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The Church at Laodicea
3: 14-22

The church at Laodicea DIG: What does the faithful and true witness see when He looks at the Laodicean church? How does the church view itself? Why the contrast? What does Jesus tell them to do in 3:18? Why? What does this say about true wealth? Why does Christ say: I wish you were one or the other? What door is Messiah speaking about in 3:20? How would you describe the Lord, based on what you have read so far in this book? How does this broaden the picture in the gospels?

REFLECT: If Yeshua took your spiritual temperature today, what would He find? Are you hot? Cold? Or lukewarm? The Laodiceans had great wealth but were spiritually poor. Do you spend far more time and money on yourself rather than others (Matthew 6:19-21)? The Laodiceans were self-sufficient. Do you hide your needs from friends, family and church or messianic synagogue out of embarrassment (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)? The Laodiceans were blinded by their own spiritual sin. Do you compare your spiritual life and growth to that of others rather than to the perfect standard of Christ? The Laodiceans thought their lives were clothed in good deeds. Do you walk the walk or merely talk the talk? If you were put on trial for being a believer in Messiah Yeshua, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Perhaps the most tragic theme of all time is the story of Isra'el's continual rebellion against **ADONAI**. The Jewish people were the recipients of unprecedented spiritual privileges **(Romans 9:4-5)**. **God** chose them from all the peoples of the earth, rescued them from Egypt, brought them to the Promised Land, loved them, cared for them and protected them **(Deuteronomy 4:37, 7:7-8)**. Yet despite all of this, they have continually rebelled against **Him**, which brought grief to **His** heart **(Isaiah 5:3; Psalm 78:40; Ezeki'el 6:9)**.

Sadly, the same thing can be seen in the universal **Church**. There are many people in churches, even entire congregations, who are lost. They may be sincere, zealous,

and outwardly religious, but they reject the truth of the gospel. They have all the rich New Covenant teachings about **Christ's** life, death and resurrection. But they neither believe it or obey it. As a result, they are doomed, just like unbelieving Jews. Paul described them as those **having a form of godliness, but denying its power. He** wisely counseled believers to **have nothing to do with them (Second Timothy 3:5).**

The church in Laodicea represents such apostate churches that have existed throughout history. It is the last and worst of all of the seven **churches** addressed by our **Lord**. The downhill spiral that began in Ephesus, and continued through Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis, reached the bottom at **Laodicea**. Even at Sardis there were a small group of true believers left. However, **in the church** at **Laodicea** very few were saved **(3:14a)**. It has the grim distinction of being the only one of the seven for whom **the Messiah** has no positive word of commendation. Thus, due to the drastic nature of the situation there, this is the most threatening letter of the seven.[117]

1. The description of Christ: The Lord did not identify **Himself** with any of the phrases from the vision in **1:12-17**. Instead, **He** described **Himself** using three divine names. First, **Yeshua** identifies **Himself** as **the Amen (3:14b)**. This title is used only here in the Bible. It is a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning ***truth***. **Isaiah 65:16** refers to **the Lord** as **the God of Truth**, literally **the God of *Amen***, a Hebrew word acknowledging the truthfulness of something. Therefore, **Amen** is also used in Scripture to affirm the truthfulness of a statement (**Numbers 5:22; Matthew 6:13; Mark 9:1; Luke 4:24; John 1:51, 3:11, 5:19; Romans 16:27; First Corinthians 16:24).** The idea is that **He** is the true **God** in contrast to false gods, but that **Messiah** is the faithful **One**, who can be trusted to keep all of **ADONAI's** promises.[118]

Secondly, whatever **God** says is **true**, therefore, **He** is **the Faithful and True Witness (3:14c)**. **He** is completely trustworthy because **He** always speaks **the truth**. **He** is completely reliable. **Jesus** is **the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6)**. In this way **He** affirmed to the unbelievers **at Laodicea** that **His** word could be accepted as absolute authority. Unlike **the Laodiceans**, **Christ** was no hypocrite.

Finally, **Messiah** referred to **Himself** as **the beginning of God's creation**, capable of bringing judgment upon **them** if they did not repent **(3:14d NKJ).** In their attack on the deity of **Christ**, the Jehovah's Witnesses' have two basic

arguments. First, **Jesus** cannot be **God** because **He** had a **beginning**. In other words, **He** was created. Secondly, they teach that **Yeshua** cannot be **God** because the Bible shows that **He** is inferior to **ADONAI**. In support of their two arguments, they have eight primary passages of scripture. Three of those verses are used to try to prove that **Jesus** was created, and the other five try to prove that **He** is inferior to **God**. Of those which are supposed to prove that **Messiah** had a beginning, one of the scriptures they misinterpret is in the TaNaKh, **Proverbs 3:14**, and the other two they misinterpret are in the New Covenant, **Colossians 1:15** and **Revelation 3:14**.

The Jehovah's Witnesses' use their own New World Translation of the Bible. The NWT reads, "And to the angel of the congregation in Laodicea write: These are the things that the Amen says, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation by God . . ." Jehovah's Witnesses will interpret this statement to mean that **Jesus** was the first thing that **God** created. This is a clear example of the Witnesses misunderstanding the meaning of biblical words. They look at the word **beginning** in that verse, and assume that it means the first part of something, or the start of something. For example, if I say to you, "I am going to San Diego at the beginning of the week," you will automatically assume that I am going at the first part of the week. But the word **beginning** has another meaning as well. The Greek word *arche,* or **beginning**, does not mean that **Messiah** was the first person **God** created, but rather that **Christ Himself** is the source or origin **of God's creation**. Through **His** power everything was created **(John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2)**. So here, in **Revelation 3:14**, we learn that **Yeshua** is the source **of God's creation**.[119]

The letter to **the church in Laodicea** had much in common with Rabbi Sha'ul's letter to **the** Colossian **church**. Colosse was not far from **Laodicea**, so it is likely that the same heresy plagued both. Gnosticism taught that **Messiah** was created, and the Gnostics (from the Greek word *gnosis,* meaning *knowledge*), believed that they possessed a secret, spiritual *knowledge* above that of the Bible. To confront that heresy, Paul wrote: **He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-17).** This Gnostic heresy was the reason **the church in Laodicea** was dead. False teaching about **Christ**, especially the denial of **His** deity, is the trademark of every cult in the world today.

2. The church: Because of its worldly success, **the church in Laodicea** had become indifferent to its spiritual need. The letter makes no mention of persecution from the Roman officials or trouble from the Gentiles. But doubting the Word of **God**, it had embraced the humanistic philosophy of Gnosticism. The neighboring **church** at Colosse, to whom Rabbi Sha'ul had written to thirty years earlier, had urgently been warned to resist all such humanistic philosophies. **See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than Messiah (Colossians 2:8).** But **the church in Laodicea** had been completely taken **captive** by **the basic principles of** Gnosticism**.**

Like the other six churches, it was likely founded during the time Paul spent at Ephesus during his third missionary journey **(Acts 19:10)**. There is no evidence, however, that Rabbi Sha'ul ever visited **the church**, but he did write them a letter **(Colossians 4:16)**. Perhaps the fact that their letter is now lost demonstrates how little good it did them. Since Epaphras, Paul's partner in ministry, founded **the church** in nearby Colosse **(Colossians 1:6-7)**, he may have also founded **the Laodicean church** as well **(3:14a)**. Here **Yeshua** found this **church** only worthy of blame and encouragement; **He** did not praise **them** for anything.



3. The city: Laodicea was located about forty miles southeast of Philadelphia. There was a cluster of three cities, Hieropolis, Colosse, and **Laodicea**, which was the main city of the Roman province named Phrygia. Also located at the junction of two important imperial trade routes and completed the circle of seven **churches (3:14b)**. The first trade route led east a hundred miles to Ephesus and beyond, and the second from Pergamum to the Mediterranean. Five of the seven cities to which **John** wrote lay in order along this second trade route (Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis,

Philadelphia, and **Laodicea**).[120] Located on a plateau several hundred feet high, it seemed to be invincible. But in reality, it was extremely vulnerable because it had to bring its water supply from several miles away through an underground aqueduct that could easily be blocked by attacking forces before the Roman peace. Because of this vulnerability, they had to learn the art of appeasement.

It was founded about the middle of the third century BC by Antiochus II and was named after his first wife Laodice. Since he divorced her in 253 BC, the city was probably founded before that date. Though its original settlers were largely from Syria, a significant number of Jews also settled there. They lived a life of luxury and ease **in Laodicea**.

Not unlike Wall Street, **Laodicea** was the major banking center of Asia Minor because of its favorable location. This meant it attracted people with means and became the wealthiest city in Phrygia. The Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero cashed his letters of credit there, indicating its importance as a banking center. The city had so much **gold** that it paid for its own reconstruction after the devastating earthquake in AD 60, rejecting offers of financial aide from Rome.[121] They were very proud of that, and money continued to flow freely through its streets, reflected in its buildings, its businesses, and, yes, in its **church**.

*Dear Heavenly **Father, You** are so wonderful and a relationship with **You** is worth far more than any earthly gold. Praise **You** that **You** are the foundation and the only way to heaven and when we build lovingly on **You, You** reward **Your** children. **You** see the heart to see if the good deed was done with love for **You** or out of a desire to please others. **You** consider serving **You** out of a heart of love and surrender to **You**, to be like building with gold. **Let each consider carefully how he builds on it. For no one can lay any other foundation than what is already laid – which is Yeshua the Messiah. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear. For the Day will show it, because it is to be revealed by fire; and the fire itself will test each one's work – what sort it is. If anyone's work built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. (First Corinthians 3:10c-14).** How wonderful to love **You** now and to look forward to living with **You** forever in **Your** perfect heaven. In **Your** holy **Son's** name and power of resurrection. Amen*

The fertile soil of the Lycus valley provided excellent grazing for unusual flocks of sheep. They were black, not white. By careful breeding, soft, glossy black wool was

used to produce **clothes to wear**. It was in much demand and made **the city** famous. **Laodicea** also had a flourishing medical school that was especially noted for its "Phrygian powder." They claimed when mixed with oil that was used as an **eye salve** and would cure Oriental eye diseases.[122] All three industries, **gold**, wool and medicine, are used by **the Lord** to make **His** point to **the church in Laodicea**.

4. The commendation: The church of Laodicea has the dubious distinction of being the only one whose conduct was so unacceptable that even **Jesus**, who knew all about **them**, could not find one positive thing to say about **them**. The **church** was almost entirely lost. The few believers there were "closet Christians," not wanting anyone to find out about their faith.

5. The concern: Because there was nothing for which to commend this spiritually dead **church**, **the Lord** went right into **His** concerns. **Jesus** said to them: **I know your deeds. Deeds** always reveal a person's true spiritual condition. **Yeshua** declared: **By their fruit you will recognize them (Matthew 7:16).** Although salvation is by faith alone, **deeds** either prove or refute the presence of genuine salvation. **James**, the brother of **Christ**, asked this question: **What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds (James 2:14)?** The grammatical form of the question demands a negative response. No, it cannot save. Spiritual **fruit** is not *the means* to salvation, but spiritual fruit is *the evidence* of salvation, and there was very little *evidence* of spiritual **fruit in the Laodicean church**.

Jesus reprimanded **them** because **they** were **neither cold not hot** but **lukewarm. He** said: **I wish you were either one or the other!** This symbolic language comes from **Laodicea's** own water supply. Since **they** had to bring it from several miles away through an underground aqueduct, the water came to them polluted, dirty and **lukewarm**. It was not hot and relaxing like the **hot** springs at Hierapolis. Nor was it **cold** and refreshing like the brooks of Colosse. **So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I AM about to spit you out of My mouth (3:15-16).** The distinction between **hot**, **cold** and **lukewarm** can be determined by the overall context. The **hot** are the truly saved believers. The **cold** are those who are not believers and do not claim to be believers. The **lukewarm** are those who claim to believe in **Yeshua the Messiah**, but there is dearth of any fruit.[123] Some churches make **the Lord** cry, others make **Him** angry, but this **lukewarm church** made **Him** sick.

Their limited amount of spiritual **fruit** was compounded by **their** self-deception.

The church at Laodicea boasted that it was healthy and prosperous, saying: **I am rich. I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But Jesus** contradicted **them** by saying: **You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked (3:17).** Characterized by richness in worldly things, and self-deception, **they** were spiritually **poor, blind and naked**. Not only did **the church** boast in **their** supposed spiritual well-being, **they** boasted that **they** had acquired **their wealth** by **their** own efforts. Spiritual complacency was accompanied by spiritual pride.[124] **Their** belief in Gnosticism led **them** to believe that **they** had a higher level of spiritual knowledge. **They** looked down on the unsophisticated who were satisfied with the teachings of the Bible and **the Person** of **Messiah**.

The church in Laodicea is also a very good description of the Apostate Church, Mystery Babylon, during the Great Tribulation. Only those few who secretly aided the Jews would become **the sheep** of the Great Tribulation and enter into the Messianic Kingdom (**to see link click Fc – The Sheep and the Goats**). Like **the sheep** Gentiles of the Great Tribulation, if anyone did accept **Christ** as their **Lord** and **Savior** they wanted to keep it a secret.

Apostasy can be defined as *the departure from the truth that one professes to have.* It does not mean that the apostate actually possesses the truth. Rather, it is a *departure from the truth he profess to have* because of an affiliation with a particular denomination. For example, a minister of a Baptist, Presbyterian or Methodist Church is professing, by virtue of his very position, to believe in the doctrines of the Baptist, Presbyterian or Methodist Church respectively. But actually the apostates deny these doctrines and have departed from the truth that they professes to have.

Rabbi Sha'ul clearly taught that there would be an apostasy of many outwardly religious people in the last days before the Second Coming. **Don't let anyone deceive you in any way for [the Day of the Lord] will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed (Second Thessalonians 2:3).** The Greek word for **the rebellion** is *apostosia,* which can be translated *the apostasy.* **The man of lawlessness**, the antichrist, will **be revealed** during the Great Tribulation. At that time, the Mystery Babylon will only have **a form of godliness, having denied the power God (Second Timothy 3:5a)**.

6. The command: Of course, **the Lord** could have easily destroyed this apostate **church**. Instead, **He** graciously offered them salvation. But **He** used the three things that **the Laodiceans** were most proud of, **their wealth**, **their** wool industry

and **their eye salve**. As an alternative, **Yeshua** offered **them** spiritual **gold**, spiritual **clothes** and spiritual sight. Of course, **Christ** did not teach that salvation could be bought by our good **deeds**. Because of our sin nature, we have nothing with which **to buy** our salvation **(Isaiah 64:5-6)**. We can only repent, and offer our pitiful, lost condition in exchange for **Messiah's** righteousness. **He** knew **the Laodiceans** were far too undisciplined to obey orders, so here **He** did not command **them**, but advised **them** to buy three things, all of which picture true salvation.

First, **the Lord** encouraged **them to buy gold refined in the fire, so** that **they** might **become rich (3:18a).** Although its banking industry had material wealth, **the church** lacked spiritual richness.[125] **They** needed **gold** that was free of impurities that could only be refined by true salvation. **Peter** wrote of a **faith** much **greater than gold (First Peter 1:7)**. Therefore, **Yeshua** offered **the Laodiceans** a relationship with **Him** that was far greater than any wealth that **they** thought **they** possessed.

Secondly, **the Lord** advised **them** to **buy the** spiritually **white clothes** of righteousness, **so** that **they** could **cover their shameful** spiritual **nakedness (3:18b).** Those holy **clothes** can only be purchased by faith in the blood of **Christ**. **Laodicea's** famous black woolen cloth symbolized the dirty, sinful **clothes** that those who have rejected **the Messiah** wear **(Isaiah 64:6; Zechariah 3:3-4)**. **They** needed to exchange **their** filthy rags for the **white clothes** of salvation **(3:4-5, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9-14, 19:14)**.

Finally, **the Messiah** offered **them salve to put on their** spiritual **eyes, so they** could **see their** true spiritual condition **(3:18c).** Confident of **their** clear vision into spiritual matters, it seemed that **the Laodiceans** needed **their** own **eye salve** to restore **their** sight. Blindness represents lack of understanding and knowledge of spiritual truth **(Matthew 23:16-17; Luke 6:39; John 9:40-41; Romans 2:19; Second Corinthians 4:4; First John 2:11)**. Like all lost people, **the Laodiceans** needed **to open their eyes and turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they** could **receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18).**

Some argue that the language of **Christ's** direct appeal to **the Laodiceans**: **Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline (3:19a NASB)**, indicates that this was a believing **church**. The context in **verses 18** and **20**, however, points to the fact that most were lost. **The Messiah** has a unique and special **love** for those who

believe in **Him**. Yet such passages as **Mark 10:21** and **John 3:16** reveal that **He** also loves those who have rejected **Him**. To **reprove** means *to expose and convict.* It is a general term for **God's** dealing with sinners **(John 3:18-20, 16:8; First Corinthians 14:24; Titus 1:9; Jude 15)**. **Discipline** refers to punishment **(Luke 23: 16** and **22)** and is used of **ADONAI's** convicting of unbelievers **(Second Timothy 2:25)**. So the terminology of this verse does not demand that **Christ** be referring to believers. **The Lord** compassionately, tenderly called those in this lost **church** to come to saving faith. But in order for **the Laodiceans** to be saved **they** would need to **be earnest and repent (3:19b)**. The message to **them**, as it is to all the unsaved, is to passionately pursue the **repentance that leads to life (Acts 11:18 NASB).**

Jesus said to these apostate Gnostics: **Here I am! I stand at the door and knock (3:20a).** Although this passage has been used in countless tracts and sermons to picture **the Lord** knocking on **the door** of the sinner's heart, it is broader than that. **The door** on which **Christ** knocks is not **the door** of a single human heart, but to **the** whole **Laodicean church**.

Here I AM! I stand at the door and knock. The present tense indicates continual knocking. **If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me (3:20 NASB).** The Greek phrase for **I will come in to** is *eiseleusomai pros*. Note the space between the prepositions. The idea of *come into* would be expressed with *eij* as the independent preposition and would suggest a penetration into the person. However, spatially *pros* means t*oward*, not into. In all eight instances of *eiserchomai pros* in the New Covenant, the meaning is *come in toward or enter a building, house, etc.,* never penetration into the person himself/herself. In some instances, such a view would not only be absurd, but inappropriate **(Mark 6:25, 15:43; Luke 1:28; Acts 10:3, 11:3, 16:40, 17:2** and **28:8).**

Messiah was outside, wanting to **come into the** apostate **church** to bring spiritual life. Something that could only happen if **they** would **repent**. But for virtually all of **them**, **their** pride, self-sufficiency and hypocrisy had kept **Him** at arm's length. The picture of **Jesus** standing outside **the Laodicean church** wanting to **come in** points to the sad fact that there were merely a few undercover believers in that city.[126]

God's readiness to receive repentant sinners, well known from the TaNaKh **(Zechariah 1:3)** and restated in the B'rit Chadashah, is the basis for what **Yeshua**

says in this verse: **If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me (3:20b).** Unlike most guests, here, **the Lord** provides the food, the spiritual nourishment that gives the strength needed to repent. The metaphor of meal-sharing **(Luke 15:2; John 14:23; Acts 11:3)** is appropriate to Jewish and most other cultures, where fellowship around a meal implies affection, intimacy and mutual confidence. In short, **Jesus** is promising to be intimately and truly present with anyone who genuinely asks **Him**, Jew or Gentile alike. But **the Laodiceans**, in **their blind** self-sufficiency, had, in effect, excommunicated **Messiah** from **their church**. And **if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9b).** But even though almost all of **them** were apostates, **Jesus** urged **them** to repent and have fellowship with **Him** before judgment came. Life has many choices. Eternity has only two. What's yours?

7. The counsel: Yeshua presents **Himself** as the model for anyone who wants to win the victory over evil, temptation and apathy: **To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne (3:21).** This is an amazing demonstration of grace. The apostates who were about to be **spit out of the Lord's mouth** were invited to **sit with Him on His Father's throne**. To have a relationship with **the Messiah** for all eternity is blessing enough, but **He** offers more. **He** promises **to sit** believers **on** the same **throne** that **He** shares **with the Father (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29-30)**. This symbolizes the truth that we will rule and **reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10, 20:6).**

Notice again that all seven of the promises to overcomers are descriptions of **His** Second Coming and the Eternal State (see **Fq – The Eternal State**), where all will be fulfilled. So, **the tree of life** was promised to the Ephesians **(22:2)**, deliverance from **the second death** to the believers at Smyrna **(20:6)**, a new **name** was promised at Pergamum **(22:4)**, **the Morning Star** to the Thyatirans **(22:16)**, **white** clothing to the believers at Sardis **(19:8)**, **the New Jerusalem** to believers at Philadelphia **(21:2)**, and the ability to share **His throne** to the apostate **Laodiceans** if **they** would only trust in **Him (20:4)**.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (3:22). The message to **the** apostate **church** is obvious: repent of your sin before it is too late and judgment falls. For believers, the message is clear. We must see the lost through our **Father's** eyes and call them to repent and accept **Jesus Christ** as their **Savior (Jude 23)**.

Yeshua**, I confess that without **Your** generosity I too would be **wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked**. But **You** have lavished **Your** gifts upon me. In gratitude and **love**, I want to give it all back to **You**. I want to be **Your** instrument in this world. Come, **Lord**, and use me for **Your** glory.*[127] ***Amen.

The church at Laodicea is a picture of the Apostate Church Age that will last for seven years during the Great Tribulation. When the Lord comes back He will set up His Messianic Kingdom that will last a thousand years. **Laodicea** represents the final form of the worldly church, Mystery Babylon, which is rejected by **the Lord** and **spit out of** **His** **mouth** because of its profession of faith in the antichrist. **The** true **Church** ends with the Philadelphian Age, which is removed from the earth according to the promise of **3:10** before **the Great Tribulation** begins. The false church, from which the true will be separated by the Rapture **(First Thessalonians 4:17)**, is left behind, rejected by **the Lord** and **spit** into **the 70th Week of Daniel (Dani'el 9:24-27)**.[128] **Laodicea** means, *people ruling*, in contrast to **Jesus** ruling **His** **Church**. In **the Great Tribulation**, it will be a counterfeit church entirely ruled by counterfeit men, for **the Holy Spirit** will no longer restrain it. This journey has been very interesting, but it was nothing compared to what will be coming next in the **Revelation** of **Jesus Christ**. We will be taking a trip to heaven (see **Cd – And There Before Me was a Throne in Heaven**).