

What is the significance of Laodicea in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Laodicea-in-the-Bible.html>

Founded in 260 BC by King Antiochus II, the city of Laodicea is infamously known as the home of the apostate church that was heartily condemned by the Lord Jesus in Revelation 3:14-22. Situated in the Lycus River Valley, Laodicea, a hub of banking, law, and commerce, was frequented by travelers journeying along the east-west and north-south routes of the Roman Empire. Ephesus, one of the most referenced cities in the New Testament, was located about forty miles west of Laodicea.

Laodicea was built on a spur of Mount Salbacus, in modern-day Turkey; the city was about a mile from the south bank of the Lycus River. Roughly two centuries before the birth of the Messiah, Laodicea, then known as Diospolis, was part of the kingdom of Pergamus. Ravaged by war, the city fared far better and even flourished under Roman rule. By the close of the first century BC, Laodicea was a leading city in Asia Minor, its economy bolstered by finance, industry, and trade.

Besides being a major center of commerce, Laodicea was significant in the Roman judicial system. As the citizens enjoyed no small measure of prosperity, the city was adorned by an impressive amphitheater and other notable monuments. Because of the city's economic well-being, the Laodicean congregation of professed believers boasted they were in need of nothing, but the Lord Jesus, unimpressed by the city's grandeur, charged them with spiritual bankruptcy (Revelation 3:17).

In chastising the Laodicean church for their lukewarm condition, that is, the deplorable state of indifference in their loyalty and affections, the Lord may have been

referencing the tepid water supplied by the city's aqueduct. Unlike the therapeutic hot water that benefited the citizens of Hierapolis or the cool, refreshing water enjoyed by the people of Colossae, the water of Laodicea was scarcely palatable. Water served at a lukewarm temperature is neither pleasant nor satisfying. Jesus warned the lukewarm Laodiceans that He would spew them from His mouth, just as one might violently expel a disagreeable-tasting liquid (Revelation 3:16).

Besides woolen products and sandals, Laodicea exported a locally made eye salve throughout the Roman Empire. The effectiveness of this Laodicean balm is doubtful, but the Lord made reference to its production. In rebuking the apostate believers for their spiritual blindness, Jesus told them to buy from Him "salve to put on your eyes, so you can see" (Revelation 3:18).

There is significance in the name Laodicea. The city was named primarily in honor of King Antiochus II's wife, Laodice, but the name also implies its citizens had more than a passing interest in Roman law. The name Laodicea is comprised of two Greek words, laos, which means "people" or "nation," and dike, a legal word referring to "custom," "punishment," or "judgment," based on context. The Laodiceans considered themselves law-abiding people; however, the church in Laodicea summarily ignored the commands of the Lord Jesus. God's law prevails; unfortunately, the Laodiceans were content following Roman custom.

Cicero, one of the ancient world's greatest philosophers, orators, and statesman, was a chief architect in the formation of the Roman Empire and influenced the law, philosophy, rhetoric, and literature. Cicero resided in Laodicea while serving as governor of that province.

Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60. Rome offered financial assistance after the disaster, but as citizens of one of the most prosperous places in the empire, the people refused Roman charity and rebuilt the city with their own wealth.

A thriving Jewish community existed in Laodicea before Christ's birth. Opportunities in banking, finance, manufacturing, and medicine abounded. Many Jews who made Laodicea their home enjoyed a substantial measure of economic prosperity as well as religious freedom. Initially, the church in Laodicea was comprised primarily of Jews; in time, Gentile converts joined the congregation. Possibly, the Laodicean church was founded by Epaphras, a disciple of the apostle Paul. Epaphras was from nearby Colossae (Colossians 1:6-7); therefore, it is reasonable to think he may have founded the Laodicean church.

From the Isle of Patmos, John penned the book of Revelation. During this time, Emperor Domitian ruled the Roman Empire. Domitian declared himself a living god and demanded worship from the citizens of the empire. Christians and Jews, being monotheistic, could not submit to the emperor's demands for worship, and both groups began facing religious persecution. It is possible that the lukewarm Christians of Laodicea divided their allegiance between Christ and the emperor to avoid persecution and the subsequent loss of life, property, or social status. Ultimately, the church in Laodicea sacrificed their faithfulness to the Lord Jesus for the sake of holding on to their wealth and position.

The city of Laodicea was a thriving, prosperous financial center, but Jesus chastised the church there for saying they had need of nothing when, in truth, they lacked Him (Revelation 3:17). He was outside the church door, yearning to be invited in and take His rightful place within the church: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If

anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me!” (Revelation 3:20).