

Seven Churches of Asia: Sardis

1. Recap of the 7 Churches so far:

- a. **Ephesus:** The church who was doctrinally sound, but their deeds were no longer motivated by love for Christ and the brethren
- b. **Smyrna:** The church who held fast against the synagogue of Satan: Physically poor but spiritually rich
- c. **Pergamum:** The church who held the name of Jesus in an idol saturated city; however there was a spirit of compromise and justification among some
- d. **Thyatira:** A church with deeds greater than the first, but who took no action against the woman who enticed others to give themselves over to immorality.
- e. **READ 3:1-6**

2. Historical Background:

- a. Sardis is a city that has a very rich history, and in many ways is somewhat unique from the other cities that we have looked at so far.
 - i. Since this was a gentile city, obviously there was going to be idolatry: But whereas the other cities we've looked at were defined by their extreme and mind boggling number of temples, the constant feasts where pledges of loyalty were required, etc., in the days of these brethren, Sardis was not known for its religion:
 - ii. It had been over 500 years since there had been any large scale religious structure of any significance:
 - iii. During **the sixth century** there had been an enormous temple to Artemis built; it didn't stay around for long as it was destroyed in the year 499 BC during a military revolt.
 1. **When Alexander** the great took over the area, he attempted to rebuild it in 329 BC, but those efforts were eventually abandoned; It suffered further loss when the remains were covered up by landslides during an Earthquake in AD 17. **(4 slides)**

2. While it was a very impressive structure, it was never really revived for idol worship, and eventually was added onto as a **Christian place of worship**:

iv. What did this mean for the brethren then? Well, we will make more mention of this in the text, but what it means is that the main struggle in the city of Sardis was not one of Idolatry; The cultural and societal issues that influenced the brethren here were not over the pressure to conform, but rather their spiritual struggle was shaped by an attitude that personified the people of this city:

b. **The importance of the city of Sardis** reaches back to the time of the **Lydian Empire**: which had last for many hundreds of years, but had reached its peak during the days of the King Croesus:

i. Croesus was an extremely rich King, having mined large amounts of gold from nearby rivers. His wealth was so great that he funded the construction of the Temple to Artemis in Ephesus, one of the 7 ancient wonders, and his name went on to become a by word for excessively wealthy, leading to the phrase “rich as Croesus”.

1. It is credited as having taken much of this gold and creating the first system of modern currency having minted many golden and silver coins.

ii. Sardis served as the capital city for his empire and as far as physical locations went, you would be hard pressed to find a better place to build a great fortress; Sardis was positioned where it was built into the mountain, with walls that were said to be **impossible to climb**: There was one southern entrance, while the other three sides were a straight 1500 foot rise into the air of unscalable rock.

iii. **In the year 547 BC** Croesus decided that he would go to war with Persia during the reign of King Cyrus. Initially he had success and took control of the Persian city of Pteria, enslaving all who lived there:

1. Cyrus responded rather quickly, and in the ensuing battle Croesus was forced to retreat back to his capital in Sardis: His plan was that

he would recover in his invincible city while the Lydian forces gathered to launch a counter attack against Cyrus:

- iv. The historian Herodotus tells us that Cyrus offered a reward to anyone who could find a way to get in to this seemingly invincible fortress.
 - 1. It is said that one of the men observed a Soldier on the wall drop his helmet, and then carefully walk down a stretch of the wall and work his way back up.
 - 2. That night the Persians followed the same route up the mountain side, and you know what they found waiting them at the top? Nothing! Nobody was there! They didn't bother to post any guards or soldiers because they just assumed that nobody could get in!
- v. You might think that this would have caused those who took it to take note, and learn some lessons; But 300 years later, the city fell again in the exact same fashion to Antiochus III.
 - 1. You see, Sardis became known as a city whose name was synonymous with unjustified pretension. It was a city that had a great name, but in each and every instance failed to live up to it
 - 2. One historian writing about Sardis says this: "Reputed an impregnable fortress, it had repeatedly fallen short of its reputation and ruined those who trusted in it."
- vi. Do you see how this church was influenced by the city in which it was in?

3. The Text:

- a. V1: He who has the seven Spirits of God: This is a phrase that is given more explanation in **chapter 5:6** Here the seven spirits are labeled as being the same thing as the seven eyes. In that context, that image was supposed to represent God's perfect vision:
 - i. In other words, His ability to see everything; not just in the sense that He knows the future, past, and can see everywhere, but most importantly in our context, God can see everything for what it is: As **John 2:25** tells us, Sardis was being viewed by the one who knows the hearts of man:

- ii. I wonder if as this was being read those who heard these words felt them as a foreshadowing for what came next:
- iii. They had a name that they were alive: These were active people; They met for worship; They were faithful in their teaching... But what was on the inside: This was a church who was dead:
 - 1. We don't read about the doctrine of balaam. We don't hear about the Nicolaitins or Jezebaal. There is no false doctrine infiltrating their midst. There was no persecution—no pressure from outside, no being pursued from the Jews; Their issue was not one of remaining faithful during times of conflict, theirs was staying alive during times of peace:
- b. Vs 2: WAKE UP! If you have the King James or the ASV, you'll have the phrase be watchful; Again, I think that the city's history is being alluded to in this address. Just as the kingdoms who had held Sardis in the past had grown complacent and failed to post guards, this church had grown sleepy and had failed to post anyone at the watch.
 - i. **All is not lost:** they were on life support; They were about to die, but it was not too late to shake themselves out of their lethargy and be vibrant once more:
- c. **V3:** If you refuse to post a watch... then you are going to be destroyed:
- d. **V4:** There were still those who were remaining faithful: The one who is able to see all could see that even in the midst of a church that had all but died, there were a few names that were still holding on to truth; For everyone who keeps on, and for those who repent, those names will not be blotted out of the book of life:

4. Lessons

- a. **Condemnation: “you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”**
- b. **1 Sam. 16:7: The Lord sees not as man sees.**
- c. **They belonged to Christ in name, but not in heart.**
- d. **Isa. 29:13: These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me...**

- e. **2 Tim. 3:5: “...having a form of godliness but denying its power.”**
 - i. It doesn't matter how great we look, what our reputation is; if we are dead on the inside we are what Paul describes in 1 tim 5:6 as being dead while we live:
- f. What about those with white robes?
 - i. **A Few have remained Pure.**
 - ii. **The doctrine of the Remnant.**
 - iii. **Told to establish the things that remain.**
 - iv. **To stabilize themselves and proceed with doing God's will.**
 - v. **God can use a minority of awakened and responsible Christians to preserve a dying church from extinction and to fan its flame into a fire.**
 - vi.