

# The Church at Laodicea

*Revelation 3: 14-22*

*The Luke-Warm Church*



This was the main street of Laodicea and was lined with colonnades.

## **I. THE PLACE:**

It was 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 Lycus. The town was originally called *Diospolis*, "City of [Zeus](#)", and afterwards *Rhodas*, and Laodicea, the building of which is ascribed to [Antiochus II Theos](#), in 261-253 BC, in honor of his wife [Laodice](#), was probably founded on the site of the older town. It was approximately 11 miles west of [Colossae](#), and 7 miles south of [Hierapolis](#). It was approximately 100 miles east of [Ephesus](#). It was in [Phrygia](#), although some ancient authors place Laodicea in differing provincial territories – not surprising because the precise limits of these territories were both ill-defined and inconstant; for example, [Ptolemy](#) and [Philostratus](#) call it a town of Caria, while [Stephanus of Byzantium](#) describes it as belonging to Lydia.

- A. At first, Laodicea was not a place of much importance, but it soon acquired a high degree of prosperity. It suffered greatly during the [Mithridatic Wars](#) but quickly recovered under the dominion of Rome.
- B. Towards the end of the [Roman Republic](#) and under the first emperors, Laodicea, benefiting from its advantageous position on a trade route, became one of the most important and flourishing commercial cities of Asia Minor, in which large money transactions and an extensive trade in black wool were carried on.

- C. The area often suffered from earthquakes, especially from the great shock that occurred in the reign of [Nero](#) (60 AD) in which the town was completely destroyed.
  - a. The inhabitants declined imperial assistance to rebuild the city and restored it from their own means.
  - b. The wealth of its inhabitants created among them a taste for the arts of the [Greeks](#), as is manifest from its ruins, and that it did not remain behind in science and literature is attested by the names of the sceptics [Antiochus](#) and [Theiodas](#), the successors of [Aenesidemus](#) and by the existence of a great medical school.
  
- D. Its wealthy citizens embellished Laodicea with beautiful monuments. One of the chief of these citizens, [Polemon](#), became King of [Armenian Pontus](#) (called after him "Polemoniacus") and of the coast round [Trebizond](#).
  - a. The city minted its own coins, the inscriptions of which show evidence of the worship of [Zeus](#), [Æsculapius](#), [Apollo](#), and the emperors.
  
- E. It received from Rome the title of [free city](#). During the Roman period, Laodicea was the chief city of a Roman [conventus](#), which comprised twenty-four cities besides itself; Cicero records holding trials and court sessions there in 50 BC.
  
- F. It was very desirable to have the Jews part of the population. They were excellent in generate trade and commerce, and Roman rules, when new cities were planted, often gave incentives to Jewish families to relocate.
  - a. [Antiochus the Great](#) transported 2,000 [Jewish](#) families to Phrygia from [Babylonia](#). Many of Laodicea's inhabitants were [Jews](#), and Cicero records that [Flaccus](#) confiscated the considerable sum of 20 pounds of gold which was being sent annually to [Jerusalem](#) for the [Temple](#) (*Pro Flacco* 28-68).
  - b. The Jews would send their annual offering to the temple in gold, even after they were forbidden by the Romans to do so.
  - c. It is a calculation from this confiscated gold that tells us that there were 7,500 Jewish men/families living in Laodicea.
  - d. The calculation: 20 pounds of gold would equal 15,000 drachmae. One-half shekel was equal to two drachmae. The offering was one-half shekel.

## : THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH:

<sup>4</sup> *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea<sup>p</sup> write:*

**These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness,<sup>q</sup> the ruler of God's creation.<sup>r</sup> <sup>15</sup>I know your deeds,<sup>s</sup> that you are neither cold nor hot.<sup>t</sup> I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup>So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my**

mouth. <sup>17</sup> You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.'<sup>u</sup> But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.'<sup>v</sup> <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire,<sup>w</sup> so you can become rich; and white clothes<sup>x</sup> to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness;<sup>y</sup> and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

<sup>19</sup> Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.<sup>z</sup> So be earnest and repent.<sup>a</sup> <sup>20</sup> Here I am! I stand at the door<sup>b</sup> and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,<sup>c</sup> I will come in<sup>d</sup> and eat with that person, and they with me.

<sup>21</sup> To the one who is victorious,<sup>e</sup> I will give the right to sit with me on my throne,<sup>f</sup> just as I was victorious<sup>g</sup> and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear<sup>h</sup> what the Spirit says to the churches."

## II. THE ASSETS POSSESSED BY THE CHURCH/PEOPLE IN LAODICEA

### A. The city was notably wealthy.

- a.** It was the center of banking arrangements throughout Asia Minor. When Cicero was traveling in the East in 51 B.C., it was here that he cashed in all his letters of credit.
- b.** In 17 A.D. the city was devastated by the same earthquake that destroyed Sardis and Philadelphia. Tiberius, the Roman Emperor, as he had with the other two cities, made an allowance to rebuild the city.
- c.** In 60 A.D. the city was destroyed again. This time the city fathers refused assistance from anyone to help them rebuild. Tacitus, the Roman historian writes that it was said: "Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from anyone.
- d.** Verse 3: 17: *"I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing."*

### B. The city was rich in the clothing industry.

- a.** On the hillsides around the city there were many flocks of BLACK sheep.
- b.** They were called Milesian sheep because of their dark or raven color.
- c.** The wool from these sheep made unique and very expensive outer garments – coats, cloaks, tunics (called trinita) and shawls. They were exported and sold all over the world. This was the only place where these sheep were indigenous – subsequently, a significant source of revenue.
- d.** Revelation 3:18 has the Lord telling them that they should buy *"white linen so that they could cover themselves because they were naked and should be ashamed and are not."*

- C. The city was the most populous area for the worship of the Carian god named MEN. It was rich in the “healing business.”
- a. MEN was the God of healing who was later identified by the name Asklepios.
  - b. There was a world renowned medical school in Laodicea.
  - c. But most of all, the healing for which the city was best known for two eye medicines:
    - i. One was an eye-powder called *tephra Phrygia* that was sold in pill form to be ground up and applied to improve eye-sight
    - ii. The second was a nard (remember what Mary poured on Jesus feet in John 11) that was used as a salve to cure eye sores.
  - d. In 3:18, they are told to ***“anoint their eyes with salve that they may see because they are blind.”***
- D. The city was rich with healing mineral baths. The baths were filled with natural mineral water. When the water was HOT (the Greek “zestos – ζεστό) it was tolerable for a person to drink. The word literally means “boiling.”
- When the mineral water was cold (the Greek kruo -- κρύο) it could be consumed with no problem.
- However, when the mineral water was neither hot nor cold, (term used is luke-warm, the Greek chilaro -- χλιαρό) it would immediately facilitate nausea.
- Thus, verses 15-16.

### III. KEY PASSAGES:

- A. **Vs. 14** --I AM THE “AMEN.” I am the absolute truth. (Literally) AMEN literally means “I guarantee” or “So be it” or “This is the absolute truth.”
- B. **Vs. 14** --“I am the beginning of creation.” (the greek “arkos” αρχή) This does not mean “I was the first thing created,” but rather that I was at the beginning when creation occurred. Very different. (See John 1)
- C. **Verses 15-16** - Luke-warm, not hot or cold.
- D. **Vs 17-18** – Laodicea’s wealth
- E. **Vs. 20** “Behold I stand at the door and knock.”
- F. “I will come in and have supper (Greek “deipnon” Μυστικός Δείπνος.) This was the most important meal of the day:  
 Breakfast would be bread dipped in wine  
 Lunch would be vegetables  
 Dinner would be with the family around a table of conversation.

