

# THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON FIFTEEN = *The Church in Sardis*  
Bible Class Series by Ray Reynolds (4/10/11)

Introduction: Each of the congregations in the New Testament had unique features and characteristics. They all had qualities we can learn from and use to better our own congregations today. In this lesson we are going to consider the church in Sardis. Let's study together . . . . .

Discussion:

## **I. The Geography of Sardis**

The city is strategically located on a spur at the foot of Mount Tmolus (Boz Dag).

\* The original part of the city sat on the ridge of the mountain (1500 feet up).

\* The secondary part of the city was built at the base of the mountain in the Hermus valley.

The city was located on the western part of the Persian royal road.

The site of the ancient city is now located in the village of Sart (near Salihli in the Manisa province).

The only remnants of the city include the bath, the gymnasium, the synagogue, and a few shops.

## **II. The History of Sardis**

Sardis (Sardes) was once the capital of the flourishing Lydian kingdom of the 7th century BC.

There are a handful of early references to Sardis in history.

\* One is found in *The Persians* of Aeschylus (472 BC).

\* Another is in the *Iliad* (Hyde was an older name for Sardis, or the name of its citadel).

Historians believe that it was ruled by Croesus from about 560 to 546 BC.

\* He was renowned for his great wealth and was the last king of Lydia.

The city was no stranger to battles and warfare.

\* The city was captured by the Cimmerians, by the Persians, the Athenians and by Antiochus III. .

In 17 AD it was destroyed by an earthquake, but it was quickly rebuilt.

\* They were far advanced in the industrial arts and many manufacturing companies.

\* They were famous for dyeing delicate wool and carpets (similar to Thyatira).

The Pactolus stream/spring flowed through the market-place carrying "golden sands."

After Constantinople became the capital, a new road system grew up connecting to the capital.

Among Christians it was not lacking in supremacy and influence though.

## **III. The Beginning of the Church in Sardis**

There was a small Jewish population in this region, and the synagogue has been found.

\* The Jewish influence and place of worship would have been valuable to the early Christians.

\* Many scholars believe that the early church may have worshipped at this facility.

We are unsure who founded this congregation and when, but there are theories.

\* The church could have been established after Pentecost (**Acts 2:5-12**).

\* The church could have been established after great persecution of Saul (**Acts 8:1-4**).

\* The church could have been established by Paul or students from Ephesus (**Acts 19:10**).

\* The church could have been established by the apostle John (**Revelation**).

They were strong in the first century but founded during a difficult time in Christian history.

#### **IV. The Work of the Church in Sardis**

The church work was organized and established.  
The congregation was known in its community.  
The local work was respected and had a good reputation.  
Some of the Christians in Sardis were walking in purity.  
Some of the Christians in Sardis were still faithful.

#### **V. The Letter to the Church in Sardis**

*And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, "These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* (Revelation 3:1-6 - NKJV)

#### **VI. The Dilemmas of the Church in Sardis**

They had a form of worship but denied its power.  
They struggled with things of a spiritual nature.  
They focused too much on activities and programs.  
The services and activities were for social fellowship instead of spiritual growth and edification.  
They lost their zeal for the Great Commission.  
They became complacent and lethargic in their personal devotion and study.  
The weak Christians were ignoring the great example of the faithful.

#### **VII The Maturity of the Church in Sardis**

The congregation benefited from John's correspondence.  
Jesus saw that the church could have a future.

\* What Did Jesus Say?

*Commendation: Some kept the faith.*

*Criticism: They were a dead church.*

*Command: Repent and strengthen what remains.*

*Compensation: The faithful would be honored and clothed in white.*

\* They needed to focus on steadfastness and truth.

The congregation had faithful Christians to follow.

Conclusion: God clearly blessed the church in Sardis. We can see that history shows the wisdom and providence of God throughout the New Testament. We should trust Him to provide direction for the church today. It is my prayer that by studying about these wonderful congregations of the Lord's people that we will see our place in the kingdom. Next week we will begin our study of Philadelphia.