

Cultural/Historical Context

Old Testament Text

The Ancients believed that a soul traveled to be a star in the Milky Way. To get there, you must navigate the “seven stars.” The gods claimed to hold the keys to the seven stars.

Sardis obsession with death. The Acropolis (city of life) and the Necropolis (city of death) looked similar.

Twice in the history of Sardis (547) and (213) – during military campaigns – the acropolis that was deemed impregnable fell overnight.

During the processions of the Cybele festival the male adherents of that cult, dressed in white robes, cut themselves to release blood – said to be a blessing of the goddess.

Ramsay suggests that v.5 is a reference to a Roman Triumph. After defeating an enemy, the Caesar would lead a procession – dressed in white – to celebrate the victory.

1 “To the angel of the church of Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

4. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. 6 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Possible allusion to Zechariah 4

Obadiah is the only book in the OT to mention the ancient name for Sardis, *Sepharad* (1: 20).

Obadiah 1: 3-5

See 1 Kings 18:26-27 for a reference to self-flagellation for religious purposes.

Exodus 33: 32-33

After the “golden calf” episode, Moses pleads with God to forgive the people and continue on to the “Promised Land” with them. Moses references having his name removed from God’s book. (See also - Ps. 56:9, 69:28, 139:16; Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:16).