

## Revelation of Jesus Christ Study 22

*Rev 3:14-22*

*14 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:*

*15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.*

*16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

*17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--*

*18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*

*19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. 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 dine with him, and he with Me.*

*21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit 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." ' ' "*

Perhaps the most tragic theme in all of redemptive history is the sad story of wayward Israel.

The Jewish people were the recipients of unprecedented spiritual privileges:

*Rom 9:4-5*

*4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;*

*5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.*

God chose them from all the world's people, rescued them from Egypt, brought them into the promised land, loved them, and cared for and protected them

*Duet 4:37; 7:7-8*

*37 And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power,*

*7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;*

*8 but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

Yet despite those privileges, Israel's history was one of continual rebellion against God.

After their miraculous deliverance from Egypt, the Israelites' rebellion brought God's severe judgment, as an entire generation perished in the wilderness.

The cycle of Israel's sin, God's judgment, and Israel's repentance and restoration runs throughout the book of Judges.

The Jewish peoples sinful pride led them to reject God as their King and demand a human king.

Their first king was the disobedient Saul, and the nation was in turmoil for much of his reign.

After a period of time relative peace and obedience under David and Solomon, Israel split into two kingdoms. All the northern kings (of Israel) and most of the southern ones (of Judah) were wicked men, who led their people into the gross abominations of Idolatry.

All through its centuries of disobedience, rebellion, and apostasy, God graciously called Israel back to Himself;

*Jer 7:25-26*

*25 Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them*

But instead of repenting and returning to God the Israelites

*26 Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.*

*(Jer 25:4; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4-5; Zech 7:12)*

Finally, God brought devastating judgment upon His rebellious and unrepentant people.

First Israel fell to the Assyrians, then Judah was carried away into captivity by the Babylonians and Jerusalem destroyed.

*Second Kings 17:7-23* recites the sad litany of sins that brought about God's judgment on His people. Read this!

Israel's apostasy brought grief to God's heart.  
In the parable of *Isaiah 5:1-3*

*Isaiah 5:1-3*

*1 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard On a very fruitful hill.*

*2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes.*

*3 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.*

Israel here is pictured as a well-cared-for vineyard that nonetheless produced only worthless grapes.

In *verse 4* the Lord said plaintively, "what more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?" why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?"

*Isaiah 48:18*

*18 Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.*

The Psalmist wrote:

*Psa 78:40*

*40 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, And grieved Him in the desert!*

Isaiah also echoed the same thought:

*Isaiah 63:10*

*10 But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He turned Himself against them as an enemy, And He fought against them.*

Now tragically the sorrowful unbelief of Israel finds a parallel in the church.

There are many people in the churches, even entire congregations, who are lost.

They may be sincere, zealous, and outwardly religious, but they reject the gospel truth.

They have all the rich New Covenant teaching about Christ's life, death, and resurrection contained in Bibles they neither believe nor obey.

As a result, they are doomed, just as unbelieving Israel was.

Paul describes them as those *"those holding a form of godliness, although they have denied its power"* And Paul tells the believers to *"avoid such men as these" (2 Tim 3:5)*

The church at Laodicea represents such apostate churches as have existed throughout history.

It is the last and the worst of the 7 churches addressed by our Lord.

The downward spiral that began at Ephesus, and continued through Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis, reached the bottom at Laodicea.

Even at Sardis there were some true believers left; as far as can be determined, the church at Laodicea was a totally unregenerate, false church.

It has the grim distinction of being the only one of the seven for whom Christ has no positive word of commendation.

Due to the drastic nature of the situation at Laodicea, this is also the most threatening of the seven letters.

The contents of this letter may be divided into six headings:

**The correspondent,**  
**The church,**  
**The city,**  
**The concern,**  
**The command,**  
**The counsel.**

## THE CORRESPONDENT

*Rev 3:14c*

*'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:*

As in the letter to the church at Philadelphia, Christ did not identify Himself using any of the phrases from the vision recorded in *1:12-17*.

Instead, He identified Himself using three divine titles.

### 1<sup>st</sup> **The Amen**

This unique title, used only here in Scripture to describe Christ, is reminiscent of *Isaiah 65:16* where God is twice called the "*God of truth [Heb. Amen].*"

**Amen** is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "*truth*", "*affirmation*," or "*certainty*". It refers to that which is firm, fixed, and unchangeable.

**Amen** is often used in Scripture to affirm the truthfulness of a statement (*Num 5:22; New 8:6; Mat 6:13; Rom 16:27; 1 Cor 16:24*)

Whatever God says is true and certain; therefore, He is the God of truth.

Christ is certainly the **Amen** in the sense that He is the God of truth incarnate.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Christ also identifies Himself as **the faithful and true Witness**.

This title further elucidates the thought expressed in the first title.

Not only is Jesus the **Amen** because of His work, but also because everything He speaks is the truth.

He is completely trustworthy, perfectly accurate, and His testimony is always reliable.

*John 14:6*

*<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life.*

This is an appropriate way to begin the letter to the Laodiceans because it affirmed to them that Christ had accurately assessed their unredeemed condition. It also affirmed that His offer of fellowship and salvation in *verse 20* was true, because God's promises were confirmed through His work.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> finally Christ referred to Himself as **the Beginning of the creation of God**.

The English translation is somewhat ambiguous and misleading.

As a result, false teachers seeking to deny Christ's deity have attempted us use this verse to prove He is a created being.

There is no ambiguity in the Greek text however.

*Arched (beginning)* does not mean that Christ was the first person God created, but rather that Christ Himself is the source or origin of Creation:

*John 1:1-3*

*<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

*<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.*

*<sup>3</sup> All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

*Heb 1:1-2*

*<sup>1</sup> God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,*

*<sup>2</sup> has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;*

Through His power everything was created.

This letter to the Laodiceans has much in common with Paul's letter to the Colossian church.

Colossae was not far from Laodicea, so it is likely that the same heresy plaguing the Colossians had made its way o Laodicea

*Col 4:16*

*<sup>16</sup> Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.*

The heresy that was plaguing the church was a form of incipient Gnosticism, it taught that Christ was a created being, one of series of emanation from God.

Its proponents also claimed that they possessed a secret, higher spiritual knowledge above and beyond the simple words of Scripture.

Paul wrote the following to combat the heresy at Colossae:

*Col 1:15-17*

*<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*

*<sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*

*<sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*

Firstborn (*prototokos*) is not limited to the first one born chronologically, but refers to the supreme or preeminent one, the one receiving the highest honor.

The following words speak of David as the highest King of earth in this way.

*Psa 89:27*

*20 I have found My servant David; With My holy oil I have anointed him,*

*21 With whom My hand shall be established; Also My arm shall strengthen him.*

*22 The enemy shall not outwit him, Nor the son of wickedness afflict him.*

*23 I will beat down his foes before his face, And plague those who hate him.*

*24 "But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, And in My name his horn shall be exalted.*

*25 Also I will set his hand over the sea, And his right hand over the rivers.*

*26 He shall cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.'*

*27 Also I will make him My firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth.*

Christ is the source of creation and the highest person in it.

This damning heresy about the person of Christ was the reason the Laodicean church was spiritually dead.

Their heretical Christology had produced an unregenerate church.

False teaching about Christ, specifically the denial of His deity, is the hallmark of modern cults as well.

## THE CHURCH

*Rev 3:14a*

*"the church in Laodicea"*

The New Testament does not record anything about the founding of the church at Laodicea.

Like most of the other six churches, it was likely established during Paul's ministry at Ephesus (*Acts 19:10*).

Paul was not the founder, since when he wrote Colossians some years later he still had not visited Laodicea (*Col 2:1*)

Since Paul's co-worker Epaphras founded the church in nearby Colossae (*Col 1:6-7*) he may have founded the Laodicean church as well.

Some have suggested that Archippus, Philemon's son was its pastor (*Col 4:17*), since the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* names Archippus as the bishop of Laodicea (vii, 46).

## THE CITY

*Rev 3:14b*

*"Laodicea"*

One of the triad of cities (with Colossae and Hierapolis) in the Lycus valley, about one hundred miles east of Ephesus, Laodicea was the south easternmost of the seven cities, and about forty miles from Philadelphia.

Its sister cities were Colossae, about ten miles to the east, and Hierapolis about six miles to the north.

It was located on a plateau several hundred feet high, Laodicea was geographically nearly impregnable. Its vulnerability to attack was due to the fact that it had to pipe in its water from several miles away through aqueducts that could easily be blocked or diverted by besieging forces.

Laodicea was founded by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus II and named after his first wife, Since he divorced her in 253B.C., the city was most likely founded before that date.

Though its original settlers were largely from Syria, a significant number of Jews also settled there.

With the coming of the Pax Romana (peace under Rome's rule), Laodicea prospered.

It was strategically located at the junction of two important roads:  
The east-west road leading from Ephesus into the interior, and the north-south road from Pergamum to the Mediterranean Sea.

That location made it a an important commercial city.

That the first-century B.C. Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero cashed his letters of credit there reveals Laodicea to have been a strategic banking center.

So wealthy did Laodicea become that it paid for its own reconstruction after a devastating earthquake in A.D. 60, rejecting offers of financial aid from Rome.

The city was also famous for the soft, black wool it produced. The wool was made into clothes and woven into carpets, both much sought after.

Laodicea was also an important center of ancient medicine.

The nearby temple of the Phrygian god Men Karou had an important medical school associated with it.

That school was most famous for an eye salve that it had developed, which was exported all over the Greco-Roman world.

All three industries, finance, wool, and the production of eye salve, come into play in this letter to the Laodicean church.