

about 15 miles from the Aegean coast. The earliest city was founded on a hill about 1,300 feet high. This location made the city secure when fortified, leading to the name of the city, Pergamum, a Greek word for “fortress.” The modern Turkish city of Bergama is built over that lower city.

The city developed in both culture and education, building one of the greatest libraries of the ancient world. The great library served as a focus for book making, and the fine, thin, tanned animal skin used for writing gained the name “Pergamum sheeting” or “parchment.” Pergamum lost its great library when Mark Anthony gave it to his paramour Cleopatra. During the Roman period the city was an important center for medicine, and religion. The city built a temple to Augustus and Roma and was the first city in Asia to do so. It became one of the most important centers for the imperial cult. The city also boasted of an ancient temple of Asklepios, the god of healing.

THYATIRA

The current Turkish city of Akhisar marks the site of ancient Thyatira situated in the Lycus River Valley. It lies on the road between Pergamum, to the northwest, and Sardis, to the southeast. It was known as a city of trade guilds led by wool and linen merchants, supported by dyers. Other known guilds included coppersmiths, leatherworkers, and tanners.

Inscriptions depict Thyatira as worshiping various deities. The worship of Apollos became related to emperor worship and claimed that the emperor was the earthly form of Apollos and thus the son of Zeus. In Revelation, the description of Jesus as the Son of God likely refutes the claim of the emperor to be the son of Zeus. The depiction of Jesus as having “eyes like flames of fire and feet like burnished brass” may refer to the local statue of Apollos.

SARDIS

On the highway south of Thyatira and east of Philadelphia lies the city of Sardis. It is situated in the Hermus Valley. In AD 17 the

city was severely damaged by an earthquake, but was rebuilt with the financial assistance of emperor Tiberius. It was a city of power, wealth, and influence.

PHILADELPHIA

The ancient city of Philadelphia stood on the site of the modern city of Alasehir in western Turkey. Its ancient location was a fertile, productive farming area yielding many crops, including grapes used for wine. It was situated on the great highway between Sardis and the rest of Asia Minor. This location made it a center of communication and business. The city was almost destroyed by the great quake of AD 17. Philadelphia was aided in rebuilding by Tiberius. Later the city took on the name of several emperors including Vespasian and Domitian. This may be the background of the statement in Revelation 3:12 concerning the believer having on him “the name of My God and the name of the city of My God” (NASB). Philadelphia also suffered when Domitian ordered half of the vineyards of Asia to be destroyed.

LAODICEA

The southernmost of the seven cities, Laodicea was located on the Lycus River at the junction of the highway from Ephesus on the west and from Philadelphia to the north. It was situated on a fertile plateau. The city was subject to earthquakes and suffered major damage in AD 60, but the people refused outside assistance when they rebuilt. The city’s great wealth came from its fertile land, industry, and commerce. The area was well-known for a magnificent black wool used for garments as well as carpets. Another source of income was special medicines made for eye and ear diseases. The eye medicine was kollyrion and was highly prized throughout the ancient world. The city’s commerce led to its becoming a financial and banking center. The city’s water supply was considered inferior and was perhaps the city’s one weakness, when compared to the wonderful cold spring water of Colossae and the therapeutic hot water of Hierapolis.

George Knight is Cook-Derrick Professor of New Testament and Greek, Hardin Simmons University, Abilene, Texas.