

# The Letter to the Church at Laodicea – Revelation Ch. 3 vs. 14– 22

## *Bible Study Notes on the Letter to the Church at Laodicea*

### Laodicea – History

- Originally founded about 2000 BC by the Ionians as the relatively small town of Diospolis (City of Zeus)
- In the C19<sup>th</sup> BC the Hittites added it to their expanding empire
- In 900BC it was captured by the Phrygians and soon after by the Lydians and renamed Rhoas
- In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC it was taken by the Syrians (the Seleucid Empire) and rebuilt by Antiochus II (Theos), in 261-253 BC, and in honour of his wife Laodice, he named the city after her
- In 188BC it became part of the kingdom of Pergamos and ultimately passed into the hands of the Roman Empire in 133BC
- According to Josephus there was a large Jewish community in Laodicea – Antiochus III (the Great) transported 2,000 Jewish families to Phrygia from Babylonia

### Laodicea - Geography

- Laodicea is around 40 miles (65km) south east of Philadelphia on a key crossroads; and about 100 miles (160km) east of Ephesus.
- With its near neighbour of Colossae 11 miles (17km) to the east, and Hierapolis 6 miles (10km) to the north, it formed a tri-city area
- It is situated on the long spur of a hill between the narrow valleys of the small rivers Asopus and Caprus, which discharge their waters into the River Lycus which flows into the Meander River
- It is near the modern village of Eskihisar (Eski Hissar) in Denizli Province – the nearby city of Denizli having a population of almost half a million
- Laodicea itself is today in ruin

### Laodicea - Economy

- Laodicea was a city of merchants, bankers and gold refiners; at the junction of roads leading from Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamos – much wealth flowed through the city
  - The city had caravan trade as which extended as far east as the Yellow River in Punjab by the China Sea
  - Cicero (Roman philosopher, statesman, lawyer and political theorist) held court there and did his banking there
- When an earthquake destroyed the city in 62AD it was rebuilt by its wealthy citizens *without help from Rome* (Tacitus, Annals 14:27)
- The wealth of its inhabitants created among them a taste for the arts of the Greeks
- The city minted its own coins, the inscriptions of which show evidence of the worship of Zeus, Æsculapius, Apollo, and the emperors.
- Because of its location on a trade route it became a very prosperous city
- Laodicea – Prosperous Neutrality - since the city of Laodicea was never militarily defendable its posture was always one of compromise
  - A highly successful commercial and financial centre, remains of a theatre, aqueducts, baths, gymnasium and stadium still survive to testify of its former luxury
- Principal Products

- Textile manufacturing: it was well known for the quality of its black wool which was soft and glossy, produced from a particular breed of sheep kept in the Lycus valley, and for the cloth and carpets made from it
- A famous school of medicine was there, known especially for an ophthalmic ointment:
  - A mixture of oil and collyrium powder
  - Described by Aristotle as ‘Phrygian powder’
- Water Supply
  - Laodicea was near Hierapolis, renowned for its hot springs
  - Laodicea stood midway between the hot springs of Hierapolis and the cold waters of Colossae
  - It was fed by an aqueduct from Hierapolis, the water being lukewarm when it reached Laodicea

### Laodicea – Church History

- Possibly founded by Epaphras *Colossians 4: 12-14*
- Paul addressed a letter to the Laodicean church which may have been the circular letter which has been preserved as the Epistle to the Ephesians *Colossians 4: 16*
- Paul’s first letter to Timothy was written by him from Laodicea *1 Timothy 6: 21*
- There is a tradition that Archippus had become the bishop of Laodicea. Some 30 years earlier Paul had warned Archippus (thought by some to have been the son of Philemon) to be more diligent in fulfilling his ministry *Colossians 2: 1; 4: 16-17*
  - It may have been his weakness which contributed to the spiritual condition of the church here
  - Colossae and Laodicea are so close they are instructed by Paul to exchange letters - the Laodicean letter, mentioned in Colossians is generally considered to be lost.



*Ruins of Laodicea*



*Ruins of Hierapolis*



*Hierapolis Hot Springs*

*Pamukkale Thermal Pools*



*Site of Colossae*

*See Supplementary Note 24 'Laodicea & Hierapolis Maps'*

## **The Letter to Laodicea – Revelation 3: 14-22**

The letter to Philadelphia, along with the letter to Laodicea, is probably the most provocative and impacting one for the church today

The letter to Laodicea is last of the letters to the seven churches of Asia

### **V 14            The Address and Sender**

The Name of the Church – signifies rule by the people

- Greek: *lao* or *laos* means people.
- Greek: *dicea* means rule, from the Greek *dikastes* meaning judge
- This may suggest democracy – maybe – or a weak leadership dominated by its congregation

***Who is supposed to be ruling the church?***

***Who is the Letter From?***

It is from ‘The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, and the Beginning of the creation of God’

It is from Jesus Christ, from Yeshua

His titles are from Chapter 1, either specifically mentioned or implied there

#### Titles of Christ

The titles that Yeshua uses draw upon His foundational character

***What should we Understand from His Title ‘the Amen’?***

Amen in Hebrew means true or verily or ‘so be it’

The Greek word (*amēn*) means firm or trustworthy and also implies surely (‘so be it’)

- Yeshua is The Truth and the Source of Wisdom - see *Isaiah 65: 16; John 14: 6; and 1 Corinthians 1: 18-22*
- Note: He is called ‘The Amen’ – implied in *Revelation. 1: 6-7* and *1: 18* – it is Yeshua who is the last and final word on all things

***What should we Understand from His Title ‘the Faithful and True Witness’?***

This title is taken from *chapter 1 verse 5*

Yeshua is a completely trustworthy and perfectly accurate witness to the truth of God –

Yeshua is ‘the truth’ – *John 14: 6*

- Faithful and True Witness – The Lord’s word is to be trusted and He is faithful to His covenants – *Psalms 89: 34-37; Isaiah 55: 3-4; John 18: 37*

***What should we Understand from His Title ‘the Beginning of the Creation of God’?***

This title is taken from *chapter 1 verse 8*

Beginning (Greek: *arche*) means first origin, first cause; it is also an allusion to the ruling power or the authority – to the creator God

- A unique expression – only here and in *Colossians 1: 15*
  - Paul, in *Colossians 4: 16*, had specifically instructed Colossae and Laodicea to exchange epistles – the letters are a rebuttal of the Gnostic errors beginning to appear in the Lycus valley



- Yeshua is both the firstborn over all creation and the person of the godhead through whom all things were created (*Colossians 1: 15-16*)
  - This is to correct a heresy, apparently present in Laodicea as in Colossae, that Christ was a created being
  - Yeshua is the ‘Beginning’, literally ‘beginner, originator, and initiator’, of creation (see *John 1: 1-3, 14*)
  - Yeshua is ‘the firstborn over creation’ (*Colossians 1: 15*) – He has the pre-eminence (*Colossians 1: 18*) and possesses the right of inheritance ‘over all creation’ (see *Hebrews 1: 2; Revelation 5: 1-7 and 13*) – He existed before the creation and is exalted in rank above it
  - As a man, He had a beginning, but as God, He was the beginning – sadly, this heresy concerning the person of Christ seems to have produced an unregenerate church in Laodicea
  - This heresy (called *Arianism*) is a tenet of belief in Jehovah’s Witnesses and The Way International

## VS 15-17      **Concerns (criticisms) of Yeshua**

### *What is Missing?*

There are NO Commendations expressed (as with Sardis)

‘I know your works’ – Yeshua knows what the true state of the church is (you cannot hide)

But no works are specified, unlike the good works noted in most of the previous churches

### *What is Yeshua’s Assessment of the Church at Laodicea?*

Two Things

Lukewarm

‘That you are neither cold nor hot’ – Jesus draws an allusion from the local water supply which was lukewarm (tepid)

Nearby Hierapolis was famous for its hot springs, and Colossae for its cold, refreshing mountain stream; but Laodicea had dirty, tepid water that flowed for miles through an underground aqueduct - visitors, unaccustomed to it, immediately spat it out!

### *What is Yeshua’s Reaction to Laodicea’s Lukewarmness?*

‘Because you are lukewarm...I will spew (vomit) you out of My mouth’

The church is so unpalatable to Christ it makes him retch! It makes Him sick!

The church at Laodicea was neither cold, openly rejecting Christ, nor hot, filled with spiritual zeal; instead, its members were lukewarm, hypocrites professing to know Christ, but not truly belonging to Him – see *Matthew 7: 21-23*

False Self Evaluation

‘Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked’

The church thought of itself, indeed said of itself, that it was rich, increased in wealth and needed nothing – just like the city of Laodicea – and like modern day ‘health and wealth’ and false gospel preachers

Yeshua says they are unaware of their true state – wretched, miserable and poor and blind and naked – yet again in these seven churches their perception of themselves was in error, like in Sardis

- Wretched – miserable and pitiable (the Laodiceans thought they were worthy of admiration) – see *Romans 7: 24* (Christ their only hope of salvation)
- Miserable – pitiful, more miserable than all (the Laodiceans thought they were increasing in wealth) – see *1 Corinthians 15: 19* (Christ ...the hope of glory)
- Poor – beggarly (the Laodiceans thought they had need of nothing) the - ‘poor in Spirit’ know their need of Christ, they are not self-sufficient – see *Matthew 5: 3*
- Blind – unseeing spiritually – see *2 Peter 1: 5-9*
- Yeshua criticised the Pharisees for spiritual blindness – *Matthew 23: 23-26*
- Naked – in need of covering like Adam and Eve (*Genesis 3: 7*) – the Laodicean church needed to be clothed in Christ (*Colossians 3: 8-10; Romans 13: 14*)

## **VS 18 - 20 Exhortations from Yeshua**

### ***What are the Two Exhortations Yeshua gives to the Church at Laodicea?***

Buy from Me’ – Come to Me for what you need!

Yeshua uses idioms which would have been familiar to those in Laodicea – they are the spiritual counterparts to the three major industries in Laodicea

Their wretchedness, poverty, blindness and nakedness are not incurable – if they come to Him – each item was a way to refer to genuine salvation

- ‘Gold, refined in the fire’ – speaks of sanctification and purity
  - The Ultimate Refiner offers His gold – *Psalms 19: 7-11; 1 Corinthians 3: 11-15*
- ‘White raiment (garments), that you may be clothed’ – speaks of both purity, justification and the covering of God
  - The Bridegroom offers His covering – the white of purity as opposed to black woollen clothing (a Laodicean product) – *Isaiah 61: 10; Zechariah 3: 4 and Revelation 3: 4-5 (Sardis), Revelation 19: 8*
- And anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see – speaks of clarity of spiritual vision
  - The Great Physician offers His remedy to really open their eyes – His word and the Holy Spirit who will lead His people into all truth – *Psalms 119: 18, 146: 8; Mark 8: 18; Luke 11: 34; John 9: 6-11, 14: 16-17 and 26; Ephesians 1: 18*

### **Exhortation to Repent**

‘As many as I love, I chasten and rebuke’ – God’s chastening is a sign of His love not of His displeasure! See *Deuteronomy 8: 5* and *Hebrews 12: 5-7*

Chastening is the Act of a Loving God, the right response is zealousness and repentance

‘Therefore be zealous and repent’ – earnestly desiring the Lord, acknowledging ones true state and turning around ones direction (*Ezekiel 18: 30* and *2 Corinthians 7: 9-10*)

### ***What should we understand from Yeshua at the Door Knocking?***

Open the Door and Let Me In

One of the most well known and quoted verses in scripture, certainly in Revelation – often used in the context an altar call, calling sinners to repentance and salvation...but it is said to a church (a body of saints)!

It is the final indictment to the church at Laodicea – Jesus is outside the door of the church, not on the inside – politely knocking and inviting individuals in an apostate church to come into relationship with Him

Jesus is seeking to be let in to His church – His plea and commitment is not to the church as a body, but to any individual in the body who will hear Him knocking

The promise Jesus makes is to come in and share a meal – it is a commitment to fellowship and relationship with the individual believer

John MacArthur comments in relation to *verses 18 to 20* that they “indicate that Christ was speaking here to unbelievers. God certainly loves the unconverted (cf. *John 3: 16*). And chasten (literally "reprove") often refers to God's convicting and punishing the unregenerate (*Matthew 18: 17; 1 Corinthians 14: 24; 2 Timothy 2: 25*).

In John’s gospel Yeshua speaks of Himself as ‘the door’ – the entry to salvation and eternal life (*John 10: 7 and 9*)



The Light of the World by William Holman Hunt

## V 21            **The Promise to the Overcomer**

### ***What is Promised to the Church at Laodicea?***

‘To sit with Me on My throne’ – this is a promise linked to Jesus’ second coming

It is a figurative expression meaning that believers will share the privilege and authority that Christ enjoys as they reign with Him

Believers are made, in and through Christ, to be 'kings and priests to His God and Father – they will reign on the earth – see *Revelation 1: 6* and *5: 10*

Jesus is not on His throne yet – having overcome, He is at present at the Father's right hand throne – may verses...see for example *Matthew 26: 24; Acts 7: 55–56; Romans 8: 34; Ephesians 1: 20; Colossians 3: 1; Hebrews 1: 3, 8: 1, 10: 12; 1 Peter 3: 22*

Christ is will be given a throne by the Father (*Luke 1: 32-33*) – the throne of David

The Lord promised King David that his kingdom and his throne would be established forever (*2 Samuel 7: 12-16* and *Isaiah 9: 6-7*)

Overcoming is not a matter of legalism – it is a matter of faith! See *1 John 5: 4-5*

## V 22            **The Common Phrase**

For the fourth time this phrase is the closing phrase - not in the body of the letter  
In each of the last four letters of the seven, this phrase finishes the letter and the promise to the overcomer is in the body of the letter

Why this difference between the first three letters and the last four?

The implication is that these last four churches are in some way 'present' in the days when Christ comes again – at the end of 'the Church Age'

There will be a Corrupt Church (Thyatira)

There will be a Dead Church, a church in name only (Sardis)

There will be a Faithful Church (Philadelphia)

Note: this church suffered persecutions – elements of Smyrna

There will be a Lukewarm (Apostate) Church (Laodicea)

The Common Phrase "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" should make us aware of the different aspects of Application of these Letters:

Local – to the church to whom it is addressed

Admonitory – to all churches... 'what the Spirit says to the churches' – plural!

Personal – to each individual who has an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying

Prophetic – these letters are in a specific order (there is nothing in scripture 'by chance') which indicates the prophetically the history of the church

We live today in the age of the Laodicean church, an Apostate church – although the Corrupt, Dead and Faithful churches are still present today

This phrase occurs seven times in Revelation (the seven letters) and also seven times in the Gospels: *Matthew 11: 15, 13: 9 and 43; Mark 4: 23, 7: 16; Luke 8: 8, 14: 35*

## **Applications of this Letter**

### Local Application

Seek My riches, My holiness and My vision



The churches of Sardis and Laodicea, for whom there is no commendation, are the two that most characteristically describe many churches today – those, particularly in the west, which once were dynamic but are now dead or apostate

Zealousness (for the Lord) and repentance are the keys to their revival

*See Supplementary Note 25 'Inscription from a German Cathedral'*

#### Admonitory Application (to all churches)

Avoid prosperous compromise

Seek the purity of the Lord's refining – gold

Seek the covering of His white raiment – a spotless bride

Seek the clear spiritual, not worldly, vision that comes from the Holy Spirit

#### Personal Application

Personal refining and sanctification are to be zealously sought

Repent of any compromise (wretchedness, poverty, blindness, nakedness) and be committed

The Lord will come in and sup with you - and you with Him - if invited in

#### Prophetic Application

The Apostate Church – the church today – much of the church today makes Christ sick

The C20 & C21 church, particularly in the west, has fallen from its love of the Lord in many places, and is worldly in its attitudes and behaviour

Christ prophesied this would happen (*Matthew 24:11-12*)

#### Prophetic Profile

The seven churches divide into two groups:

The first three – Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos

The Promise to the Overcomer is a postscript to the letter, coming after the 'common phrase'

There is no reference to Christ's second coming

The implication is that these three churches are not 'present' in the days when Christ comes again

The last four – Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea

The Promise to the Overcomer is in the body of the letter – the 'closing phrase' finishes the letter

There is specific reference to Christ's second coming in these letters

The implication is that these four churches are in some way 'present' in the days when Christ comes again

Thyatira is warned it will go into the tribulation if they do not repent

Sardis is warned to watch for the Lord will come as a thief

Philadelphia is promised to be kept out of the tribulation

Laodicea is warned that Yeshua will spew them out of His mouth

## Matthew 13

The Laodicean Church is reflected in the parable of 'The Drag Net'  
The kingdom of heaven is like...

- a drag net cast into the sea which gathers some of every kind – good and bad
- when full it is drawn to shore and the catch sorted

The parable is about the end of the age (*Matthew 13: 49*)

- the angels will come and separate the wicked from the just – similar to the parable of The Tares & The Wheat (*Matthew 13: 41-43*)
- The wicked are cast into the fire (*Matthew 13: 49*) and there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth (*Matthew 13: 42, 22: 13, 22: 13, 24: 51 and 25:30*) because of the loss of what they had and the missed opportunities to repent

The Laodicean Church is the Apostate Church at the end of the age

See: *Supplementary Note 9 'It Is The Last Hour – A Significant Sign – Apostasy ...a Message by Brian Gemmell'*

## Paul's Epistles

Paul's letter to the Colossians was probably written when under house arrest in Rome

It is a letter warning against philosophy and empty deceit (*Colossians 2: 8*) and against legalism (*Colossians 2: 20-23*) and carnality and worldliness (*Colossians 3: 5-7*) - in it Paul speaks about the pre-eminence of Christ (*Colossians 1: 15-18*) – and he speaks of a door opened for the word, an interesting parallel with the letter to Laodicea (*Colossians 4: 2-6*)

The Colossian church is to pass the letter on to the church at Laodicea (*Colossians 4: 16*)

## Yeshua's 2nd Coming

There is an explicit reference to the Lord's second coming in this letter (v.21) speaking about His throne in heaven and the throne for believers

The implication is that this church, together with the Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia churches, is in some way 'present' in the days when Christ comes again

Certainly there is a apostate church present in the world today (particularly in the west) – a church that believes it has everything (is rich) yet has nothing – a church where, in reality, the Lord is not present and He is on the outside seeking to come in, if any will hear His voice

The apostate church is so distasteful to the Lord that it is like vomit – it is in reality wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked

