

# LAODICEA: WEALTHY BUT LUKEWARM

Revelation 3:14-22

## I. BACKGROUND

### A. BEGINNINGS

1. Built by Seleucid King Antiochus II—between 261 and 246 BC
2. Named for his wife—Laodice
  - a. Name means “justice for the people”—laos (people) + dike (justice)
  - b. Six other cities in region named Laodicea
  - c. This one—Laodicea ad Lyceum—on the Lycus (River)

### B. LOCATION

1. Most eastward and southern of 7 cities—last in clockwise direction from Ephesus
2. On Lycus River—on the edge of Phrygia
  - a. Fertile valley known for agriculture
  - b. Three key cities in valley
    - Laodicea
    - Colossae—10 miles east—had **cool** water well
    - Hierapolis—known for **hot** mineral baths—6 miles north
3. No water source of its own
  - Neither hot water of Hierapolis
  - Nor cool water of Colossae
  - Transported water by aqueduct from Baspinar Spring—5 miles to south [now Denizli]
  - When it arrived—it was tepid
  - Lukewarm mineral water induced vomiting!
4. On two important roads
  - a. One—from Ephesus (100 miles away) eastward to → Syria
  - b. The other—from Pergamum southward to → Mediterranean
5. On edge of Phrygia—to the east
6. On Mount Salbacus—one mile from Lycus River
7. Near modern Turkish town of Eskihisar—meaning ‘old castle’

### C. ECONOMY

1. Three sources of wealth

- Banking
  - Textiles
  - Medical center
2. Very wealthy city—rich citizens built many beautiful monuments
    - a. Rich citizens built many lavish, beautiful monuments
    - b. Lavish pleasure center—with huge stadium and two opulent
    - c. Noted throughout Asia minor as banking center
    - d. Self-sufficient and proud of wealth
      - Earthquake destroyed it—60 AD
      - They refused monetary help from Romans—rebuilt it on their own!
    - e. Textile industry
      1. Produced glossy black wool
      2. Very soft—like silk—and expensive
      3. Citizens wore black garments with pride
3. Medicine
    - a. School of medicine—13 miles south
    - b. Produced eye-salve made from alum
      - Known as Phrygian powder
      - Supposedly cured weak eyes
      - Exported throughout Mediterranean

#### **D. GEO-POLITICS**

1. Ruled later by King of Pergamum
2. Lost economic power when Pergamum lost war with Pontus (northern Turkey)
3. Roman possession starting 133 BC
  - Laodicea regained economic strength
  - Became free Roman city—and justice center for region of 25 cities

#### **E. RELIGION**

1. PAGANISM
  - a. Worshipped
    - Zeus
    - Apollo

- Aesclepius—healing
- b. Emperor worship
- Competed to build temple to Tiberias
  - Lost competition to Smyrna
  - Eventually became ‘Temple-Warden’ for worship of later emperors
2. JEWISH COLONY—OF SIGNIFICANT SIZE AND WEALTH
- Sent annual tribute to Jerusalem—20 pounds of gold
  - Some of them formed nucleus of first Christian church there
3. CHRISTIANITY
- a. Church planted there during Paul’s stay in Ephesus
- b. Probably by Epaphras—along with Colossae and Hierapolis—**Col 4:12-13**
- c. Epaphras probably assisted by Nympha—female—in house church
- d. Paul asked Colossians—**Col 4:15-16**—to do the following
- Communicate (salute) with Laodicea
  - Send his letter to Laodicea for them to read
  - Receive from Laodicea his letter to them—and read it in Colossae

## II. BIBLICAL TEXT

**14** *To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are **lukewarm**, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, “I am rich, and have become **wealthy**, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and **blind and naked**, 18 I advise you to buy from Me **gold refined by fire** so that you may become rich, and **white garments** so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and **eye salve** to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”*

## III. EXPLANATION

### A. BIBLICAL CONTEXT—verse 14

**14 To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:**

1. Title—"Amen"

- Probably echoes description of 'God of Amen'—God of Truth—in Isaiah

**Is 65:16**—*Because he who is blessed in the earth will be blessed by the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth will swear by the God of truth; Because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My sight!*

- He is about to uncover the truth—the *real* situation in Laodicea

2. Faithful witness and Beginning of creation

a. Reference to "faithful witness, firstborn of the dead"—**Rev 1:5**

1. Could be historical reference to His resurrection
2. Could be eschatological foresight of His ushering in final age

b. Also a to historical reference to His cosmic role—as Creator

**Col 1:15-17**—*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*

**B. CONFRONTING LAODICEA'S PRIDE AND UNCOVERING THE TRUTH—vv 15-17**

**15** *I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.*  
**16** *So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.*  
**17** *Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,*

1. Like Sardis—they have a good reputation—but it is false
2. Unlike Sardis—Laodicea is proud and arrogant—*boasting* and promoting what is wrong
3. Obvious references to Laodicean situation
  - Luke-warm—like tepid aqueduct water that made them vomit [spit out of mouth]
  - Poverty—vs—rich banking and textile industry
  - Blind—vs—eye salve—Phrygian powder
  - Naked—vs—clothed in rich black cloth
4. Luke-warmness
  - a. Worse situation than Ephesus—that lost its first love—had grown *cold*
  - b. Here—they are *neither* hot nor cold—and unaware they have lost passion
  - c. Despicable neutrality—Christ calls us to make an 'all-or-nothing' commitment

- NOTICE: Laodicea is the only church Jesus said *nothing* good about!!!
  - He does not tolerate in-between-ness—and half-heartedness!!!
- d. Having your cake and eating it too—both ‘in and out’—once cancelling the other
  - e. Like people with a flag but without a nation
    - They have the banner of Christ—His name—but no place to plant it
    - They are neither full citizens of this world—or of heaven
    - Like refugees without a country—aliens in transit!
  - f. Spit you out—an involuntary reflex
    - Not a conscious and judgmental rejection based on thoughtful reflection
    - But a natural, common, visceral reaction
    - Like hating a tepid shower!
    - Rejection is inevitable and universal
5. Poverty
- a. They think that they have *real* gold—it seems pure—and thoroughly refined
  - b. But it is fool’s gold—of no lasting wealth
  - c. The power it buys is only temporary—temporal
  - d. Like the gold/silver in James 3—it has rusted—been corrupted
  - e. Really like the wood, hay and stubble of I Cor 3—will not survive final test of fire
  - f. It will not survive the testing of fire
6. Blind
- a. Lost the ability to see things spiritually—in truth—as they really are
  - b. Lost the ability to discern right from wrong—to make right moral judgments
  - c. Hence—they are in-between—lukewarm in behavior
  - d. Blindly compromising their way through life
7. Naked
- a. They are not clothed in finery
  - b. But like the ‘emperor’ who has no ‘new clothes’!
  - c. They are unprepared for the wedding feast
    - Like man cast out of the wedding because he is not properly dressed—Mt 22:11-13
  - d. Just as bad—or worse—than those in Sardis who had soiled their garments

1. They are naked and shamed
2. Warning later in Revelation about this problem--

**Rev 16:15**—*Behold I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.*

### C. REBUKE AND REMEDIES

**18** *I advise you to buy from Me **gold** refined by fire so that you may become rich, and **white garments** so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and **eye salve** to anoint your eyes so that you may see.* **19** *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.*

#### 1. REBUKE

- a. Verse 19—gives the reason for chastisement of verses 15-17
  1. **Motive** is—Love!—I reprove/discipline those I love
  2. **Goal**—is correction and redemption—to save them from themselves!
- b. This is not just rebuking—reproving [negative]—but beyond that [positive]
  - It also gives the solution—disciplinary action correct the faults
  - The root word for discipline—is disciple
  - Discipline returns them to the path of true discipleship

#### 2. FOUR REMEDIES

- a. Buy **refined gold**
  1. Strengthen your faith and commitment
  2. Strengthen your resolve to stand against persecution
  3. Your faith will be tried/refined by fire—like true gold
 

**I Pe 1:6-7**—*In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ*
- b. Put on **white garments**—like the promise given to the faithful in Sardis
  1. Like the robes of the 24 elders—**Rev 4:4**
  2. Like the wedding garment at the marriage of the Lamb—**Rev 19:7-8**
    - These robes are clean—clothed with the righteous acts of the saints
    - But their righteous acts are Christ working through them—not themselves alone
  3. We will be made righteous/clean by Christ's blood—**Heb 9:14**—**I Jn 1:7**

#### 4. Understood in context of persecution in Revelation

**Rev 7:9,13-14**—*After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes . . . Then one of the elders answered saying to me, ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?’ I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

- Those who overcome tribulation will be dressed in white robes
- Their robes will be washed white in the blood of the Lamb

#### c. Anoint your eyes with salve

##### 1. Jesus’ chastisement about being hard-hearted

**Mk 8**—You have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear

##### 2. Like the Pharisees—**Mt 15:14** and **Mt 23:24**—Laodiceans had become ‘blind guides’

##### 3. Salve—allusion to Jesus healing the boy born blind

**Jn 9**—made clay from dirt and spit—and anointed his eyes with salve

#### d. Final remedy—REPENT—verse 19

- Warning issued to five of seven churches
- Only Smyrna and Philadelphia escaped this judgment

### D. INVITATION

**20** *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.*

#### 1. POPULAR UNDERSTANDING

- A call to personal salvation—and inviting Christ into our hearts
- Like the picture by Holman Hunt—In the Garden

#### 2. ESCHATOLOGICAL MEANING

##### a. Warning—promise—the kingdom is near

- Jesus’ first message—“The time has come, the kingdom of God is near—repent . . .”

##### b. Now He alerts them—He is about to return!

##### c. Messianic banquet associated with the Kingdom of God

##### 1. Prophesied by Isaiah—**Is 65:13**

##### 2. Jesus spoke of the wedding feast—**Mt 25** and **Lk 12**

3. Jesus said He would not drink again until ‘that day’ in the Kingdom of God—**Mk 14**
4. Promised to His disciples—as they ate around the Sea of Galilee

**Lk 22:28-30**—*You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom . . .*

5. Promised later in **Revelation**—where guests will be dressed in white

**Rev 19:7-8**—*Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has com and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

## **E. PROMISE**

**21** *He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

### 1. CHRIST WILL BE ENTRHONED

- **Col 3:1**
- **Heb 1:8**
- **Phil 2:9-11**
- **Lk 22:29**

### 2. FOLLOWERS WILL RULE WITH HIM

- a. The promise of the Crown—given to Smyrna—**Rev 2:10**—and Philadelphia—**Rev 3:11**
- b. Continuation of promise in **Luke 22** (above)—also in **Mt 19:28**

**Lk 22:28-30**—*You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

- c. Among the last promises in **Revelation**
  - We will serve (**22:3**) and reign (**22:5**) with Him eternally

## **F. EXHORTATION—THE SAME AS THE OTHER CHURCHES**

**22** *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”*