

# 13 Sardis

## Names (also known as)

Sardis (/ˈsɑːrɪs/) or Sardes (/ˈsɑːrɪːz/; Lydian: Sfarḏ; Ancient Greek: Σάρδεῖς Sardeis; Old Persian: Sparda).

## Etymology

Sardis signifies: “escaping ones”.

## Location/Description



Sardis was situated in the middle of the Hermus Valley, at the foot of Mount Tmolus, a steep and lofty spur which formed the citadel. It was about 4 kilometres (2.5 miles) south of the Hermus.

Today, the site is located by the present day village of Sart, near Salihli in the Manisa province of Turkey, close to the Ankara - İzmir highway approximately 72 kilometres (45 miles) from İzmir. The ancient ruins include the bath-gymnasium complex and synagogue .

## Scriptural references

### New Testament

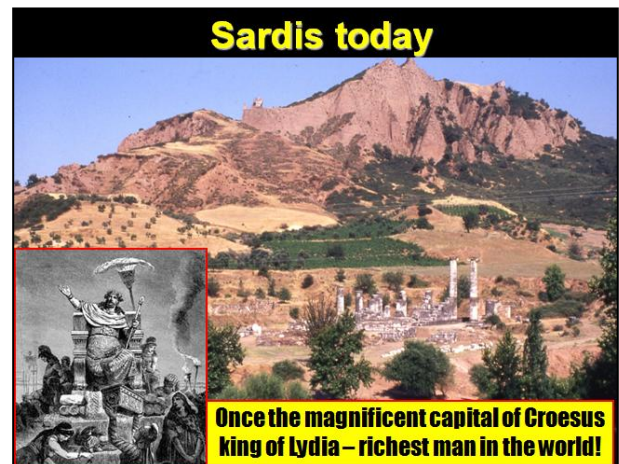
Rev. 1:11; 3:1-6.

## Famous characters

Croesus  
Cyrus  
Alexander the Great  
Tiberius

## Brief history

Sardis was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, one of the important cities of the Persian Empire, the seat of a proconsul under the Roman Empire, and the metropolis of the province Lydia in later Roman and Byzantine times. As one of the seven ecclesias of Asia, it was addressed by Christ via John in Revelation. Its importance was due, first to its military strength, secondly to its situation on an important highway leading from the interior to the Aegean coast, and thirdly to its commanding the wide and fertile plain of the Hermus.



It was the ancient residence of the kings of Lydia, among them Croesus, proverbial for his immense wealth. Cyrus is said to have taken \$600,000,000 worth of treasure from the city when he captured it, BC 548. Sardis was in very early times, both from the extremely fertile character of the neighboring region and from its convenient position, a commercial mart of importance. The art of dyeing wool is said to have been invented there. In the year 214 BC it was taken and sacked by the army of Antiochus the Great. Afterward it passed under the dominion of the kings of Pergamos.

Its productive soil was a continuing source of wealth; but its importance as a central mart appears to have diminished from the time of the invasion of Asia by Alexander. The massive temple of Cybele still bears witness in its fragmentary remains to the wealth and architectural skill of the people that raised it. On the north side of the acropolis, overlooking the valley of the Hermus, is a theatre near 400 feet in diameter, attached to a stadium of about 1000. There are still considerable remains of the ancient city at Sert-Kalesi. Travellers describe the appearance of the locality as that of complete solitude.

Sardis is of special interest to the student of Herodotus and Xenophon, for there Artaphernes, the brother of Darius, lived, and from there Xerxes invaded Greece and Cyrus marched against his brother Artaxerxes. It was moreover one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor, and until 549 BC, the capital of the kingdom of Lydia. It stood on the northern slope of Mt. Tmolus; its acropolis occupied one of the spurs of the mountain. At the base flowed the river Pactolus which served as a moat, rendering the city practically impregnable. Through the failure to watch, however, the acropolis had been successfully scaled in 549 BC by a Median soldier, and in 218 by a Cretan (compare Rev. 3:2,3).

### Unfounded confidence

In the war between **Croesus king of Lydia** and **Cyrus king of Persia in BC 546** a Lydian soldier dropped his helmet over the northern wall. He climbed down and retrieved it and was noticed by the Persian army. The Persians thus entered the city and overthrew it.

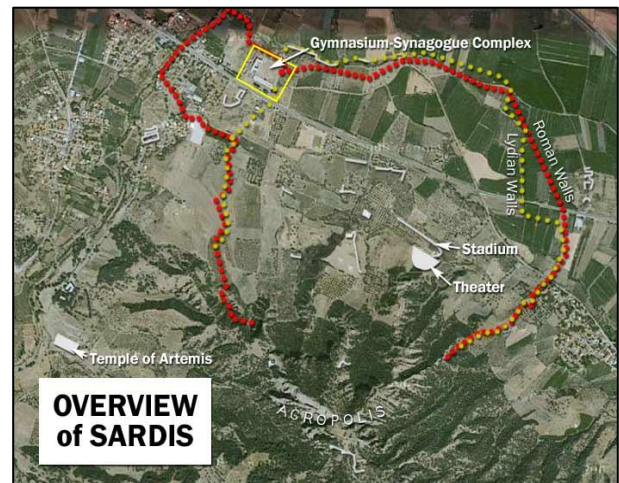
**"...thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."**



Because of its strength during the Persian period, the satraps here made their homes. However, the city was burned by the Ionians in 501 BC, but it was quickly rebuilt and regained its importance. In 334 BC it surrendered to Alexander the Great who gave it independence, but its period of independence was brief, for 12 years later in 322 BC it was taken by Antigonos. In 301 BC, it fell into the possession of the Seleucidan kings who made it the residence of their governor. It became free again in 190 BC, when it formed a part of the empire of Pergamos, and later of the Roman province of Asia.

In 17 AD, when it was destroyed by an earthquake, the Roman emperor Tiberius remitted the taxes of the people and rebuilt the city, and in his honor the citizens of that and of neighboring towns erected a large monument, but Sardis never recovered its former importance (Rev. 3:12). Again in 295 AD, after the Roman province of Asia was broken up, Sardis became the capital of Lydia. The city continued to flourish until 1402, when it was so completely destroyed by

Tamerlane that it was never rebuilt. Among the ruins there now stands a small village called Sert, a corruption of its ancient name. The ruins may be reached by rail from Smyrna, on the way to Philadelphia.



The ancient city was noted for its fruits and wool, and for its temple of the goddess Cybele, whose worship resembled that of Diana of Ephesus. Its wealth was also partly due to the gold which was found in the sand of the river Pactolus, and it was here that gold and silver coins were first struck. During the Roman period its coins formed a beautiful series, and are found in abundance by the peasants who till the surrounding fields.



### Christ's letter to Sardis – Rev. 3:1-6

And unto the angel of the ecclesia in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before



God.

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

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

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the ecclesias.

### Sardis – The dead ecclesia

- ❖ **Commended by Christ for:**
  - a few worthy members who had not defiled their (Christ) garments.
- ❖ **But criticised for:**
  - having a reputation of vitality, but being spiritually dead;
  - unfulfilled works before God.

#### Notes on Rev. 3:1-6

V.2 – “watchful” - *gregoreo* – to keep awake. Bro Thomas - “become watchful”. Need for spiritual alertness to recover sensitivity to the Truth.

“strengthen” - *sterizo* – to set fast, fix firmly, make steadfast.

“for I have not found thy works” - R.V. – “no works of thine”. Works are unacceptable without faith - James 2:26.

“perfect” - *pepleroomena* – fulfilled. Their vow of baptism not carried out.

“before God” - *mou theos* – R.V. “my God”.

V.3 – “received” – Past tense. The culture of Sardis was to rely on privilege and reputation. There was a need for the ecclesia to recognize the gift of the truth.

It is possible for an ecclesia to be large in number and of good repute but to be dead due to a lack of spiritual dedication. In an age of permissive tolerance this is a real danger.

“hold fast” - *tereo* – to watch over, take care of, watch narrowly, give heed.

“repent” - *metanoeo* – to change one’s mind and purpose. There was a need for action.

V.4 – “garments” - *himatia* – Refers to the figurative garment received at baptism – Rev. 7:13-14.

“they shall walk with me in white” – Thus emphasizes importance of walking with Christ now. True saints already clothed (Isa. 61:10).

V.5 – “blot out his name out of the book of life” - As capital of Lydia, Sardis housed the royal archives – the records of the kingdom. Christ now has control of the real records of the Kingdom – the book of life - Phil. 4:3; Ex. 32:32; Mal. 3:16. Names are written in the Book at baptism but may be blotted out at the end of probation.

“I will confess his name before my Father” – Christ will publicly acknowledge faithful saints – Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:8-9.



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(Compilers – Darren Peeler/Jim Cowie)