

7 Laodicea

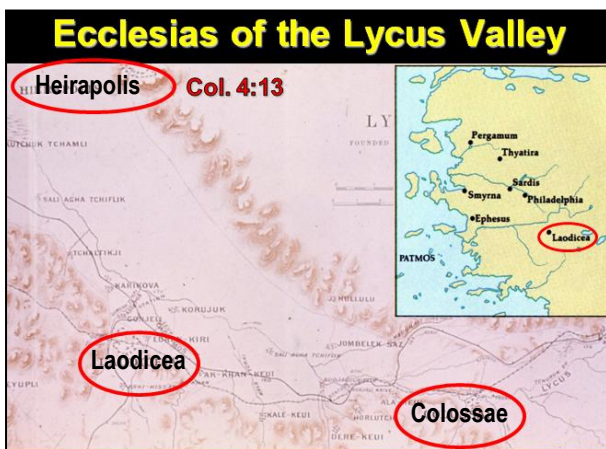
Names (also known as)

Laodiceia, Laodikeia, earlier known as Diospolis and Rhoas; in modern Turkish: Laodikei near Eskihisar.

Etymology

The name is said to mean “Justice of the people”.

Location/Description



Laodicea was approximately 17 kms (11 miles) west of Colossae, and 10 kms (6.2 miles) south of Hierapolis from which it obtained its water. It was about 160 kms (99 miles) east of Ephesus.

Laodicea 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 Lycus.

Scriptural references

Old Testament

None

New Testament

Col. 2:1; 4:13,15,16; Rev. 1:11; 3:14.

Famous characters

The Ecclesia in Laodicea
Epaphras

Brief history

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 honour of his wife Laodice. It was probably founded

on the site of the older town. According to Strabo, it was on a major road in Phrygia.



At first, Laodicea was not a place of much importance, but it soon acquired a high degree of prosperity. In 220 BC, Achaeus was its king. In 188 BC, the city passed to the Kingdom of Pergamon, and after 133 BC it fell under Roman control. It suffered greatly during the Mithridatic Wars but quickly recovered under the dominion of Rome.

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.



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. But the inhabitants declined imperial assistance to rebuild the city and restored it from their own means. 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 contributed to the advancement of science and literature, including the existence of a great medical school.

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. The city minted its own coins, the inscriptions of which show evidence of the worship of Zeus, Æsculapius, Apollo, and the emperors.

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 assizes there circa 50 BC.

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 9 kilograms (20 lb) of gold which was being sent annually to Jerusalem for the Temple.

The Byzantine writers often mention Laodicea, especially in the time of the Comneni. In 1119, Emperor John the Beautiful and his lead military aid John Axuch captured Laodicea from the Seljuk Turks in the first major military victory of his reign.

It was fortified by the emperor Manuel I Comnenus. In 1206–1230, it was ruled by Manuel Maurozomes. The city was destroyed during the invasions of the Turks and Mongols.

The ruins of Laodicea

The existing remains attest to its former greatness. The ruins near Denizli are well preserved and are being substantially renovated. Its many buildings include a stadium, baths, temples, a gymnasium, theatres, and a bouleuterion (a building which housed the council of citizens - *boule* in Ancient Greece).

On the eastern side, the line of the ancient wall may be distinctly traced, with the remains of the Ephesus gate; there are streets traversing the town, flanked by colonnades and numerous pedestals. North of the town, towards the Lycus, are many sarcophagi, with their covers lying near them, partly imbedded

in the ground, and all having been long since rifled.

Particularly interesting are the remains of an aqueduct starting several kilometres away at the Baspinar spring in Denizli, and possibly having another more distant source.



The low arches commence near the summit of a low hill to the south where the header tank was located, and thence continue to the first terminal distribution tank at the edge of the hill of the city, whose remains are visible to the east of the stadium and South Baths complex.



The water was heavily charged with calcareous matter, as several of the arches are covered with a thick incrustation where leaks occurred at later times.



Western Theatre with Hierapolis–Pamukkale in the distance

The stadium, which is in a good state of preservation, is near the southern extremity of the city. The seats are arranged along two sides of a narrow valley, which appears to have been taken advantage of for this purpose, and to have been closed up at both ends. Towards the west are considerable remains of a subterranean passage, by which chariots and horses were admitted into the arena, with a long inscription over the entrance.

Strabo attributes the celebrity of the place to the fertility of the soil and the wealth of some of its inhabitants: amongst whom Hiero, having adorned the city with many beautiful buildings, bequeathed to it more than 2000 talents at his death.

The Ecclesia at Laodicea

Laodicea was the seventh and last ecclesia on the path of delivery of Christ’s letters to the ecclesias in Asia.



The ecclesia suffered from a complacency that was clearly the result of the environment in which they lived. This is evident from the content of the letter. Christ first makes obvious reference to the lukewarm water that was piped from Heirapolis as typical of their lukewarm approach to the truth. They were neither hot or cold. Both are acceptable –

Prov. 25:13 – **“As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters.”**

Ps. 39:3 – **“My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue.”**

Luke-warmness is condemned by Christ (see Luke 11:23), and he warns that he would spew them out of his mouth if they did not change.

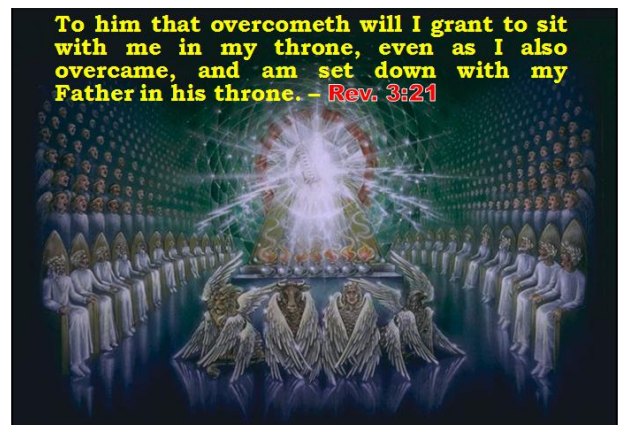
Laodicea – The complacent Ecclesia

- ❖ There is no commendation by Christ.
 - ❖ Criticised by Christ for:
 - lukewarmness in their attitude and works;
 - confidence in their prosperity;
 - blindness to their true spiritual state.
- But repentance was still possible!**

Their problem was ease and prosperity. Materially wealthy, they were spiritually poor, blind and naked. The antidotes recommended bring into focus some of the notable products of Laodicea. They needed to ‘buy’ with full commitment the true ‘gold’ of tried faith (1 Pet. 1:7), and a ‘white’ covering in lieu of the famous black wool clothing of Laodicea. To make these choices they needed to see clearly. Laodicea was known for its collyrium, the famous Phrygian eye-salve, but it could not open their eyes to the realities.

Christ impresses upon them that his words are the rebuke of a friend, and calls upon them to repent and make the necessary changes to ensure acceptance in the day of account.

The warning to them is actually, in the Divine scheme of things, a warning to the final generation of believers who similarly live in times of unparalleled prosperity. The warning is clear – “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.”



To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. – Rev. 3:21

Sources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laodicea_on_the_Lycus

(Compiler – Jim Cowie)