of Prophecy indicates that our sins [guilt] are blotted out when we accept Christ as Savior.

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