

BIBLE CLASS: NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES
Wednesday nights at 7:00Pm September 29

Lesson 12

THE CHURCHES OF PHILADELPHIA AND LAODICEA

Little and lukewarm

Excerpt from the workbook, "New Testament Churches: Their Strengths and Weaknesses" by Carl MccMurray:

Introduction to Philadelphia—Revelation 3:7-13

Philadelphia is located on the Cogamus River in Asia Minor, 105 miles from Smyrna and 28 miles southeast of Sardis. It is not so ancient a city as others in Asia Minor, being founded about 189 BC, but it did quickly become an important and wealthy trade center in its day. Its public buildings and temples were magnificent enough so that the city received the title of "Little Athens." The ground in the area is extremely fertile and an excellent wine was produced here about which the Roman poet Virgil wrote.

The city has been destroyed by earthquakes several times and is continuously beset by tremors so that the practice of running out of the city for fear of falling walls and pillars must have been a familiar one to the Philadelphians. Perhaps this is the source of Jesus' reference to safety and security in 3:12, that the one who overcomes, spiritually, will not have to go out anymore. There were enough Jews in the area that a synagogue is recorded as being built here. From His comments in 3:9 these Jews as a whole were resistant to the gospel and instigators of some kind of persecution or trial. Jesus assures the Christians however, that they were going to come to know that Christ had loved these people.

The modern city goes by the name Alashehir. It boasts a licorice factory which is the single greatest source of income for the people in that area. The city is best reached by rail from Smyrna.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What did it mean for the church in Philadelphia to be commended for having a little power?
2. What are some real and present dangers that small churches might fall into?
3. Give two or three ways today that a church that is small in number might still show that it is powerful in faith?
4. Why is it an encouragement for us to know that Jesus is at work in the world?
5. How could a synagogue become known as a synagogue of Satan?

6. What is the blessing of having a Lord that can open where no one can shut and can shut so that no one opens?

Introduction to Laodicea—Revelation 3:14-22

Laodicea was located in the province of Phrygia, only about 50 miles from Philadelphia. This city was known in Roman times for the fine black wool of its sheep and the Phrygian powder for the eyes, which was manufactured there. The city had a renowned school of medicine, as well as an extensive banking operation. Her bankers negotiated with the whole world. Today the ruins of a theater, an aqueduct, and a gymnasium speak eloquently of a glory in that place that has long since passed. Epaphras may have been the one to bring the gospel to Laodicea (Colossians 1:7), although little is known.

In 60 AD, just a little over thirty years before this letter was written, the city was almost completely destroyed by an earthquake. The citizens of the city, however, possessed such wealth that they refused Roman aid and rebuilt the city themselves. Perhaps these things, along with the fine black wool and eye powder produced here, were the reason for the Lord's comments in 3:18. The Laodicean church received the sharpest rebuke for being infected with the worldly prosperity and attitude of the city it was located in.

Today the city is a ruin by the name of Eski Hissar and has long served as a quarry to a neighboring town. Three ruins of early Christian churches can be seen here.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

7. To whom is verse 3:14 referring to when it says; "The words of the Amen"? What does the word "Amen" mean?
8. How did the culture of Laodicea perhaps influence the congregation there?
9. What does the "lukewarm" description say to you? In your own words...
10. What are some dangers of lukewarmness and can it be cured?
11. Can we find any words of encouragement to the church of Laodicea in Revelations 3:14-22?

