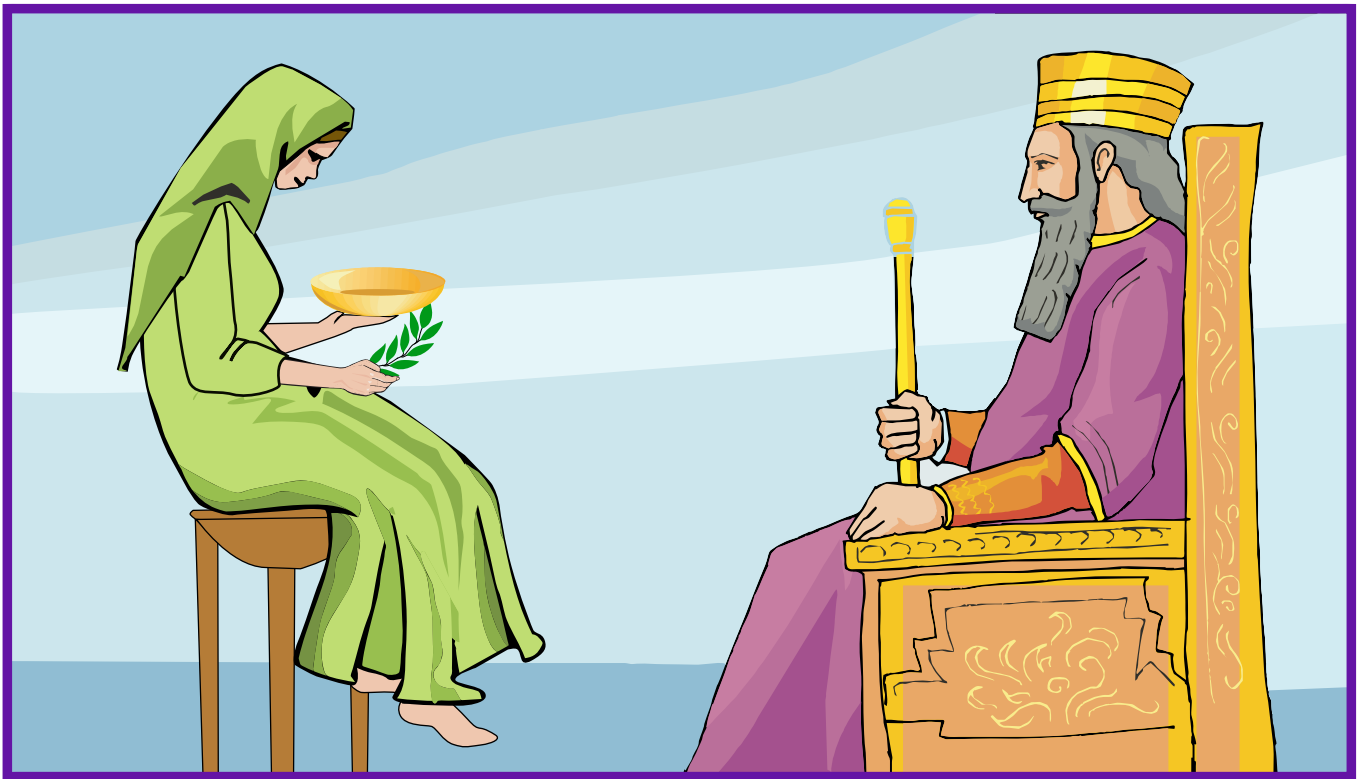


Tour of the Holy Lands - Sardis



Here we are on the outskirts of Sardis, the location of another church that received a letter from the Apostle John. As we get closer to the city, look at the beautiful green valley we're in. Now, look to your left at the ridge over there.

Today, Sardis is located in the valley. But it once rested on top of that ridge, 1500 feet high, like a gigantic watch-tower. The sides of the ridge were so smooth that they were impossible to climb, which made the city safe from enemies. But over time, Sardis became too big, and people moved down the ridge into the valley. Eventually, Sardis became two cities – one above and one below.



Seven hundred years before John wrote his letter to the church in Sardis, the city was one of the greatest in the world. The river that ran through the valley flowed with gold. The Sardis' kings ruled in splendor. The greatest and last of the kings was Croesus (Cree'sus). People today still describe wealthy men as "rich as Croesus."

King Croesus declares war on Cyrus of Persia across the river. But before he attacks Cyrus, Croesus asks advice from a famous fortuneteller in Greece - the oracle at Delphi (del'fee). The king is told that if he crosses the river, he will destroy a great empire. Let's think about this answer from the oracle. Should Croesus cross the river or stay home?



Croesus decides to attack the Persians...and he is defeated. The oracle was right: King Croesus destroyed a great empire – his own!

Cyrus marches here to Sardis, and offers a reward to anyone who can find a way up the cliff.



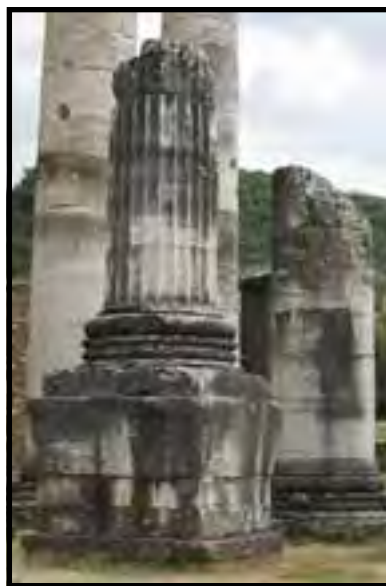
A Persian soldier spies a Sardian soldier whose helmet has dropped over the cliff. The Sardian soldier is making his way down the ridge to retrieve it. The Persian watches, then follows the Sardian soldier's footsteps all the way up the side of the ridge. He takes the information to Cyrus, and they capture the city easily.

Cyrus takes over, and Sardis becomes the western capital of the Persian Empire. New laws are made. The citizens can no longer wear armor or learn how to fight. The people become soft and lose their enthusiasm for living active, meaningful lives. They start grand projects, but don't finish them. They turn into wimps and become "couch potatoes" of the ancient world! Under Cyrus' rule, the citizens of Sardis lose all their spirit, and the city falls into ruins.

TEMPLE OF ARTEMIS



Look at what is left of the Temple of Artemis. Its columns are smooth because they were never fluted. A fluted column has grooves carved into it. The lines running up and down make the columns look pleasing to the eye - tall and straight and thin. The ancient Sardians quit this project...and never finished it.

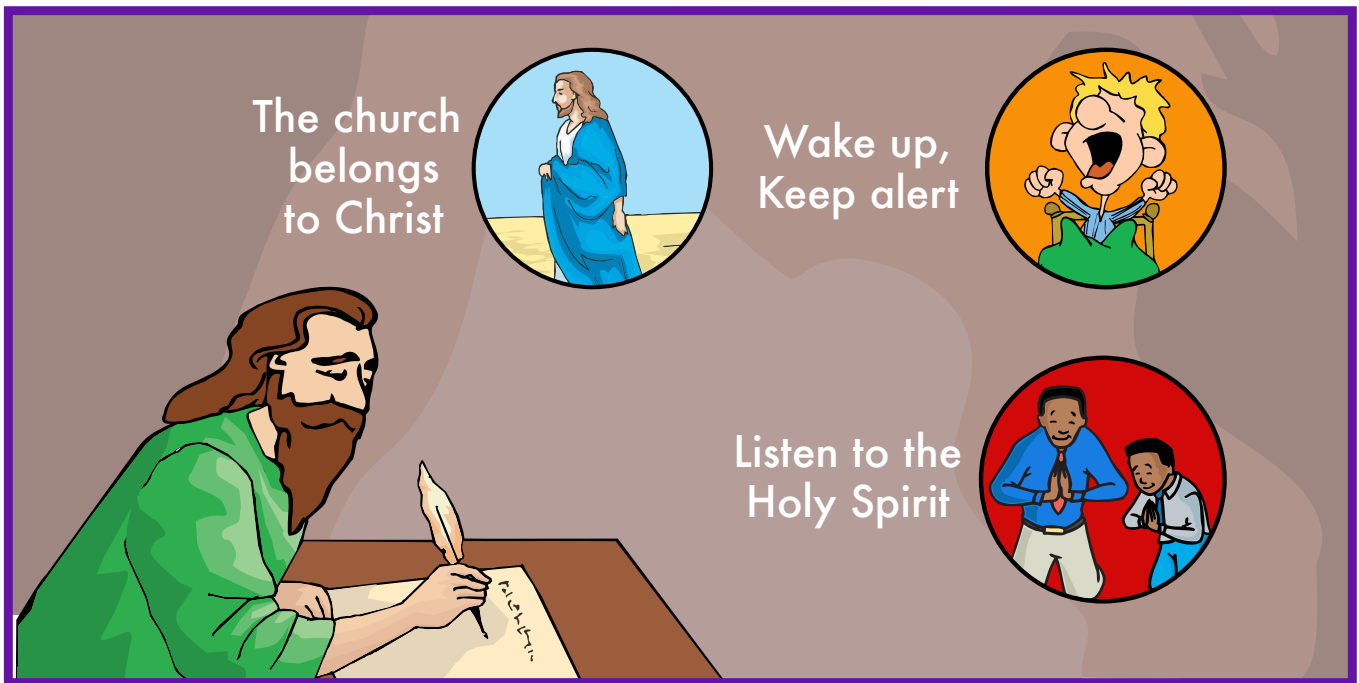


A FLUTED COLUMN

CHURCH IN SARDIS



The Apostle John's letter arrived in Sardis when the church was still wealthy and active – at least, that's how it looked. But most of the Sardians were uninspired and uninterested in the teachings of Christ Jesus. At one time, they had been spiritually awake and alive with faith and goodwill, but now they reminded John of their ancestors who had slept while their enemies took over their city.



In his letter, John reminded the Sardians that the church belonged to Christ, not to them.

“What shall we do?,” the church members asked.

“Wake up,” replied John in the name of the Christ. Find the good news again. Hold on to it. Stay alert. Keep watch against the devil, who will always try to lure you away from being a good Christian.

John ended his letter by pointing out that the church still had a faithful few who had kept their promises by not returning to pagan ways. He admonished them to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to all churches. His words were meant to encourage and strengthen Christians everywhere -- even today -- who are faced with hardship, which makes us feel like we just want to go to sleep to escape the challenge. Not so!, wrote John. We can count on the power of the Christ to move us.