

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON SEVENTEEN = *The Church in Laodicea*

Bible Class Series by Ray Reynolds (5/1/11)

Introduction: Each of the congregations in the New Testament had unique features and characteristics. They all had qualities we can learn from and use to better our own congregations today. In this lesson we are going to consider the church in Laodicea. Let's study together

Discussion:

I. *The Geography of Laodicea*

The city of Laodicea was located in the southwest region of Phrygia in the Lycus Valley (Lycus River). Laodicea is situated on the long spur of a hill between the narrow valleys of two small rivers. The Asopus River and Caprus River discharge their waters into the Lycus River. The city was in the middle of an important trade and military route from east to west.

II. *The History of Laodicea*

The town was originally called Diospolis, "City of Zeus" (also renamed Rhoas).

- * It's foundation was ascribed to Antiochus II Theos (261-253 BC).

- * He built it in honor of his wife Laodice on the foundation of Rhoas.

It's history is associated with two other ancient cities (Hierapolis and Colosse).

- * It suffered greatly during the Mithridatic Wars, but recovered under the dominion of Rome.

This region often suffered from earthquakes.

- * There was a great earthquake here during the reign of Nero (60 AD).

- * The city excelled in science, literature, and medicine.

Josephus wrote that Antiochus the Great transported 2,000 Jewish families to this region.

- * The district of Laodicea was very large and had a high Jewish population.

These Jewish men would have been heavily influenced by the pagan culture and environment.

- * The people in the tri-cities practiced the worship of angels.

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III. *The Beginning of the Church in Laodicea*

The work was well established before Paul wrote to them (**Colossians 4:12-13, Revelation 1:11, 3:14**).

We are unsure as to who may have planted the church in Laodicea or Colosse.

- * Luke records that Phrygians were present on Pentecost (**Acts 2:10**).

- * The church could have been established after great persecution of Saul (**Acts 8:1-4**).

- * The church could have been established by Paul or one of the students in Ephesus (**Acts 19:10**).

- * The brethren in Colosse may have helped with its establishment (**Colossians 1:7, 4:12-13**).

- * The church may have been established by Epaphras (**Acts 28**).

- * Tychicus and Onesimus have connections and went to visit the brethren (**Colossians 4:7-9**).

- * The church may have been established by Timothy (**Colossians 1:1**).

- * The church could have been established by the apostle John (**Revelation**).

There was a large Jewish population in this region.

They were strong in the first century but founded during a difficult time in Christian history.

IV. The Work of the Church in Laodicea

Laodicea is mentioned five times in Paul's epistle to the Colossians.

Paul commands the Colossians to read the letter to the Laodiceans (**Colossians 4:15-16**).

Paul's letters indicate a Christian presence in Laodicea as early as the AD 50's.

The Laodicean letter, mentioned in Colossians, is generally considered to be lost.

Nothing good can be gleaned from the work in Laodicea in the book of Revelation.

V. The Letter to the Church in Laodicea

And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 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— I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 3:14-22 - NKJV)

VI. The Dilemmas of the Church in Laodicea

The church in Laodicea was lukewarm.

The church in Laodicea thought of themselves as rich people.

The church in Laodicea thought of themselves as visionary.

The church in Laodicea thought of themselves as clothed in beauty.

The church in Laodicea was loved by God, but needed to be punished.

VII The Maturity of the Church in Laodicea

The congregation benefited from John's correspondence.

Jesus saw that the church could have a future.

* What Did Jesus Say?

Commendation: None.

Criticism: They were not committed, lukewarm, and seemed to be indifferent.

Command: Be zealous and repent.

Compensation: They would share the throne of Jesus Christ.

* They needed to get back on track before it was too late.

The congregation needed to repent and turn back to God.

Conclusion: God clearly blessed the church in Laodicea. We can see that history shows the wisdom and providence of God throughout the New Testament. We should trust Him to provide direction for the church today. It is my prayer that by studying about these wonderful congregations of the Lord's people that we will see our place in the kingdom. Next week we will begin a survey of Revelation.