

Laodicea

We have arrived at our last lesson in our study of the Letters to the Seven Churches. Our last lesson will focus on the church in Laodicea. This wealthy city was located 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia, on the road to Colosse, 10 miles to the east. It is not known if Paul ever visited Laodicea, but he does mention it in Colossians 2:1-2 and 4:16 where he also mentions a letter written to the church of Laodicea. This letter does not seem to have survived. Some scholars associate it with either the Book of Ephesians or Philemon.

Laodicea was rebuilt by the Greeks under Antiochus II who renamed the city after his wife, Laodice, in the mid 200's B.C. Under Antiochus, some 2,000 Jews were brought to the region from Babylon to settle in the area of Laodicea establishing a strong Jewish presence. The city came under Roman rule in 133 B.C. The city's prosperity increased under Roman peace and fostered a prominent banking center in Asia Minor. In addition to banking, Laodicea was well known for its glossy black wool cloth unique to the small valley in which the city is located. The cloth was used in making garments and carpets, highly and widely valued for trade and export. A highly famous medical school and its associated temple to the god Asclepius was also a prominent and prosperous feature of Laodicea. The medical school produced a substance called collyrium used as both an eye salve and a cosmetic¹ prized throughout the Roman Empire.

The city did not have its own water supply. It was not blessed with the hot springs found in nearby Denizli, 6 miles away. Nor did it boast fresh spring water as blessed the citizens of Hierapolis, 6 miles to the north. The cities' wealth can be seen in the immense aqueducts spanning the country side between Denizli and Laodicea, as well as the network of stonepipes throughout the city that brought fresh water from the Denizli hot springs. By the time the water reached Laodicea, it was no longer therapeutically hot, and certainly not refreshingly cool. It was tepid.

Laodiceans were devoted to the Roman Imperial cult, worshipping both Caesar Augustus and Domitian. It was also a center of the worship of Apollo, Zeus and Asclepius, the god of medicine and health. The Laodiceans seem to have a keen sense of self-reliance, trusting in their own strength and abilities. The same earthquake that leveled Sardis and Philadelphia also destroyed much of Laodicea in 60 AD. Instead of seeking financial aid from Rome to rebuild the city as did their neighbors, Laodicea took pride in rebuilding

¹ Yamaguchi, Edwin M.; *New Testament Cities in Western Asia Minor*, 1980.

itself. This city prized its own self-sufficiency and wealth above all else. William Ramsay said of Laodicea:

“There is no city whose spirit and nature are more difficult to describe than Laodicea. There are no extremes, and hardly any very strongly marked features. But in this even balance lies its peculiar character. Those were the qualities that contributed to make it essentially the successful trading city, the city of bankers and finance, which could adapt itself to the needs and wishes of others, ever pliable and accommodating, full of the spirit of compromise.”²

² Ramsay, William; Ramsay, William; *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*