

The Seven Churches of Asia

Sardis



The REVELATION
PART ONE
The Seven Churches of Asia



The next Church we will study is the Church at Sardis.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS:

ATTENDANCE:

The required minimum attendance for the course overall is 10 weeks.

The required minimum attendance for this lesson is 1 week.

You may take more than 1 week for each lesson should you choose to do so; without any penalty. In fact, some lessons probably will take more than a week to complete for some students. However, though you can take more than the minimum required attendance for each lesson, under no circumstances are you to take less than 1 week for each lesson.

TESTS:

Lesson tests must be taken not less than one week apart.

If you fail a test you may not retake that test on the same day that you failed it.

You must wait at least one day before retaking the test. Use that time to restudy the material and find all of the correct answers to every question missed on the test. The copy of the test automatically sent to you has all of the correct answers on it. Use that copy to make sure you have found all of the correct answers in the study materials.

SCRIPTURES:

Each scripture referenced in this lesson must be looked up and read in your KJV. Reading the scriptures in the lesson, even if they are fully quoted in the lesson, will not fulfill this requirement. They must be looked up and read in your KJV.

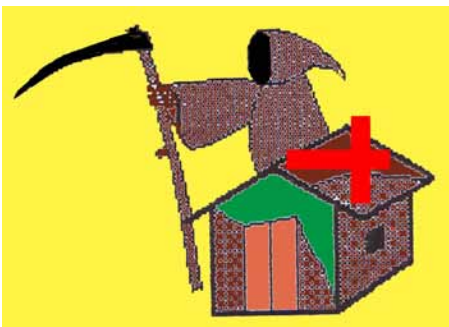
LESSONS:

Each lesson is followed by a test. You will find a link to the course main page at the end of each lesson. When you click that link you will be returned to the course main page where you will find a list of tests. There will be instructions concerning whether a particular test is open book or closed book.

If a test is open book you will not need a password to access that test. Click the link for it and it will open and you can then take the test. Your next lesson attendance begins the day after you pass the current lesson test.

If a test is closed book, then you will be instructed to submit a Closed Book Test Contract form. When we receive that form, then you will be sent the password that you will need to access that test. In answer to your request, the password will be sent in 1-2 days, not including weekends when the college offices are closed.. Your next lesson attendance begins the day after you pass the current lesson test.

You may now proceed to the next page to begin the study of the Church at Sardis.



SARDIS

The City: Sardis was located 70 miles East and approximately 25-30 miles North of Ephesus. It was prominent as a vital connection with the principle high-ways to and from the East. In it, merchants hawked the wares of the known world. Through its streets

passed the caravans carrying the riches as well as the necessities of the far-flung reaches of the Empire, and beyond. As a merchant city, a respectable portion of the wealth passing through it remained in its control. This gave it a prominent place as one of the “first cities,” of Asia. The most that the city was known for in the area of indigenous businesses was its dyeing and woollen industries. Mostly it was a city of bygone glory. This was reflected by the church at Sardis which Christ called, “dead.”

History: Early on in its history, Sardis was one of the most prominent of the cities in Asia Minor. At one time it even was the capitol of the kingdom of Lydia. Originally it was built upon the surrounding hills. In a short time, however, it began to spread down the slopes of Mt. Tmolus (Boz Dag) and into the valley along the east bank of the Pactolus River. During the 6th century B.C., under Croesus the last king of Lydia, it rose to world prominence as one of the richest and most powerful cities of that day. Then, after being conquered by Cyrus the Great of the Persians, it retained this prominence because of wealth gained from its strategic position along the trade routes, and became the Western capitol of the Persian Empire for the next two hundred plus years. Then when Alexander the Great led his army of 40,000 men against Persia in 334 B.C., his overwhelming success against Darius III at the Granicus River encouraged him and, in a change of plans after this easy and undoubtedly heady victory, he subsequently swept through the cities of Sardis, Ephesus, and Miletus on his way to stab at the very heart of the Persian Empire.

By NT times it had slipped to a place of lesser prominence but still was famous as a merchant city. By that time, and because of the wealth of goods flowing through it, its main boast was its wealth. In A.D. 17, some seventy years before the writing of the Book of the Revelation, the city was destroyed by an earthquake; but, because of its importance to the flow of commerce in the empire, the money to rebuild it was supplied by Imperial Rome.

For the next 600 years, its affluence slowly waned and it eventually fell to conquering Arabs in A.D. 716. The last references to its being inhabited give a date of just after its destruction by the Berlas Turks under Tamerlane in 1402. The scriptural condition of the church as, “dead,” (Rev 3:1) is reflected in the present condition of the abandoned city and is physically visible today in the mute testimony of the imposing ruins on the slopes of Mt. Tmolus in Asia Minor. These ruins, that speak only of past glory, can only stand silent today in metropolitan death. The only spark of life is a small and barely visible one of new life among the old ruins; the village of modern day Sart built among these crumbling evidences of many centuries of cultural progress, now in magnificent chaos. Those stone skeletons give mute testimony to the death of this great city that once was (6th century B.C.) one of the leading monoliths of riches and power in the ancient world. Now those ruins can only bear

stark witness to the frailty of man's achievements, the lying promises of temporal power and wealth, and, finally, to the eventual end of those who are materially rich but spiritually bankrupt.

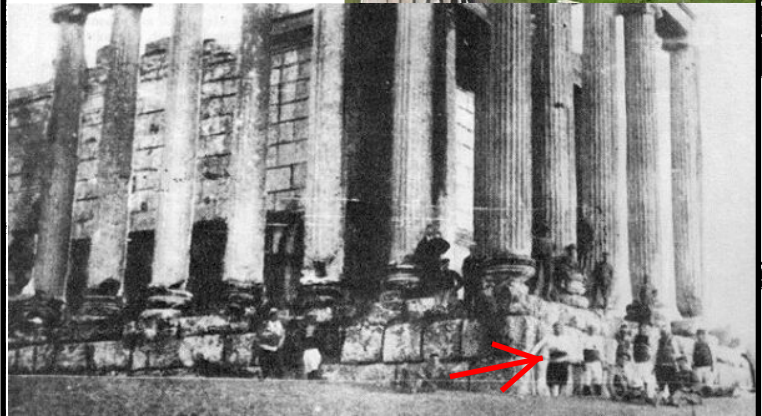
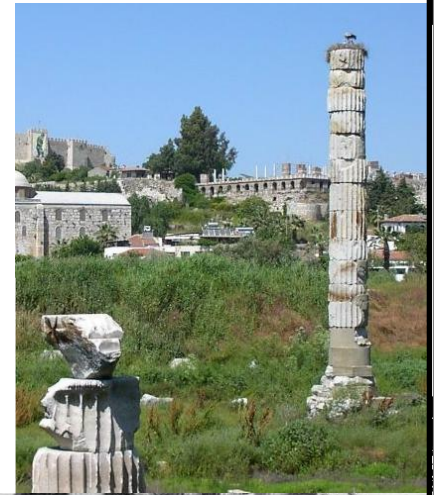
It seems appropriate because of the deplorable spiritual condition of most of the Christians there as well as that of the general populace that was eventually to bring about their destruction, that the city has over the passage of the intervening centuries metamorphosized from being the "prince of joy," (the meaning of the name Sardis) to being the "king of ruins."

Religion: In the area of public religion, Sardis was a major rival of Ephesus in Artemis (Diana) worship. In private, however, many turned to the mystery religions whose rites and practices were known only to their initiates. One of these, still popular in NT times, was the cult of Cybele, the indigenous, "Great Mother-goddess," of Asia Minor. She was originally a goddess of Phrygian origin. Cybele was identified by the Greeks with their Rhea, "mother of the gods." This cult was widely practiced in Sardis and, probably because of its particularly disgusting rite of initiation, may have been the reason for John's reference (Rev 3:4) to those who have, "not defiled their garments." This rite, called the taurobolium, was one in which initiates were baptized in bull's blood. Many practitioners thought that this one time, "baptism," brought eternal life, while many others would repeat it after twenty years. This practice continued until at least the fourth century A.D. where, from the writings of Prudentius, we are given a most vivid description of this rite. The second most striking rite of the religion, from its early days, would have to have been the custom of physical emasculation of male devotees. This was supposed to represent the offering of ones own fertility, in a supernatural manner, to promote the fertility of the world. This particular rite evidently had ceased by the time of Claudius Caesar (ruled from A.D. 42-54) and probably was not practiced in Sardis at the time of John's writing.

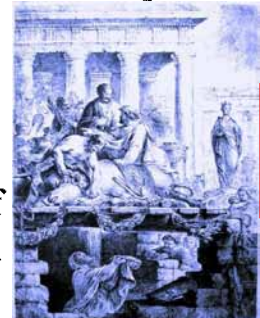
Of the magnificent temple of Artemis (Diana) at Sardis, all that remains are a few of the stupendous columns, mere echoes of past glory.

The recent picture at right shows the current state of the ruins- reduced to several remnants of the magnificent columns.

The picture below shows a much earlier view of the ruins when more of the columns of the once magnificent temple were still standing.



To gain some appreciation of the size of the temple, note the relative size of the woman at the bottom of the picture. Remember also that these are just a few columns, the temple itself was a lot more extensive.



See the next page for an explanation of the rite.

Christianity: The first mention of the church in Sardis is in Rev 1:11. There is nothing to tell us exactly when the church there started so it is a possibility that it was another one of those churches started sometime during Paul's time in Ephesus when the Bible tells us that, **“all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”** (Acts 19:10) This would have been around A.D. 53-55.

Sardis' conversion to Christianity, although in practice a very shallow one, seems to have had an extremely pronounced and lasting effect on the whole region.

While the church there had, at one time, a reputation for spiritual achievement, by the time of the writing of the Revelation it had deteriorated into a state of spiritual deadness. For whatever reason, possibly a lack of teachings on separation (a failure in leadership), or the failure to practice separation (a failure, as at Ephesus, of fellowship), the general licentiousness of the pagan city had finally infected and slain the Christians; and since the church is the people, when most of the members had decayed into a state of spiritual deadness the church corporate also died.

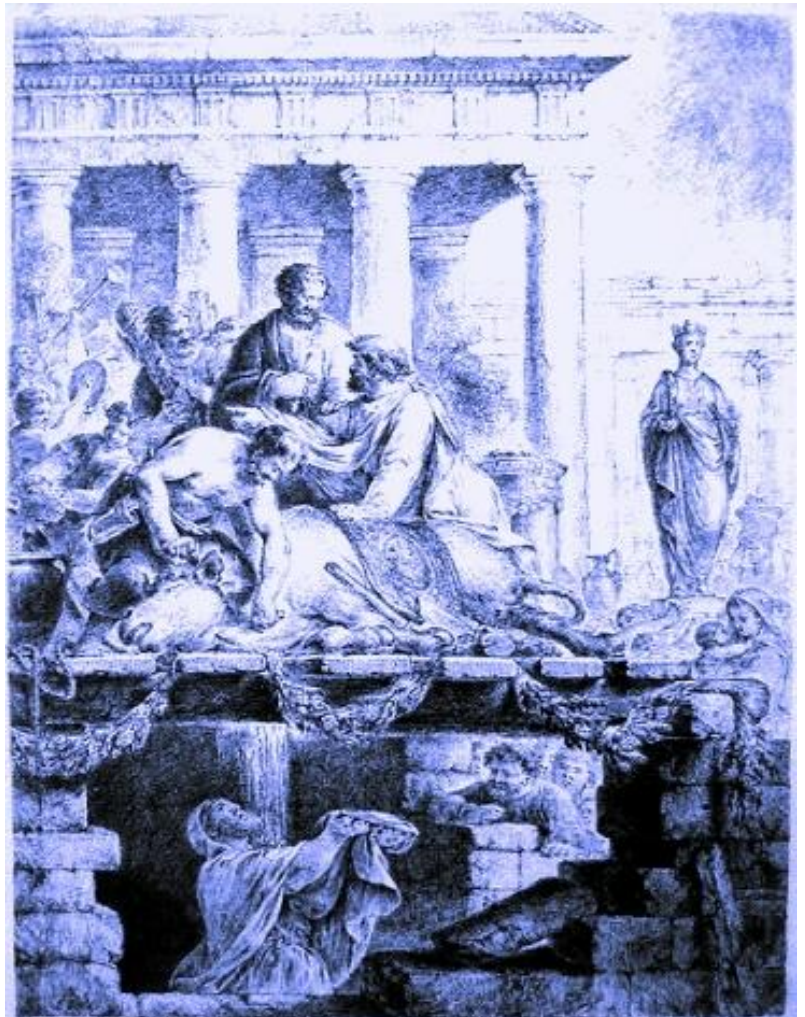


Comparison: This trait of, “has-been-ism,” in the church at Sardis, living on past glory instead of present achievement, seemed an echo of the very history of the city itself.

The picture at right depicts the baptism (actually a sprinkling) in bull's blood known as the Taurobolium.

The priest of the Great Mother, clad in a silk toga worn *cinctu Gabino*, with golden crown and fillets on his head, takes his place in a trench covered by a platform of planks pierced with fine holes, on which a bull, magnificent with flowers and gold, is slain. The blood rains through the platform onto the priest below, who receives it on his face, and even on his tongue and palate, and after the baptism presents himself before his fellow-worshippers purified and regenerated, and receives their salutations and reverence.

Many of the worshippers receiving this rite believed that they had been given eternal life. Others believed that it had to be repeated every twenty years.



THE LETTER TO SARDIS

(Rev 3:1-6)

3:1 COMMISSION: The Pastor and the church at Sardis.

Who from and who to? From Jesus Christ to the Pastor and the church at Sardis.

3:1 CHARACTER:

A description of Christ as the one in complete control and fulness.

(Seven is the number of completion or fulness.)

A. Christ is in complete control of the pastors (“stars”); and the “seven Spirits of God,” refers to the completeness (fulness) of the Holy Spirit in Him.



B. Sevens in the Bible.

1. In the greeting to the churches. (1:4)

2. Christ dictated the 7 letters to the churches, (1:11-20) and the churches were represented by 7 golden candlesticks.



3. “The Spirit saith unto the churches...”

(2:7; et al) There were 7 of them.

4. The 7 Spirits before the throne of God. (4:5 cf Is 11:2)

5. The Lamb’s “seven eyes,” (5:6) and “the eyes of the LORD,” (Zech 4:2,6,10) are the seven spirits (eyes) sent through the whole earth.

6. The seven spirits must represent the Holy Spirit in His fulness, since we know that

Eph 4:4 “There is... one Spirit...”

He is variously called: Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost, Christ’s Spirit, God’s Spirit, and Spirit.

C. Christ works in and with His churches in the fulness of the Spirit; and, in that fulness, His eyes are everywhere, searching and scrutinizing His churches and their pastors and discerning the hearts and motives of each.

Rev 3:1 “... I know thy works... “

3:1b CONDEMNATION:

For Sardis the Condemnation was so strong that, unlike in the other letters, both it and the correction are actually given before the Commendation.

A. “...works... name that thou livest, and thou art dead.” (3:1b)

1. Apparently they had a name and the outward appearance of that of a good Christian church. Inwardly, however, they had degenerated into spiritual deadness.

2. Compare this with Mt 23:27

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.”

3:2 B. "... watchful..." Keep a lookout for the enemy.

C. "... strengthen those things that remain..."

You should have been ready for the first attack, the one that almost wiped you out.

D. "... strengthen..."

The enemy has already swept through the camp but has left a few survivors; therefore Christ is warning them to build up their strength for the next attack which will deal a death blow to those that remain.

E. Remember, however, that the enemy the next time will be the Lord, Jesus Christ.

He is the enemy of all that is evil. Even when it is one of His own churches that has degenerated into spiritual death.

3:3 CORRECTION: **"Remember... hold fast, and repent." Or else!**

A. **"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard..."**

Remember how you were taught right at the first; and back then you even listened.

B. **"... hold fast, and repent..."**

Hold fast to the truth that you once had and repent of the evil you are now doing.

C. Or else.

1. Rejection of Christ's orders can result in but one thing; Christ, the avenging enemy of evil, will sweep over them with judgment.

2. And when Christ judges it is always unexpectedly and with finality.

"... I will come... as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." (Deut 32:35; Ps 94:1; Ro 12:19; II Thess 1:8-9; Heb 10:23-31)



3:4 COMMENDATION:

(Due to the nature and severity of the Condemnation, the Commendation is extremely weak.)

A. **"... even in Sardis..."** Even in a dead church there are a few live people. But, as members, they will have to suffer any condemnation pronounced on the church body.

1. They could have prevented it from happening.

a. When a brother or sister will not listen when you try to help them out of their sin: **Mt 18:17 "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."**

b. Rather than allow unchecked sin to corrupt the church and bring condemnation upon it, the unrepentant are to be put on church discipline; which has the purpose of leading them to repentance, correction, and restoration.

I Cor 5:5 "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

I Cor 5:6 "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"

2. Evidently this was what had happened at Sardis. Unchecked sin had killed the church and those few that were not wrapped up in sin were going to have to go through the heartbreak and pain of the death of their church.
3. Even the elders are not exempt from church discipline.

I Tim 5 19 “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.”

(Therefore, with proper witnesses, even an elder can be called in question.)

4. If the church had been disciplined, separated, and followed Scripture, Christ would not have to have come to it in judgment. In addition, those members who had not fallen in with the rest of the group, and defiled themselves, would not have to suffer with the rest.
5. If through unalterable circumstances they could not prevent the dying of the church, then they should have gotten out and went to the church were God wanted them to be.

II Cor 6:17 “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.”

B. “... they shall walk with me in white...”

The very small portion that have kept themselves holy will be clothed in white and be with Christ; i.e., they are truly saved, sanctified, and on their way to heaven.

3:5 CHALLENGE: “He that overcometh...”

A. “...the same shall be clothed in white raiment...”

According to Rev 19:8, that white raiment is “... the righteousness of saints.”

(Which, of course, we can only receive through Christ.)

B. “and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.”

This carries with it certain advantages.

1. Those not in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:15) Therefore, we will not be cast in because our name is in the book of life.
2. Since we are in the book of life we will be among those in the new Jerusalem.

(Which is currently in heaven; but it will descend to earth one day.) (Rev 21:10;27)

C. “...but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

(Lk 12:8; Mt 10:32-33; Mk 8:38; II Tim 2:12; I Jn 2:23)

All of these references put forth one main thought: If you deny Christ before men, then He will deny you before His Father. Conversely, if you confess Him before men then He will confess you before His Father.

Rom 10:9 “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

3:6 CALL: “... he that hath an ear...” The call, as always, is to anyone who will listen.

Note: “Overcomer.” (I Jn 5:4-5)

