

Introduction to Laodicea:
Context & History
(Rev 3:14-22)



Truth Matters Church, Inc.

The Seven Churches of Revelation



A brief look *in Scripture*: Laodicea



- ☞ Only 3 of 7 churches are directly mentioned apart from Revelation:
 - ☞ Ephesus, Thyatira, and Laodicea
- ☞ Colossae was near the ancient town of Laodicea and Hierapolis which helps explain why both are mentioned in Colossians
- ☞ Laodicea or Laodiceans was mentioned 5x and only in Paul's letter to Colossians and I'd like to review these mentions with you



A brief look *in Scripture*: Laodicea



Colossians 2:1-3

1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at **Laodicea**, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

- ❧ The Laodiceans along with others likely have not seen Paul face to face
 - ❧ Paul likely not the church planter
- ❧ The fact that Paul mentions “wealth” and “treasures” is another likely indicator that the Laodiceans were characterized as wealthy, but Paul wants them to know the true wealth that comes from full assurance and understanding of God

A brief look *in Scripture*: Laodicea



Colossians 4:12-13 (in context Paul is listing believers by name involved in his affairs)
12 **Epaphras**, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are **in Laodicea** and Hierapolis.

☞ Epaphras who was part of the church in Colossae prayed for the believers in Colossae and in the neighboring towns in Laodicea and Hierapolis

☞ A couple of verses later, continues to mention Laodicea...

A brief look *in Scripture*: Laodicea



Colossians 4:15-16 (NASB)

15 Greet the brethren who are in **Laodicea** and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. 16 When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of **the Laodiceans**; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from **Laodicea**.

- ☞ Nympha was a Laodicean believer
- ☞ The church in Laodicea met at Nympha's house
- ☞ Hence why Paul instructed the believers in Colossae to circulate his letter to the church of the Laodiceans who meet at Nympha's house
- ☞ "my letter that is coming from Laodicea" - interpretive challenges
 - ☞ Likely one of Paul's epistles being circulated, in addition to Colossians
- ☞ This is what Scripture had to say about this city, now onto history and historical backgrounds...

A brief look *in History*: Laodicea



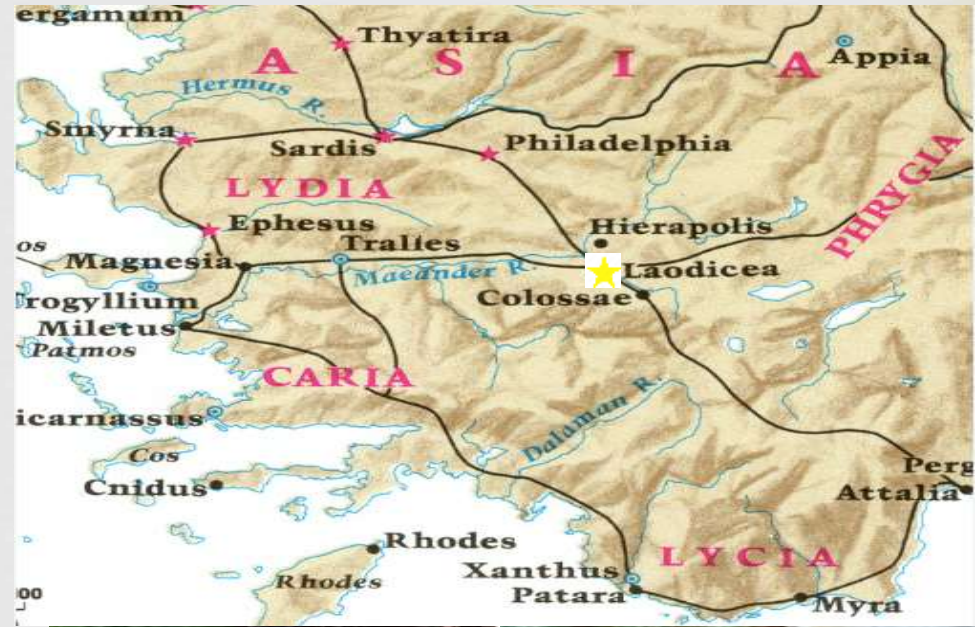
- ❧ Modern day Çürüksuçay in central Turkey
- ❧ Located on the southern bank of the Lycus River, west of Colossae
- ❧ In Paul's day this region was also called Phrygia
- ❧ It is aka "Laodicea on the Lycus"
- ❧ Laodicea was founded by Greek king of the Seleucid Empire Antiochus II (261-246BC) who named the town after his wife, Laodice



A brief look *in History*: Laodicea



- ☞ Laodicea is known for its wealth and prominence during Roman power
- ☞ In 133BC, Rome relocated the main trade route through Asia Minor making Laodicea the site of major cross roads
 - ☞ By the time we get to Revelation the city became one of the richest cities in the known world
- ☞ Widely known as a banking center of its day and the business of money changing prospered



A brief look *in History*: Laodicea



- ❧ One source of its wealth came from the wool of its black sheep
 - ❧ It was famous for its black and dyed wool
- ❧ Another source of its wealth was in its production of a poultice for treatment of eye ailments (“eyesalve”)
- ❧ Laodicea also prospered because of the marble available in the area
 - ❧ Much of its magnificent buildings included marble



A brief look *in History*: Laodicea



☞ In its district were temples and shrines of ancient deities such as Apollo, Isis, Zeus, Athena, Men, Asklepios, Dionysus, Aphrodite, illustrating the prominent “free” status of the city and their dedication to pagan deities.

☞ “Freedom of religion”

☞ Archaeological discoveries connects this ancient city to even more ancient cities of Rhoas and Dispolis (city of Zeus)

☞ Historians also tell us ~81AD there was an imperial temple dedicated to Domitian

☞ In fact it had monumental gates named Ephesus dedicated to Domitian



A brief look *in History*: Laodicea



- ✧ According to Josephus, Antiochus III the Great settled 2,000 Jewish families in Phrygia and Lydia after their Babylonian deportation
- ✧ Josephus notes the Jews were granted an exemption by the city magistrates in the worship of pagan deities
- ✧ Thus, the region had a Jewish presence who also benefited from their independence and economic prominence



JOSEPHUS

A brief look *in History*: Laodicea



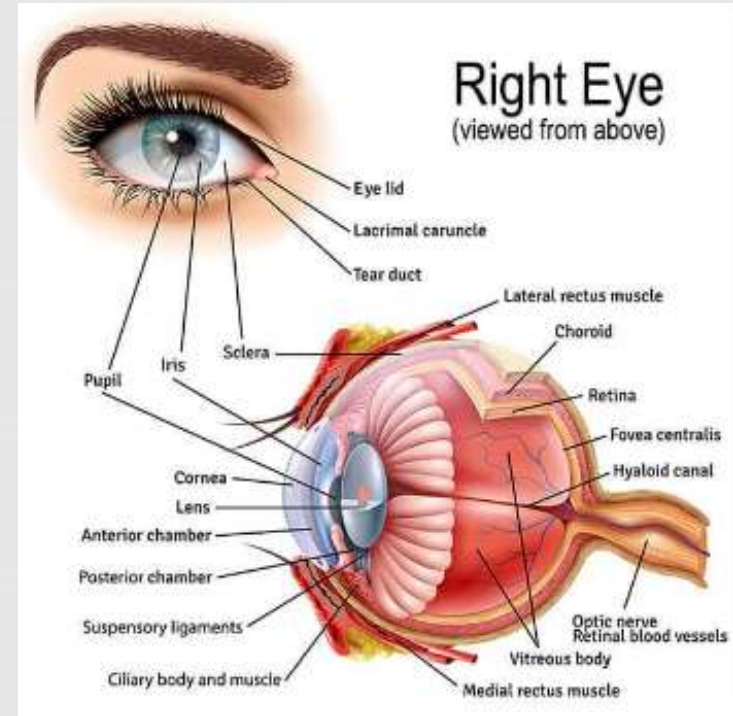
- ❧ Laodicea was a fully developed city had a city council, public latrines, a gymnasium, a water distribution system, cemeteries, two theaters (total capacity ~20K)
- ❧ It also had the largest stadium in Asia Minor (capacity ~25k) dedicated to Vespasian (~79AD)
 - ❧ Used for athletic games
 - ❧ Gladiatorial contests



A brief look *in History*: Laodicea



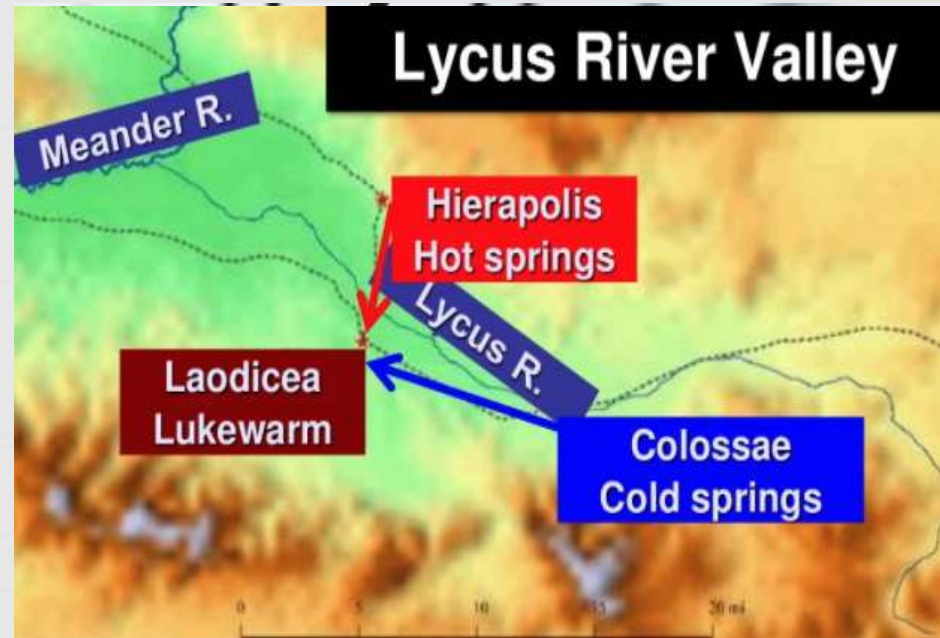
- During the Roman period Laodicea was known for its famous medical schools, textile houses, a complex water system which are alluded to in this letter
- Their school of medicine was connected to the temple of the god Men
- 4th/3rd century physician Herophilos of Chalcedon conducted experiments on prisoners to advance medical science
- Paving the way for understanding anatomy, especially of the eye
 - Hence Laodicea was known for their eye salve; eye medicine



A brief look *in History*: Laodicea



- ❧ Near Laodicea were the hot springs in Hierapolis and cold mountain water near Colossae
- ❧ Unlike those cities, Laodicea had neither hot springs (like Hierapolis) nor cold springs (near Colassae)
- ❧ By the time its waters made its way to Laodicea, it was lukewarm and full of mineral deposits
 - ❧ This helps explain their characterization as being lukewarm by our Lord
 - ❧ More on this when we get to that verse



Scripture Reading



Revelation 3:14-22 (NASB)

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.

Scripture Reading



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.'"