

Tour of the Holy Lands - Hierapolis



You might remember that the letter to the Colossians (the church in Colossae) was supposed to be shared with two other nearby churches -- in the cities of Hierapolis (High'er-a'po-lis) and Laodicea (Lay'oh-dih-see'ah). Today, we're headed to Hierapolis. So, let's collect our gear and board the bus!

Be sure to look out the window as we go! Over there is a large flock of sheep. When the pastureland is rich, the sheep and cows are happy, and they produce good milk. And when the milk is rich, the yogurt is wonderful. In fact, it was in this land 4,000 years ago that yogurt was discovered and named by the people who lived here.



We'll stop right here where they sell very good yogurt. Those of us from America are used to soft yogurt with fruit added. But Turkish yogurt is so firm that a spoon will stand straight up in the pan. Instead of fruit, honey is drizzled on top, and then poppy seeds are sprinkled on top of that. Watch the salesman turn his plate of yogurt upside down without a single spill. You must all taste it!

In Bible times, yogurt was made by pouring milk into goatskin bags until it curdled. Sounds yucky, right? But that's what yogurt is -- curdled milk -- and we love it!





Now, let's return to the bus. We have an interesting town to see before we get to our destination for the night. Okay, everyone look out your windows again. This time look on the housetops. Do you see something you've never seen on a housetop before? Shout it out if you do! Did you say, BOTTLES? You're right! Some houses have an empty bottle on their roof. You'll never guess why they're there.

An empty bottle on a roof is an announcement by parents that there is a girl of marriageable age living in that house. When a bottle disappears from a roof, let's hope a good husband has been found for the daughter! See how many bottles you can count on the roof tops.



Okay, we're getting close to Hierapolis now. Hierapolis means "Holy City." "Polis" in Greek means "city," which is where we get our English words, "police" and "politics." Can you think of a word that ends in "polis"? Here's one: "acropolis," which means "high city." See if you can think of three American cities whose names end in "polis." (If you're stumped, the answers are on page 6.)



As we drive toward Hierapolis from the west, look at this large white hill – it’s 300 feet high. The city is behind it. We’ll get a closer look later, but because of this hill, the city is nicknamed “Cotton Castle” in English. In Turkish, it’s called “Pamukkale” (Pam-oo’kalay). Repeat it out loud. It’s fun to say, isn’t it? We’ll park on the north side of the city and get out to explore.





Ahead of you is the northwest entrance to the city. Imagine chariots pulled by horses, galloping under the grand central arch, while the visitors on foot enter under the side arches. Many will be coming to be entertained at the theater, but most will be going to the famous baths and health spa. Let's see what they find so interesting!

Some American cities ending in "polis" – Indianapolis, Annapolis, Minneapolis

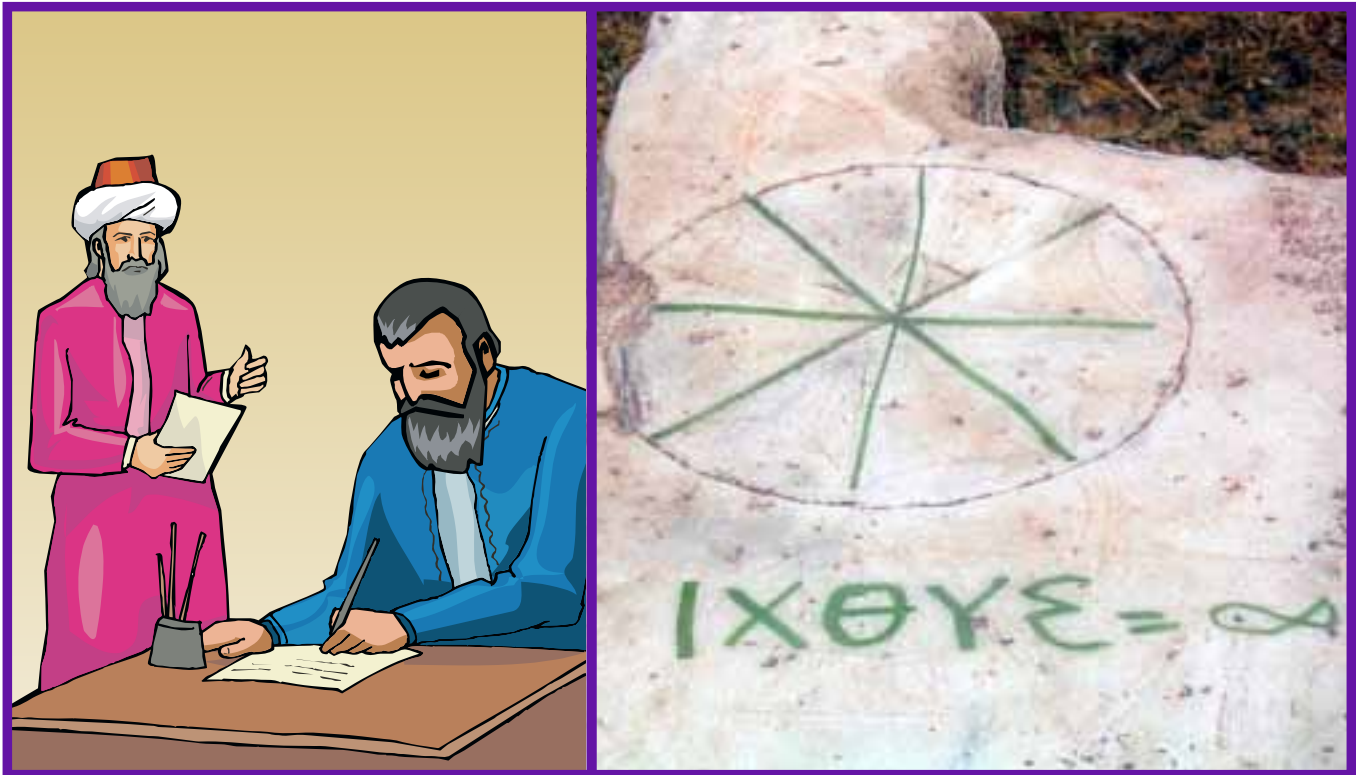




Make sure your backpacks are secure because we have a long walk ahead of us!

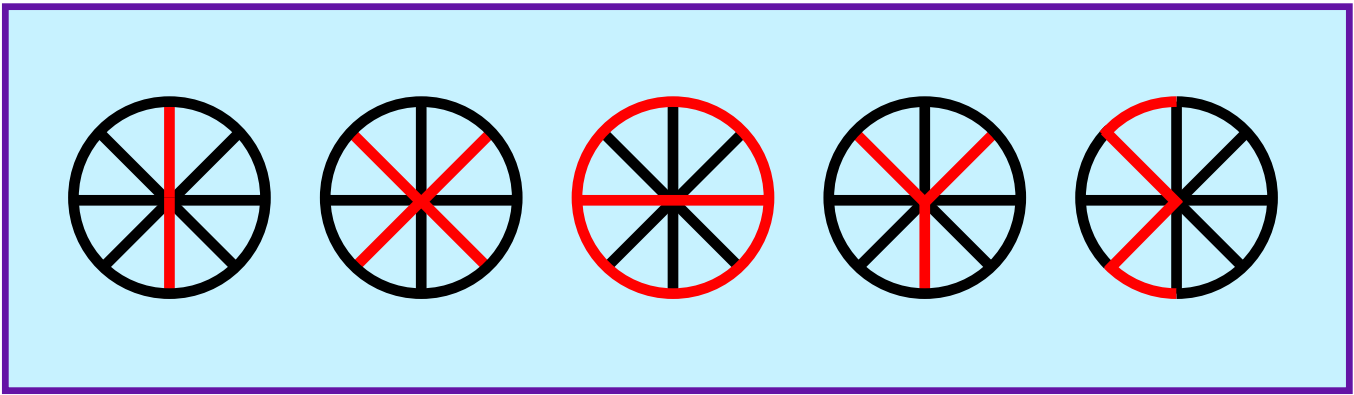
Now that we're here, take a look up to your left. There is a reddish stone structure that's rather plain. But it's full of surprises. Let's see it from the inside. It's a beautifully decorated theater with fancy carvings on the stage and lovely columns. In fact, it's one of the best-preserved theaters in Turkey today.

Christians probably didn't meet here. It would have been too noisy and dangerous, and full of people who did not believe in one God. Instead, they met at a church member's house. When the letter from Paul reached Hierapolis, the church members gathered in that house and listened quietly. Let's find some seats and listen to a short message from Paul.



In his letter, Paul wrote, "Epaphras says Hello. [Epaphras was the founder of the three churches.] He's been praying deeply for you, that you will stand firm in everything God wants you to do. I've been watching how hard he has worked for your good."
(Colossians 4:12,13)

It wasn't easy being a Christian in those days. People who refused to worship Roman gods could be arrested and killed. Christians worshiped one God, an invisible God, and they kept it secret. There were secret signals that only Christians knew. One of those secret signals is carved on the stone road above. It looks like a wagon wheel. Christians who ran a store would carve a wagon wheel on the stone road in front of their business. The wagon wheel was a signal to other Christians that here was a store owned by a Christian and a safe place to visit or hide. Turn the page and we'll hear the secret of this symbol.



Take out your notebooks and pencils.

The symbol is drawn by placing one Greek letter on top of another until there is a stack of five letters, which looks like a wagon wheel.

The Greek letters are:

Iota (Eeo' ta) — **I**

Xi (Hee) — **X**

Theta (Thay' ta) — **Θ**

Ypsilon (Ip' si lon) — **Υ**

Sigma (Sig' ma) — **Σ**



The Greek letters have a double meaning. Together, they spell the Greek word, **ΙΧΘΥΣ** (Ichthys), meaning "fish." Fish could signify "Fishers of Men" or other fish tales of Jesus.

Separately, each letter is the first letter of 5 different Greek words, "Ιησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ", pronounced: Yay'soos Kris-tos', Thay-oo' Ee-os', So-teer'. In English, the five words read: "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior."

Christians knew the secret meanings of the wagon wheel, and felt safe in stores owned by other Christians. Now you know those secrets, too.



We've had a long day. But we have one more surprise for you. Take this path down from the theater to the hot springs. Have you ever seen such a thing? The very warm water bubbles up from underground, and the hot springs fall over the terraces, leaving a white layer of limestone. People think it's healthy. They've been coming here to sit in the hot springs since ancient times. Pagans used to think the gases came from the god Pluto. You can't go in the springs anymore because the terraces are fragile -- they will break if you step on them.

Now, let's say good-bye to Pamukkale, and head to our hotel for a nice swim in the pool.

