

# Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea



*“Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.” (Colossians 4:12-13)*

David Padfield

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# Colosse, Hierapolis and Laodicea

## Introduction

- I. In western Turkey, about 100 miles west of Ephesus, in a valley where the Lycus River flows into the Maeander River, there once stood three important cities: Laodicea, Colosse and Hierapolis.
  - A. Originally they had been Phrygian cities, but in the New Testament age they were part of the Roman province of Asia.
  - B. Hierapolis and Laodicea stood six miles apart on opposite sides of a valley with the Lycus River flowing between them.
  - C. Colosse was located a few miles up river, on the same side as Laodicea.
- II. The area around these cities was very wealthy.
  - A. The land was fertile and the pastures produced great flocks of sheep.
  - B. The area was a great center for the wool industry and the associated trade of the dyeing of woolen garments.
  - C. The wealthy city of Laodicea was the financial headquarters for the whole area and the political center for the district.
  - D. Thousands of people visited Hierapolis to bathe in the spas and drink the water due to the claims that the water had medicinal benefits.
  - E. Even though Colosse was at one time as important as both Laodicea and Hierapolis, by the time Paul wrote to Colosse it was a small, fairly insignificant town.
  - F. When Paul wrote his epistle to the church at Colosse, he instructed the brethren to pass the letter along to the brethren at Laodicea, “and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (Col 4:16).
- III. Into the area of Lydia and Phrygia a ruler by the name of Antiochus the Great (ruled 222–187 B.C.) had sent some 2,000 Jewish families from Babylon and Mesopotamia.
  - A. These Jews prospered more than the Gentiles who lived in the area.
  - B. Eventually, Jews from Palestine moved into the region for “the wines and baths of Phrygia.”
  - C. It has been estimated that in the year 62 B.C. the Jewish population was as high as 50,000 (William Barclay, *Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, 93).



## I. The Church At Colosse (Colossae)

- A. During the two years that Paul ministered at Ephesus, “all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).
- B. The church at Colosse was not established by Paul, and it is doubtful that he had ever visited the city (Col 4:12-17).
  1. In Colossians 2:1 Paul acknowledged that many of the brethren at Colosse had never seen his “face in the flesh.”
  2. It is possible that Epaphras, a fellow-worker with Paul, had established the church at Colosse.
    - a) Epaphras was a “faithful minister of Christ” (Col 1:7).
    - b) Epaphras, a resident of Colosse, had great zeal for the brethren in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col 4:12-13).
    - c) The church at Colosse was composed mainly of Gentiles (Col 1:21).
    - d) Philemon and Onesimus were members of at Colosse (Col 4:9).
    - e) Archippus also lived in Colosse (Phlm 1:2; Col 4:17).
- C. “The Colossian Heresy.”
  1. Gnosticism was a great problem in the early church.
  2. The doctrine attacked the adequacy and supremacy of Christ (Col 1:15).
  3. It attacked Christ’s role in the Creation of the world (Col 1:17).
  4. It attacked the humanity of Christ (cf. Col 1:22).
  5. It offered men human philosophy (Col 2:8).
- D. The tell of Colosse is located in the Lycus valley of southwest Phrygia in Asia Minor and situated to the southeast of Laodicea at the foot of Mount Cadmus (elevation 8,435 feet).
  1. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Colosse was a major trade center on the trade route from Sardis to Konya, and was famous for the dark red wool cloth that carried its name, *colossinum*.
  2. The historian Herodotus said Colosse was an important city in his day.
  3. When Xerxes I of Persia marched to Sardis and later to Thermopylae he stopped in Colosse (around 481 B.C.).
  4. The Persian king Cyrus the Younger marched his armies through the Lycus valley in 401 B.C.
  5. The commercial importance of Colosse was lost when Laodicea was established in the first century B.C.
  6. Colosse was rather insignificant in Roman history and is mentioned only by a handful of Roman writers.





7. Colosse, along with Laodicea and Hierapolis, were destroyed by earthquakes in A.D. 17 during the reign of Tiberius.
8. It was destroyed then again in A.D. 60 during the reign of Nero.
9. By A.D. 400 Colosse ceased to exist as a city.
10. "The site is currently unoccupied and has not been excavated, although a few surface inscriptions have been found. What little we know of Colosse comes from numismatics (the study of coins and related objects) and from comments made by ancient writers, but until the city can be excavated our understanding of its history will remain clouded." (Walton, John H., ed., *Archaeological Study Bible*)

## II. The Church At Hierapolis (Hieropolis, Pamukkale)

- A. The city today is known as *Pamukkale* ("the cotton castle" of white travertine terraces).
  1. Hierapolis ("holy city") was its Roman name.
  2. The beautiful white cliffs around Hierapolis were formed by the calcium-oxide mixing with calcium in the hot water springs which flow to the plain of the river Maeander below.
  3. The water temperature of the spring is 95 degrees.
  4. This hot water brought about the worship of Heracles, the god of health and hot waters.
  5. "Another quality of the Pamukkale water is that it cleans dirt, bleaches wool and fixes the color of dyes. Wool, which has been dyed in alizarin, turns purple after being washed in this water." (Tevhit Kekeç, *Pamukkale*, 30)
  6. Hierapolis and Laodicea were the center of the ministry of Epaphras (Col 4:13).
- B. There was a "Congregation of Jews" in this city.
  1. The Necropolis, or City of the Dead, in Hierapolis is dated from the second century B.C. and contains more than 1200 tombs.
  2. "Many inscriptions and symbols, such as the seven-branched candelabrum, or menorah, suggest the presence of a large Jewish community: One tomb dating to the second century A.D. bears an inscription that mentions the family of Aurelii, described as *Ioudaioi* ('Jews')." (D'Andria, Francesco, "The Necropolis of Hierapolis." *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Jul/Aug 2011, 42)



Pagan worship in Hierapolis centered around Cybele, Apollo, Artemis, Men, Poseidon, and Pluto.

The ruins of several well-preserved temples can still be seen in Hierapolis.

“Hierapolis was a famous health resort, with medicinal baths in the streams. It was considered a sacred city.. Apollo was the patron deity here. The splendid ruins bear witness to the magnificence of this city. Here the priests of Cybele made the city the center of her mystic worship. These priests alone were considered immune from the mephitic vapor of the Plutonian or hot spring at Hierapolis. The scenery is very striking all around the city with the high cliffs of calcareous stone. There are rich mineral deposits in the valley and the mountains. From the waters were obtained precious mineral dyes (black, purple, scarlet), which gave the fine thick wool of the sheep a ready market like the fame of Thyatira. Inscriptions mention the guild of dyers as prominent in the life of Hierapolis.” (A.T. Robertson, *Paul and the Intellectuals*, pp. 1-2)

In 1957 Italian archaeologists began to excavate the ruins of the city.

The large Roman thermal bath is now part of the museum at Hierapolis.

Under the Temple of Apollo (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.) was the Plutonium-Chronion (or, Charonion), a shrine to the god of the underworld.

This was believed to be an entrance to the underworld. Carbon dioxide gases escaped from the cave with lethal effects. Small animals, especially birds, that came close to the cave would die quickly of suffocation.



The priestesses of the goddess Cybele survived by holding their breath as they entered for brief periods of time.

When they came out of the cave the people believed a *miracle* had happened, and the priests would claim they were in contact with *demons* in the cave.

Domitian's Gate is a triple-arched gate at the north of the city, flanked by two round towers, that was dedicated to the emperor Domitian in A.D. 83.

The Roman theater at Hierapolis is very well preserved.

The front length is over 300 feet, with 50 tiers.

The columns in the theater are decorated with mythological reliefs.

This theater was restored under Septimius Severus in A.D. 193-211.

- E. According to the church historian Eusebius, Philip the Evangelist (Acts 6:5; 8:5–40), together with his daughters, eventually settled in Hierapolis and was buried there.
- a) It is claimed that Philip was killed here in A.D. 80.
  - b) The *Martyrium of St. Philip* commemorates the spot where, according to ancient tradition, Philip the Evangelist was severely beaten by Gentiles while preaching the gospel—he was then thrown into prison, where he died from his injuries.
  - c) The shrine to his martyrdom is dated back to the fifth century A.D.
  - d) The tomb of Philip was discovered in 2011 by Francesco D’Andria.
  - e) “The tomb wasn’t discovered at the

center of the octagonal hilltop martyrium as long expected, however, but in a newly excavated church about 40 yards away. D’Andria’s team found a first-century Roman tomb, located at the center of the church, which he says originally contained Philip’s remains. The church was built around this tomb in the fourth or fifth century, and the nearby martyrium was built around the same time, in the early fifth century.



Philip’s remains are no longer in the tomb, however. According to D’Andria, the saint’s relics were very likely moved from Hierapolis to Constantinople at the end of the sixth century and then possibly taken to Rome and placed in the newly dedicated Church of St. Philip and St. John (now the Church of the Holy Apostles), although 12th-century reports describe seeing Philip’s remains still in Constantinople.” (“Strata: Philip’s Tomb Discovered—But Not Where Expected.” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Jan/Feb 2012, 18)

### III. The Church At Laodicea (Laodikeia)

- A. Laodicea was the chief city of this entire region.
  1. The full name of the city was *Laodicea ad Lyceum* (Laodicea on the Lycus).
  2. The city was originally known as *Diospolis* (“the City of Zeus”)
    - a) Zeus was the Greek deity considered to be the greatest of the Olympian gods.
    - b) Homer, the Greek poet, often called Zeus “the father of gods and men,” the ruler and protector of all.
  3. The city was founded between 261 and 253 B.C. by the Seleucid king Antiochus II of Syria and named in honor of his wife, Laodice (Laodike).
  4. “The early population of the city probably consisted of natives of the area, Hellenized Greeks and veteran soldiers in the army of Antiochus II” (Fatih Cimok, *A Guide to the Seven Churches*, 88).





5. The city became part of the kingdom of Pergamon and later passed into Roman hands in 133 B.C.
  6. Cicero, the famous Roman orator and statesman, served as governor of the province, residing mostly in Laodicea.
- B. Laodicea was a great center of banking and finance (Rev 3:14-21).
1. It was one of the wealthiest cities of the ancient world!
  2. When Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60, they refused aid from the Roman empire and rebuilt the city from their own wealth.
  3. “One of the most famous cities of Asia, Laodicea, was in the same year overthrown by an earthquake and without any relief from us recovered itself by its own resources” (Tacitus, *Annals*, 14:27).
  4. “The city was at the crossroads of north-south traffic between Sardis and Perga and east-west from the Euphrates to Ephesus. Laodicea quickly became a rich city, rich enough to be able to rebuild itself without outside help after the destructive earthquake of 60 A.D. In common with many of the Hellenistic cities there was a prosperous Jewish colony established there well before the Christian era. The city’s reputation was for its money transactions and the good quality of raven-black wool grown in the area.” (Blake and Edmonds, *Biblical Sites in Turkey*, 139-140)
- C. Laodicea was a great center for the manufacturing of clothing—the sheep which grazed around Laodicea were famous for the soft, black wool they produced.
- D. Laodicea was well known for her school of medicine.
1. “One of the principles of medicine at that time was that compound diseases required compound medicines. One of the compounds used for strengthening the ears was made from the spice nard (spikenard? an aromatic plant). Galen says that it was originally made only in Laodicea, although by the second century A.D. it was made in other places also. Galen also described a medicine for the eyes made of Phrygian stone. Aristotle spoke of it as a Phrygian powder. Ramsay tries to explain what kind of medicine it was by saying it was not an ointment but a cylindrical collyrium that could be powdered and then spread on the part affected. The term used by John in Revelation is the same that Galen uses to describe the preparation of the Phrygian stone. Would not these medicinal concoctions be a reason why John cautions the Laodiceans to buy ‘ointment for your eyes so that you may see’ (Revelation 3:18)?” (Blake and Edmonds, *Biblical Sites in Turkey*, 140)





2. “The principal deity worshipped in Laodicea was the Phrygian god Men Karou, the Carian Men. In connection with this god’s temple there grew up a famous school of medicine, which followed the teachings of Herophilus (330–250 B.C.) who began administering compound mixtures to his patients on the principle that compound diseases require compound medicines.” (Otto F.A. Meinardus, *St. John of Patmos*, 125)
  3. Two of the doctors from Laodicea were so famous that their names appear on the coins of the city (Zeuxis and Alexander Philalethes).
- E. The hot water springs at Hierapolis, just six miles across the Lycus River valley and to the south, are probably what John had in mind when he spoke of lukewarm water (Rev 3:15–17).

1. No other city on the Lycus Valley was as dependent on external water supplies as Laodicea.

2. At one time it was believed that water was also piped in through an aqueduct from Colosse, but there is no archaeological evidence of this.

3. “The lukewarmness for which, thanks to this letter, the name of Laodicea has become proverbial, may reflect the condition of the



city’s water supply. The water supplied by the spring...was tepid and nauseous by the time it was piped to Laodicea, unlike the therapeutic hot water of Hierapolis or the refreshing cold water of Colossae (Rudwick and Green 1958); hence the Lord’s words, ‘Would that you were cold or hot!’” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*)

4. “Water piped into Laodicea by aqueduct from the south was so concentrated with minerals that the Roman engineers designed vents, capped by removable stones, so the aqueduct pipes could periodically be cleared of deposits.” (John McRay, *Archaeology And The New Testament*, 248)

5. Like its water supply, which is neither hot, like the healing springs of nearby Hierapolis, nor cold, like the refreshing waters of neighboring Colosse, the church at Laodicea is said to be lukewarm.

6. Our Lord did not accuse the brethren in Laodicea of apostasy, nor with following some false prophet or engaging in emperor worship.

7. The church is accused of being *lukewarm*—this is the only congregation about which the Lord had nothing good to say!

- F. The remains of the city have only recently begun to be excavated, so most of what we know about the history of the city comes from written sources.
1. The remains of two theaters, one Greek and one Roman, are on the northeastern slope of the plateau.
  2. A large stadium which also served as an amphitheater, dedicated by a wealthy citizen to the Roman emperor Vespasian in 79 A.D., can be found on the opposite end of the plateau.
  3. The unexcavated stadium at Laodicea was used for both athletic contests and gladiatorial shows and was one of the largest in Asia (810 feet long).
  4. Archaeologists discovered a life-sized statue of the goddess Isis in the ancient *nymphaeum*, or monumental fountain.
  5. The gate to Ephesus, triple-arched and flanked by towers, was devoted to the Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96).
  6. On the south-west side stand a number of buildings built under Vespasian (A.D. 69-79), including a stadium (380 x 65 yards).
  7. An aqueduct bringing water into the city ended in a 16 foot tall water tower which distributed water throughout the city.
  8. "An inscription erected by a freed slave from Laodicea was dedicated to Marcus Sestius Philemon. It will be recalled that a Philemon who owned the slave Onesimus (Philem. 10) was a leader in the church of Colossae. We cannot identify this Philemon with the slaveholder to whom Paul wrote, but the coincidence of the inscription from the same area is intriguing, especially since it refers to the manumission of a slave." (John McRay, *Archaeology And The New Testament*, 247)

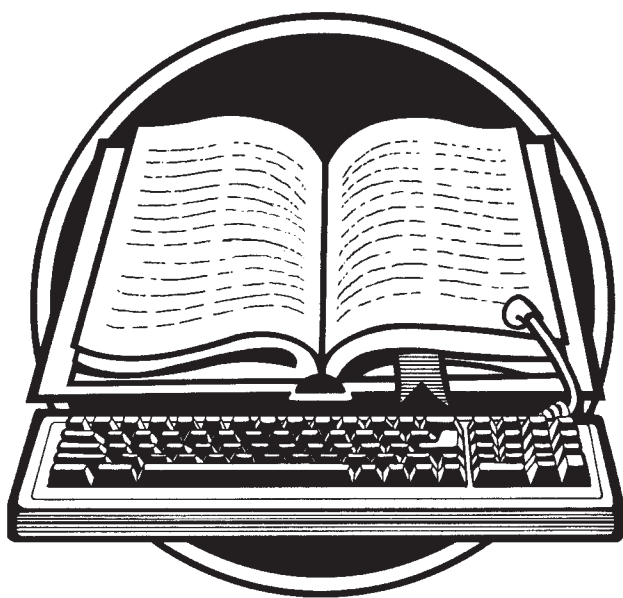
#### Conclusion

- I. What can you learn from these churches?
  - A. Laodicea took great pride in her *financial wealth*—yet the Lord told them to buy “gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich.”
  - B. Laodicea took pride in its *clothing*—yet the Lord told them to buy “white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.”
  - C. Laodicea took pride in its *eye medicine*—yet the Lord told them to buy “anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”
- II. The Lord promised to *dine* (*sup*, KJV) with the one who would hear His voice and open the door (Rev 3:19-20).
  - A. “The word translated *sup* is *deipnein* and its corresponding noun is *deipnon*. The Greeks had three meals in the day. There was *akratisma*, breakfast, which was no more than a piece of dried bread dipped in wine. There was *ariston*, the midday meal. A man did not go home for it; it was simply a picnic snack eaten by the side of the pavement, or in some colonnade, or in the city square. There was *deipnon*; this was the evening meal; the main meal of the day; people lingered over it, for the day’s work was done. It was the *deipnon* that Christ would share with the man who answered His knock, no hurried meal, but that where people lingered in fellowship. If a man will open the door, Jesus Christ will come in and linger long with him.” (William Barclay, *The Revelation Of John*, Vol. 1, 147-148)
  - B. Are you willing to open the door for your Savior?

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