

Paul's Letter to Laodicea

At the end of Paul's letter to the Colossian church the apostle tells them that when they've finished reading his letter they should forward it to the church at Laodicea. They should then read the epistle from the Laodicean church:

Colossians 4:16: "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that **ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.**"

That in itself makes sense. Paul was not writing his letters solely for the benefit of the individual churches; he intended for his letters to be passed around (which is exactly what we do with them today). He wanted the Laodiceans to read the letter the Colossians had, and he wanted the Colossians to read the letter the Laodiceans had.

The problem is that as far as we know *Paul never wrote a letter to the Laodiceans*. The only letter to the Laodicean church is found in the book of Revelation, and it was written long after Paul was martyred. So what on earth was Paul talking about?

There are a couple different possibilities. First of all, it's entirely possible that the letter the Laodiceans had in their possession was not actually written to them. They might have had a copy of the book of Ephesians, and it may be that's what Paul wanted the Colossians to read. If Paul's letters really were being passed around then it wouldn't be surprising to find that they had a copy of someone else's letter.

Another possibility is that Paul really did write the Laodiceans a letter but it was just not included in the canon of the Bible. This may seem disturbing, but it wouldn't be the first time that the Bible referred to a book that was not included in its text.

The Old Testament refers to a number of books that have been lost. For example, there is the *Book of Jasher*:

Joshua 10:13: "And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in **the book of Jasher**? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day."

There's the *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*:

1 Kings 15:31: "Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the **book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel**?"

The *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah*:

1 Kings 14:29: "Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the **book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah**?"

The *Book of the Wars of the Lord*:

Numbers 21:14: "Wherefore it is said in **the book of the wars of the LORD**, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon,"

The *Book of the Acts of Solomon*:

1 Kings 11:41: "And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in **the book of the acts of Solomon**?"

The *Book of Jehu*:

2 Chronicles 20:34: “Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they are written in **the book of Jehu** the son of Hanani, who is mentioned in the book of the kings of Israel.”

The Book of the Decree of Esther:

Esther 9:32: “And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was **written in the book.**”

There is also evidence that Paul wrote several letters to the Corinthian church that are not included in the Bible. As you can see, it's not unreasonable to think that Paul may have written a letter to the Laodiceans that was not preserved. It would not be the first time.

Keep in mind that just because a letter was inspired does *not* mean that it could not have been lost. Everything that Jesus Christ has ever said was inspired, but I'm positive that He said many things that are not included in the gospels. The Bible is *not* a complete collection of everything that has ever been inspired; instead it is a collection of inspired writings that God has decided to give to us and preserve through time.

If there really was a letter to Laodicea then we obviously didn't need it because *if we had needed it then God would have made sure that it did not get lost*. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that the Scriptures that we have been given are enough to equip us to do *all* good works. God did not leave out anything that we needed; He gave us a complete set of instructions.

This is one of those mysteries that we will never be able to clear up. Since this letter is only mentioned one time, there is no way to know what Paul was talking about. But we can know this: the Bible really does contain everything that we need. There is absolutely no need to go on a search for the “missing” books of the Bible.

