

CHAPTER 23

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CHURCH FIRST CENTURY CE

JERUSALEM, JUDEA AND SAMARIA

The geographical expansion in the first decades of the Early Church is anticipated in a dominical saying recorded in Acts 1:8: “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” Scholarship has rightly recognized that this verse serves as a literary framework for Luke’s composition. Yet, it also describes the historical movement of the Christian faith beyond the confines of its Jewish context within the borders of the Land of Israel to Gentile audiences in the Greco-Roman world. As the Jerusalem Temple played a central role in the life of the Jewish Diaspora, so the Jerusalem Church continued to play a central role in the developing life of the Church.

In the Shadow of the Temple.

The opening chapters of the Book of Acts describe the followers of Jesus still gathered in Jerusalem. On the “day of Pentecost” (τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς πεντηκοστῆς; cf. the biblical “Feast of Weeks” [Ex 34:22; Num 28:26]), Luke reports that these followers were gathered together (Acts 2:1), without specification where in the city they were located. Christian tradition has typically identified the place of gathering with the same setting as the Last Supper in the upper city (Wilkinson 2002:84, 352). These traditions do not predate the Byzantine period (Kopp 1963:326–327).

Likely, they were derived from the similarities between the description of the setting of the Last Supper (ἀνάγαιον: Mk 14:15; Lk 22:12) and place of gathering in Acts 1:13 (ὑπερῶον). Yet, even if one were to assume the same setting for the Last Supper and the meeting in the first chapter of Acts, there is no indication that the Christians remained in the room for the events that followed. The language of the second chapter opens with a Hebraic-styled narrative break (i.e. “and when the day of Pentecost came”) separating the events that follow from what has previously occurred (Blass 1975: 208 [§404]).

Details in the narrative itself may hint to its location. The time of the event is important. According to Deuteronomy 16:16:

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place which he will choose: at the feast of unleavened bread, at the feast of weeks, and at the feast of booths.... (Deut 16:16)

Josephus reports that at Pentecost the population

of Jerusalem would increase significantly:

Now, when that festival which we call Pentecost was at hand, all the places about the temple, and the whole city was full of a multitude of people that were come out of the country.... (War 1:253)

The historian’s description of the influx of visitors to Jerusalem corresponds to Luke’s testimony concerning Jewish pilgrims who were present in Jerusalem that day and witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

... Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of

by scholarship to the practical challenge of immersing three thousand people in Jerusalem. Recent excavations near the southern entrance to the Temple Mount unearthed numerous *miqva’ot*, viz. ritual immersion baths (Geva 1993:740). Many more of these installations were likely destroyed as a result of construction during the Byzantine and subsequent periods. Purity requirements for visitors to the Temple necessitated sufficient bathing facilities to serve the thousands of people who were obligated to ritually immerse before ascending (Lk 2:22; Acts 21:24). All of these elements point to the event of Pentecost somewhere within the vicinity of the Temple. This should not surprise us. Luke concludes his gospel with the observation: “They stayed continually at the temple, praising God” (Lk 24:53).

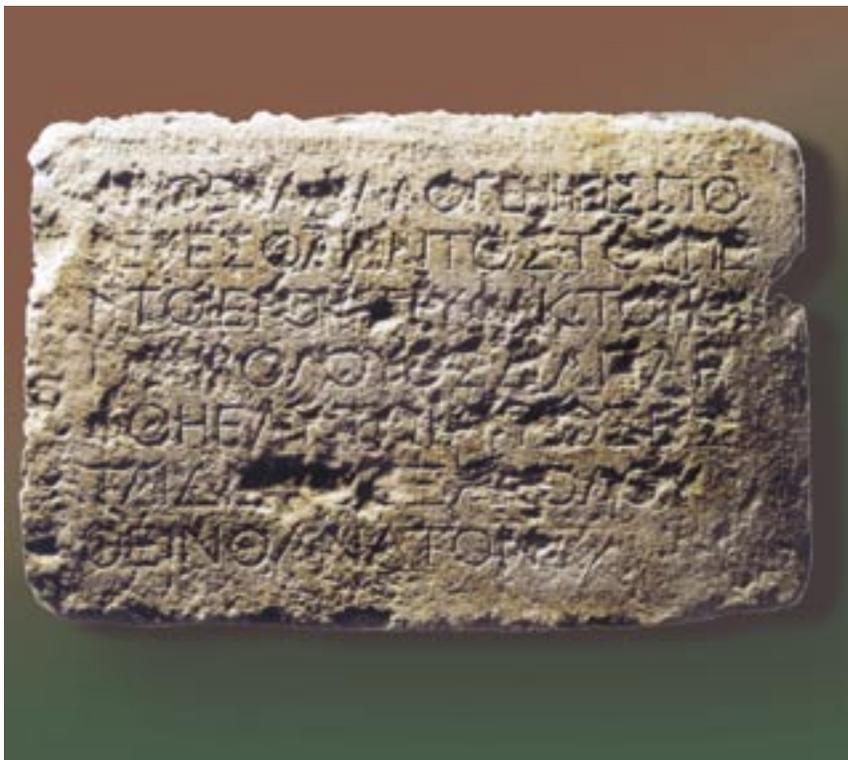
Into Judea and Samaria.

In the wake of the death of Stephen (Acts 7–9), the Christian community in Jerusalem was scattered (Simon 1958:20–38). Several episodes are recounted to describe the new faith of individuals and groups in Samaria and Judea. Philip (Acts 6:5) proclaimed the gospel in Samaria where “multitudes paid close attention to what he said” (Acts 8:6). The toponym Σαμαρεία in this passage has been read to identify either the region of Samaria or its main city called by the same name. By the New Testament period the ancient city of Samaria (שַׁמְרוֹן: 1 Kgs 16:24) had been rebuilt and renamed Sebaste by Herod the

Great in honor of Caesar Augustus (Ant. 15:296; War 1:403; Strabo Geog. 16.2.34; cf. Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1979: 2:160–164). Yet, even Josephus continues to use the biblical name, while already reporting that Herod had renamed the city (e.g. War 1:156 et passim).

Our reading of whether Samaria in Acts 8:5 designates the city or the region largely is dependent upon variant manuscript readings that include or omit the article (i.e. *the* [main] city of Samaria [=Sebaste], or *a* city of Samaria). The stronger manuscript readings (MSS P⁷⁴, α, A, B, 181, 1175, 2344; cf. Metzger 1994:311) support the inclusion of the article. Other than the inclination to read this verse in light of Luke’s topographical rubric in Acts 1:8, there seems little reason to read the location of events other than the Hellenistic city (cf. Just. Apol. 26).

No other points of geographical reference appear in the evangelistic journeys of Philip, Peter and John from Jerusalem into Samaria. The most direct northern route was the watershed route followed by the patriarchs. From Samaria,



Greek inscription forbidding Gentiles to enter the Temple Mount. (photo Garo Nalbandian)

Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians.... (Acts 2:9–11)

Luke reports that these pilgrims were amazed by what they saw and heard, and they sought an explanation. Peter stood and recounted recent events concerning Jesus’ death and resurrection. In a measure of creative exegesis, he interpreted the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in light of the Hebrew Scriptures and invited those present “to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus” (Acts 2:38).

For the current study, what is significant is the concluding report that three thousand people responded that day to Peter. Every aspect of the episode suggests a public setting. It is unlikely that such an event could occur in the confines of a private home on the upper slopes of the western hill of Jerusalem, where pilgrims from across the Roman world would have witnessed it.

Moreover, little attention has been given



The Pentecost experience—Diaspora communities represented.

Peter and John ventured into “many villages of the Samaritans” which dotted the interior of the hill country of Samaria (Acts 8:25).

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch.

Philip next ventured south (μεσημβρίαν: Liddell and Scott 1996:1106) on the road from “Jerusalem to Gaza” (Acts 8:26). The route from Jerusalem to Gaza would likely have descended south from Jerusalem near Bethlehem on the watershed route towards Hebron. Eusebius preserves the Christian tradition that it is on this ancient southern route that Philip encountered the Ethiopian eunuch. His mileage measurements attest to the existence of the road system in the late Roman period, which he used to measure distances from administrative centers—in this instance from Jerusalem and Eleutheropolis.

Bethsoro (Βηθσωρώ) is today a village at the twentieth mile on the way from which it is said the eunuch (belonging to) Candace (queen of the Ethiopians) was baptized by Philip. Another (village called) Bethsur (Βεθσοῦρ), also in the tribe of Judah, one mile from Eleutheropolis. (Eus. Onom. 52:1)



Philip, Peter and John to Samaria and the Coastal Plain.

The historian also indicates that Christian tradition in his day assumed that the caravan continued on the watershed route to springs near Beth-zur, and that it was here that the eunuch was immersed. This is likewise the opinion of the fourth-century Bordeaux Pilgrim (599), “Inde bethasora milia xiiii, ubi est fons, in quo philippus eunuchum baptizavit,” and Jerome (Eus. Onom. 53:1). It may also be reflected in the depiction of a church and springs at Beth-zur in the sixth-century Medeba Map (Avi-Yonah 1954:67).

It is unlikely that Philip and the caravan would have continued south in the Judean hills as far as Beth-zur (Kh. eṭ-Ṭubeiqā; Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994:87–88). Southwest of Bethlehem the ancient route divides. The watershed route continues to Beth-zur and Hebron, while a western spur follows the Hushah ridge and descends into the Elah Valley (Wādī eṣ-Ṣamt). The Romans paved this descent and evidence of these efforts can still be seen in steps cut into the Judean hills (Roll 1983:150; Rasmussen 1989:174).

At the western end of the Elah Valley the sharp Cenomanian limestone hills are separated from the rounded Senonian chalk hills of the Shephelah by a fault line marked with a shallow trough that transverses the eastern edge of the lowlands (Baly 1973:142; Omi-Efrat 1973: 65). Roman milestones in this chalky trough are witness to the importance of the route (Roll 1983: 152). It remained in use during the late Roman and Byzantine periods providing access from Eleutheropolis to Lydda (1 Macc 11:34; Acts 9: 32; [Diospolis] Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994:171) and points north.

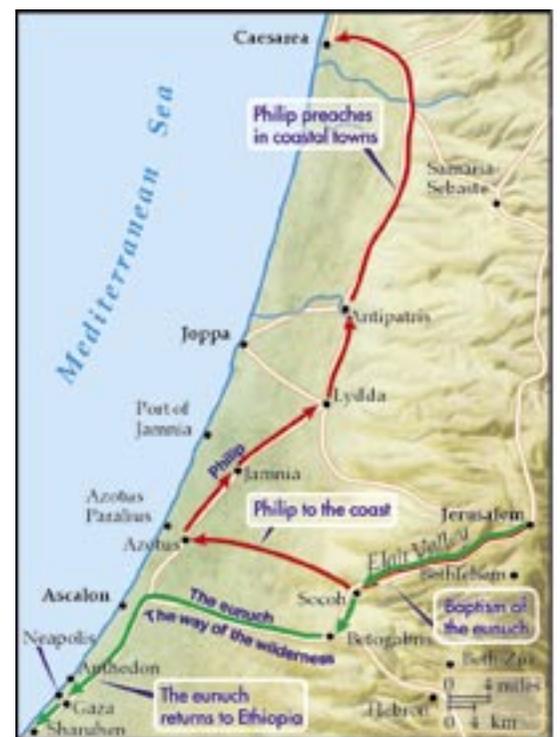
Nearby and east of the intersection of the trough and the Elah Valley was the settlement of Socoh (Kh. Shuweika; Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994: 234). The site is mentioned in the Old Testament (Josh 15:35; 1 Sam 17:1), and in the Hellenistic period it was the home of the well-known sage, Antigonus (m. ʿAbot 1:3). It may have been in the vicinity of Socoh that Philip and the eunuch parted ways. The caravan would have continued south by way of Beth Govrin (Eleutheropolis) across the coastal plain to Gaza and the southern route through the wilderness to Egypt.

Luke provides an added description about the caravan route: “This is a wilderness [road]”

(NRSV Acts 8:26b: αὐτὴ ἐστὶν ἔρημος). The Evangelist’s comment is commonly viewed as an indication of Luke’s ignorance of the topographical realities of Judea (e.g. Fitzmyer 1998: 412). The question of Luke’s personal familiarity with Judea aside, Rapuano is correct in his observation that the Greek term ἔρημος, like its Hebrew counterpart מְדִבְרָה, “does not always refer to a barren, arid region. It is also used to denote an uncultivated place, which is nevertheless fit for pasturage” (Rapuano 1990:47). Robinson made a similar observation in the journal of his travels through this region (Robinson and Smith 1856: 2:514 n. XXXII). There exists no problem in Luke’s description of this region with the term ἔρημος.

It is worthwhile noting that there is another possible reading of Luke’s presentation of the road in association with the term ἔρημος. It may be a vestige of an expression similar to what we find commonly in Hebrew, דֶּרֶךְ הַמְדְּבָרָה (e.g. Deut 2:8; Josh 8:15; 2 Sam 2:24; LXX: ὁδὸν ἔρημων, etc.). In these instances, use of מְדִבְרָה (or its Greek equivalent ἔρημος) is not intended to describe the local terrain but to indicate the destination, i.e. “to the wilderness.” This description also aptly describes the route on which the caravan was traveling. It led south to the biblical wilderness (e.g. Gen 14:6, 21:14; Ex 3:1 et passim).

There are insufficient details in the narrative to indicate where the eunuch was baptized. Luke only describes that the place as being alongside the road. Robinson (Robinson and Smith 1856: 3:278) and Bruce (1977:189) proposed that it took place at the



Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch.

springs of Wādī el-Ḥesi. While there are springs at Wādī el-Ḥesi between Beth Govrin and Gaza, they lie too far south for Philip’s route to Azotus. It seems more likely that the waters indicated were one of the numerous springs in the Elah Valley, near the descent from the Judean hills. It is here the eunuch was baptized before he and Philip parted ways.

Philip continued his journey westward across the coastal plain to Azotus (1 Macc 4:15, 10: 70–84; Ant. 13:92; Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994:72), the Hellenistic-Roman period settlement on the site

of the ancient Philistine city of Ashdod (Josh 13:3). While we have no evidence of Roman roads linking the Elah Valley and Azotus, Dorsey documents a local route by way of Gath (Dorsey 1991:194; *Ant.* 5:87; *Eus. Onom.* 68:4–7; Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994:134) and Saphir (*Eus. Onom.* 156:23; Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994:222), where one would join the international coastal route to Azotus.

Peter on the Coastal Plain. As part of Luke's account of the spread of the Gospel, he records Peter's ministry in the coastal regions (Acts 9:32–10:48). Peter is first mentioned at Lydda (Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994:152), because Tabitha, a woman "full of good works and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36), had died. The Apostle prayed for her, and she came back to life. "And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner" (Acts 9:41–42). It is at Simon's house in Joppa that Peter saw his vision of the sheet descending from heaven with clean and unclean animals on it. His experience was intended to prepare him for his meeting with the Gentile Cornelius in Caesarea, and the realization that "what God has cleansed, you must not call common" (Acts 10:15).

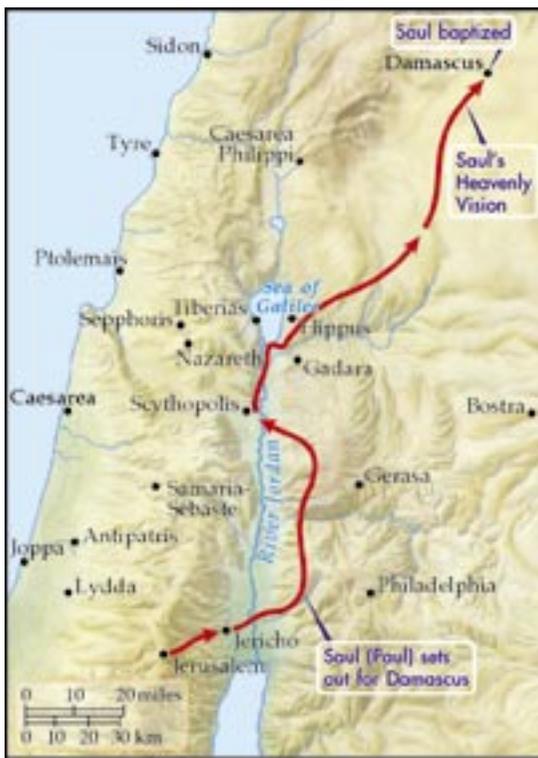
During this time, Cornelius, a Roman centurion, had a vision in which he was instructed to send for Peter. The Gentile is described as "a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10:2). Luke's description of the Roman suggests that he was a semi-proselyte, a God-fearer, who had elected to refrain from certain aspects of pagan life (e.g. idolatry, sexual immorality) and identified himself with the faith of the Jewish people (Stern 1980:2:103–107). When Peter arrived and heard of Cornelius' experience, he remarked, "Truly, I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10:34–35). Peter's experience in Joppa and Caesarea is paradigmatic for the early church's dawning recognition that Gentiles would now be drawn to faith.

PAUL'S ENCOUNTER ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

The Apostle Paul is introduced for the first time in the New Testament in Jerusalem during the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58). Paul's role in the execution of the first Christian martyr is unclear (cf. Acts 22:20; Fitzmyer 1998:394). All we are told is that those who acted against Stephen, "laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul." Concerning the Apostle's name, Paul never calls himself in his epistles by his Hebrew name (Saul: שָׂאוּל or Σαούλ). Instead, he always uses his Greco-Roman cognomen, Paul (Παῦλος; Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1, etc.).

In the chronicle of Paul's embrace of the Christian faith and subsequent missionary efforts, Luke refers to the Apostle as Σαούλ until the beginning of his missionary activities to the Gentiles (Acts 13:9). Thereafter, the only occasions when Paul is referred to as Saul are in the repeated accounts of his experience on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 22:7, 22:13, 26:14).

Insufficient geographical details are provided to know which route Paul chose to travel from Jerusalem to Damascus. Presumably he would



Saul of Tarsus (Paul) on the road to Damascus.

have traveled by way of the Galilee and ascended to the Transjordanian highlands somewhere east of the Sea of Galilee (Talbert 2000:69). We also do not know precisely where he had his vision of Jesus. Two of the three accounts (Acts 9:1–19, 22:4–11, 26:12–18) of Paul's encounter in Acts relate that he was *nearing Damascus* (Acts 9:3, 22:6). Meinardus notes that, already in the eighteenth century, explorer Richard Pococke recognized that some traditional sites were not even remotely close to the ancient Roman road from Damascus to Jerusalem. Meinardus favors a location on the ancient route near,

... Mar Boulos (St. Paul) and the village of Kaukab. ... Mar Boulos is merely a small volcanic crater where a few archeological remains of a pre-Christian temple were discovered. Tradition has placed the site of Paul's conversion in the immediate neighborhood of the village of Kaukab.... (Meinardus 1981:59)

Blinded from his vision, Paul stayed a few days at a private home "on the street called Straight" (Acts 9:11) in Damascus (McRay 1992a:2:7–8), until a disciple named Ananias arrived and laid hands on him "so that he might regain his sight" (Acts 9:12). It is to Ananias that the Lord first reveals the purpose of Paul's calling: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel..." (Acts 9:15). Paul's sight is restored, and he then is baptized and takes a meal. Soon, Paul publicly declares his new faith in Jesus to the skepticism of some of his fellow believers who have heard of his reputation and the consternation of the Jewish authorities.

Discovering a plot to kill him, Paul escaped by night and returned to Jerusalem where he once again engages in disputations, this time with Greek-speaking Jews (Ἑλληνιστάς; Hengel 1974:1:2–3; Simon 1956:1–19). After renewed threats, he was taken to Caesarea, where he traveled by ship to Tarsus, the place of his birth (Acts 9:30, 21:39, 22:3).

We next hear about Paul when he is sought by Barnabbas in Tarsus and brought to the church in Antioch (Norris 1992:1:265–269). Here the two ministered for a year (Acts 11:25–26). At the time of a great famine during the reign of Claudius,

Paul and Barnabbas were appointed by the church in Antioch to take relief offerings to the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27–30). When they returned to Antioch they brought with them John Mark. These three would once again join company in Paul's first missionary journey.

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Luke reports in Acts 13:1–3 that Barnabbas and Paul were set apart for a special work by the congregation at Antioch. They began their mission from Seleucia (Smith and Hoppe 1992:5:1074–1075), the Mediterranean port (c. 17 mi./27 km) west of Antioch, and sailed c. 120 miles (200 km) to Salamis (War 2:358; ActsBarn 22–23; Gempf 1992b:5:904–905), the eastern port city of Cyprus. The city had diminished in the Roman period when the capital of the island was moved to Paphos (Avi-Yonah and Schatzman 1975:402). Nevertheless, there remained a significant Jewish community in Cyprus (1 Macc 15:16–23; Philo Leg. 282; Ant. 13:284–287, 18:131, 20:142). In the synagogues of Salamis, Paul and Barnabbas "proclaimed the word of God" (Acts 13:5).

Traveling overland across Cyprus, the company arrived at Paphos on the southwestern coast of the island (Pliny Nat. Hist. 5.130; Gempf 1992a:5:139–140). The fame of the ancient city was attached to its temple of Aphrodite mentioned by Homer (Od. 8.363), and the city grew in importance during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. Sergio Paulus, the Roman proconsul stationed there, requested to hear from Paul and Barnabbas (Hemer 1990:108–109, 166). He accepted the new faith in spite of the interference of Elymas, a magician, and after witnessing a miracle at the hands of Paul (Acts 13:6–12).

The company sailed from Paphos to Perga in the province of Pamphylia. No mention is made at this point of Attalia, the Mediterranean harbor c. 10 miles (16 km) southwest of Perga and the natural seaward destination from Paphos. It may be that Luke assumed in his narrative that Attalia was the point of disembarkation.



City gates of Perga. (photo R. S. Notley)

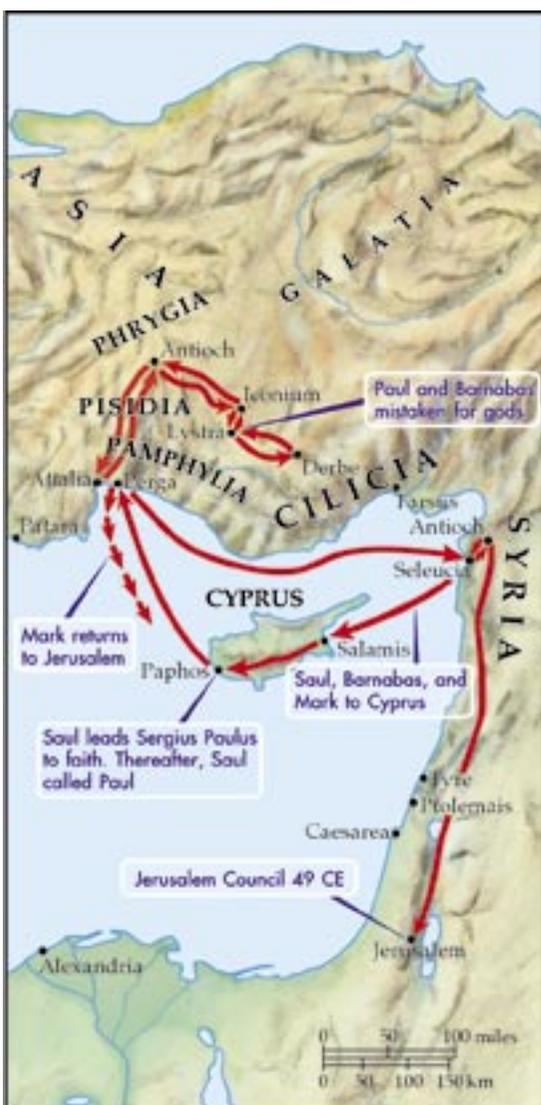


Pisidian Antioch: remains of the Augusteum. (photo R. S. Notley)

It was the natural transit point on the way to Perga, the metropolis of Pamphylia (Strabo Geog. 14.42; Levick 1967:43 n. 2; McRay 1991:240; Gasque 1992a: 5.228). Archaeological remains point to a road between Attalia and Perga built during the reign of Tiberius (Mitchell 1986).

Scant record is given about Paul's initial visit to Perga. All we are told is that for an unexplained reason, John Mark abandoned the company to return to Jerusalem. His desertion would later be a point of friction between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:37, 15:39; Col 4:10; Phil 24; 2 Tim 4:11). We also have no evidence of a Jewish settlement in Perga, though there is mention of Jews in the province of Pamphylia (1 Macc 15:23; Philo Leg. 281).

Travel from Perga followed inland along the Cestrus River to the *Via Sebaste*, built in



The first missionary journey of Paul.

6 BCE by Caesar Augustus through Colonia Comama to Colonia Antiochia. The toponym Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14: Ἀντιόχειαν τὴν Πισιδίαν) is imprecise (Hemer 1990:228). The Roman colony was situated in the province of Phrygia near the frontier of Pisidia (cf. Strabo Geog. 12.6.4: Ἀντιόχειαν τὴν πρὸς τῇ Πισιδίᾳ; Strabo Geog. 12.8.14; Pliny Nat. Hist. 5.24.94; French 1994:53).

The ancient remains of Pisidian Antioch have been identified with the ruins just east of the modern city of Yalvaç. The city thrived after Augustus annexed the region and reestablished it as a Roman colony, populating it with veterans of the Roman legions V and VII (Mitchell 1992: 1:264). The Jewish community there may have resulted from the colonization of Phrygia and Lydia by Antiochus III (Ant. 12:147–153).

On the Sabbath Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue, where Luke reports the congregation listened to the reading of “the law and the prophets” (Acts 13:15). Luke’s account is the earliest written record of the Jewish practice to read the Hebrew Prophets (the *Haftara*) following the weekly reading of the Torah in the synagogue on the Sabbath (cf. Lk 4:16–30; m. Meg. 4:2; Safrai 1989:8–10).

Paul and the other visitors were invited to speak, and in his remarks the Apostle addressed those present, “sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you that fear God” (οἱ ἐν ὑμῖν φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν; cf. Acts 16:14, 17:17, 18:7). The dual terms of address to signify Paul’s hearers are repeated throughout his journeys and they suggest the diverse composition of the synagogue audiences. A number of Gentile God-fearers, semi-proselytes or sympathizers who had abandoned pagan practices, associated with the Jewish communities in the Diaspora and became the focal point of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles (cf. Ant. 20:34–38; Stern 1974: 2:103–107; Lieberman 1994:68–90; Pines 1996:11–20; Levinskaya 1996:51–82).

The message of Paul and Barnabas received a mixed reception in Pisidian Antioch, leading them to abandon the city and continue on the *Via Sebaste* c. 90 miles (150 km) to Iconium (Xenophon Anab. 1.2.19; Pliny Nat. Hist. 5.41; modern Konya). Once again, the Apostles entered the local synagogue to proclaim the word of grace (τῷ λόγῳ τῆς χάριτος; Acts 14:3; cf. Lk 4:22; Jeremias 1971:206–207). Divided opinions among the people of the city regarding this new message grew to the point of violence, and the company had to flee [c. 20 mi. / 33 km] “to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country” (Acts 14:6). Ancient Lystra has been identified “at Zoldera near Hatun Saray . . . about 24 miles south of Konya” (Potter 1992: 4:426–427). The *Via Sebaste* reached Colonia Lystra, but the way to Derbe and the surrounding region was likely unpaved at the time (French 1994:53).

Opposition to the message of the Apostles strengthened and followed them on their way. Indeed, the pursuit by Paul’s Jewish opponents from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium to Lystra may indicate the ease of access between these cities on the *Via Sebaste*. At Lystra they stoned Paul and left him for dead, but he survived and set off with Barnabas to Derbe (Acts 14:19–20; cf. 2 Tim 3:11).

Luke records that the party returned on the same route by which they had arrived to Derbe. “They returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch” (Acts 14:21). Not only did they continue to preach in these cities, they appointed



Antioch, St. Peter's Church: outside of Jerusalem the most important early church was at Antioch. (photo R. S. Notley)

leaders for the fledgling congregations. Turning south they crossed the southwestern portions of the province of Galatia into Pisidia and finally to the province of Pamphylia, in which were the cities of Perga and Attalia (Antalya; Jones 1970: 130–131; Wineland 1992a: 1:523). From this port city they set sail and returned to Antioch in Syria, where “they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27).

Jerusalem Council. As the number of Gentiles increased in the church, it brought to the fore the question of the Gentiles’ relationship to the Law and the people of Israel. Some argued, “Unless you are circumcised and walk according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1 in Western texts; Metzger 1994:376–378; cf. Ant. 20:34–48). Paul, Barnabas and others from Antioch were appointed to go to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles and address these issues. The leadership in Jerusalem met and reached a decision. Rather than requiring conversion with circumcision and full adherence to the Law (cf. Gal 5:3), they applied minimal requirements to the Gentile Christians that approximated the basic statutes of the Noachide Laws (Acts 15: 28–29; cf. Gen 9:4–6; Jub 7:20–21; Did. 3:1–6; t. Abod. Zar. 8:4; Sipra on Lev 18:4; Flusser and Safrai 1986:176–192; Van de Sandt and Flusser 2002:243–264; cf. Cousar 1992: 3:766–768).



Roman milestone. (photo R. S. Notley)

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

After returning from Jerusalem to Antioch, Paul told Barnabas of his desire to return “to visit the brethren in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord” (Acts 15:36). However, the two disagreed about whether they should again take John Mark. Paul refused, because Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13). So, Paul and Barnabas parted ways. Barnabas sailed with Mark to Cyprus, while Paul invited Silas to accompany him.

Paul and Silas did not return on the same route that Paul had previously taken. This time they traveled overland from Antioch through the Amanus Mountains to the province of Cilicia (Ramsay 1925:145–146). Luke merely reports that they arrived to Derbe and Lystra. No details are given about their journey, and few paved roads in Cilicia are known. The earliest Roman milestones discovered at the foot of the Taurus Mountains date from 75/76 CE (French 1981: 2:461). While Luke gives no account of Paul's route, it seems likely that the Apostle would have traveled north from Antioch in Syria (17 mi./28 km) to the pass of the Syrian Gates through the Amanus Mountains and entered the province of Cilicia to his birthplace at Tarsus (Acts 22:3; Van Unnik 1962).



Anatolian Plateau: Paul traveled through here during his journey from Tarsus to Iconium, and between Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. (photo R. S. Notley)

The road from east to west follows the base of the foothills above the marshy and fertile plains but below the rocky terrain of the Taurus Mountains. At the junction of river and road lay the major settlements of the region: Adana (the modern capital), Misis (Mopsuestia), and Tarsus. Tarsus sits at the juncture of the east-west road and the route north through the Cilician Gates and on to the Anatolian plateau (Magness-Gardiner 1997: 2:9).

Turning north they traveled 26 miles (42 km) to the narrow pass of the Cilician Gates in the Taurus Mountains, and then continued northwest onto the wide plains of the province of Lycaonia and the cities of Derbe and Lystra (Acts 16:1). In Lystra they met Timothy, a young man whose Greek father was well known in the area. However, his mother was Jewish (2 Tim 1:5), so Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:1–4; cf. Titus in Gal 2:3; Dunn 1996:216). Paul's actions may be one of the earliest historical witnesses to the rabbinical opinion that one's Jewish identity is determined by the mother. The company returned to the inland cities of Paul's previous missionary journey to report about the decision of “the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4–5).

At this point, they were “forbidden by the

Holy Spirit” from continuing west to Asia. Instead, they ventured north and ministered in the provinces of Phrygia and Galatia (Acts 16:6). We are uncertain which Roman road might have been used by Paul on his northern journey through Phrygia to the edge of Bithynia, “perhaps as far as Dorylaeum, Cotiaem or Aezani” (French 1994:54). Further, with no explanation, we are told that the entourage was “compelled not to enter the region of Bithynia” (Acts 16:7; cf. Talbert 2000:62).

Instead, they turned west “coming opposite” the northern regions of the district of Mysia and “came down to Troas,” a Greco-Roman city on the coast of the Aegean Sea. It seems that Paul's circuitous route followed unpaved tracks on this stretch of his journey that led him through Adramyttium from “the later Hadrianuthera (modern Balikesir) and thus avoided Pergamum” (French 1994:54; cf. Talbert 2000: 56).

In the city of Alexandria Troas (Jones 1970:86; Hemer 1975:79–112; Cook 1973:198–204), 10 miles (16 km) south of ancient Troy, Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia who appealed, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” The Apostle interpreted the vision as an indication that “God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:10). From Troas Paul set sail to Samothrace.

From Pergamum (on the S.) or from Adramyttium (on the N.) there was a paved Republican road which most likely passed Alexandria Troas and went on to Lampsacus at the crossing of the Hellespont. Interestingly, Paul did not take this route which in Thrace became the *Via Egnatia* and, of course, went on to Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia and Thessalonica, all cities on or beside the *Via Egnatia*. Paul preferred to take the sea passage, rather than go overland. (French 1994:54)

Paul and Silas took the most direct route of travel to Macedonia. They stopped overnight at the island of Samothrace, docking in the mole of the old northern harbor of the city by the same name (McRay 1991:280). The following day they continued about 64 miles (107 km) to Neapolis, the port city for Philippi. The ancient witnesses are divided as to whether the location of Neapolis made it a part of Thrace (Strabo *Geog.* 7:330; Ptolemy 3:13) or Macedonia (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 4:18). Positioned on a promontory on the Aegean coast and strategically on the *Via Egnatia*, Neapolis became an important crossroads between Europe and Asia in the Roman period. Philip of



Roman road and Hadrianic gate: Paul would have traveled on this road during his journey inland. (photo R. S. Notley)



Alexander Troas, the Gymnasium. Paul had a vision in Alexander Troas to bring the Gospel to Macedonia. (photo R. S. Notley)

Macedonia had conquered it in 350 BCE to serve as the port for Krenides, which he conquered and renamed Philippi after himself. The assassins of Julius Caesar—Brutus and Cassius—also used the western bay of Neapolis in the battle of Philippi with Octavian and Mark Antony (App. *Bell. Civ.* 4:106; cf. *Ant.* 14:301).

Following the *Via Egnatia*, Paul journeyed 6 miles (9.5 km) to Philippi (Hendrix 1992a: 5:313–317), where the Roman road actually served as the *decumanus maximus* for the city. On the Sabbath, they went outside of the city near the river that courses by Philippi, because “we supposed there was a place of prayer (προσευχήν)” (Levinskaya 1996: 213–225; Safrai and Stern 1976: 2:913–914). Paul encountered a God-fearer (σεβομένη τὸν θεόν), “a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple” (Acts 16:14). She embraced the new message, but others among the local population were not so receptive.

Paul and Silas were dragged into the agora of Philippi, beaten and jailed for teaching “customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice” (Acts 16:21). A great earthquake at midnight freed Paul and Silas from their fetters, but they stayed in their cells. As a result, the jailer and all of his household “believed in God” (Acts 16:34). Subsequently, when it was discovered that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, the magistrates expressed concern and regret at their mistreatment. They apologized, released the prisoners, but requested them to leave the city.

The company continued west on the *Via Egnatia* (c. 40 mi./67 km) through Amphipolis and (c. 24 mi./40 km) Apollonia to (c. 36 mi./60 km) Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). Thessalonica (Hendrix 1992b: 6:523–527) is located at the northern edge of the Thermaic Gulf. It was founded in 315 BCE by Cassander, king of Macedonia, in honor of his wife, Thessaloniki, stepsister of Alexander the Great. The ancient poet Antipater celebrated it as “the Mother of Macedonia,” and it served as a crossroads for international travel.

Although historical references to a Jewish presence in Thessalonica are scarce, there is inscriptional evidence for Jews and Samaritans in the city, and elsewhere in Macedonia (Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1986: 3:65–67). Luke reports that in Thessalonica there was a congregation of Jews, and Paul worshipped with them on the Sabbath “as was his custom.” He argued with those present that it was necessary “for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead” (Acts 17:2). We witness once again the diverse composition of the audience with the mention of both Jews and God-fearing Greeks (σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων)

among those who embraced Paul's message. Nevertheless, accusations were brought by their opponents to the Roman authorities charging Paul, Silas and sympathetic local inhabitants with political sedition: "they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7).

In light of the growing danger, the two were whisked away at night c. 48 miles (80 km) to the neighboring city of Beroea (modern Verria; Wineland 1992b: 1:678–679). It lay several miles south of the *Via Egnatia* and was somewhat remote, reflecting Cicero's comment that the city was "off the beaten track" (Cic. Pis. 36.89). Once again, Paul and Silas proclaimed their message in the local synagogue. In spite of the fact that some believed, those from nearby Thessalonica arrived to incite the population. Paul was placed on a ship to Athens, while Silas and Timothy remained behind in Beroea (Acts 17:14–15). Investigations in recent years have discovered local routes of access from Beroea to the nearby ports of Methone and Pydna (Talbert 2000: 50). Either of these may have served as Paul's point of embarkation for his voyage to Athens (cf. McRay 1991:297–298).

Passenger ships arriving to Athens (H. M. Martin 1992b: 1:513–518) would have docked at Kantheros, the western harbor for the port of Piraeus c. 3.5 miles (6 km) south of Athens (Philostratus *Vit. Apoll.* 4:17; Paus. *Descr.* 1.2.2). The degree of idolatry in the ancient city disturbed Paul and prompted his arguments with "Jews and devout persons" (τοῖς σεβομένοις) in the synagogue of Athens. No archaeological evidence for the first-century synagogue has been uncovered, though a later synagogue has been suggested.

Uncharacteristic of Paul's strategy in other cities, he brought his argument to the agora of Athens where he encountered Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. The Painted Stoa from which the Stoics derived their name was found in 1981 in the northwest corner of the agora (McRay 1991:310). Paul was soon led to the Areopagus for a fuller hearing "of this new teaching." Scholarship is divided where Paul delivered his speech in Acts 17:22–31 in which he quotes the third-century Stoic, Aratus, "For we are indeed his offspring" (Aratus *Phaen.* 5) and refers to an Athenian altar "to an unknown God" (Acts 17:23; Van der Horst 1989:1426–1456; Martin 1992a: 1:370–372; Hemer 1973–74:341–350). The name ἄρειος πάγος strictly signifies the "hill of Ares [Mars]" in Athens (Liddell and Scott 1996:237), but the term was also used to identify the judicial council (i.e. ἡ βουλή) without topographical constraints. By the fourth century BCE the council regularly met in the Royal Stoa, leaving unclear its place of meeting in the first century CE (McRay 1991:309).

In any event, Paul addressed the men of Athens in the midst of the Areopagus, but his message was largely unsuccessful. Luke records that the difficulty for the Athenians was Paul's declared belief in the resurrection from the dead. Nevertheless, a member of the Areopagus, Dionysius, did become a Christian through Paul's efforts. Eusebius records that Dionysius became the bishop of Athens (Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 4.23).

From Athens Paul likely traveled west by ship c. 50 miles (83 km) along the coast to Corinth (Murphy-O'Connor 1992: 1:1134–1139), where Silas and Timothy rejoined him. Julius Caesar rebuilt this important commercial city in 44 BCE. A century earlier it had led the Achaean League of cities in



The second missionary journey of Paul.

its attempt to resist Roman rule, but the league had been defeated, and Lucius Mummius laid waste to Corinth in 146 BCE. The revitalized colony of Julius Caesar grew and became the seat of the governor for the province of Achaia.

Corinth's international importance was enhanced by its strategic location on the isthmus between the Peloponnesus and central Greece. Strabo attests to the commercial benefits of its position.

Corinth is called "wealthy" because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbors, of which the one leads straight to Asia, and the other to Italy; and it makes easy the exchange of merchandise from both countries that are so far distant from each other.... (Strabo *Geog.* 8.6.20)

Strabo describes the city's two harbors, Cenchræa, 6.5 miles (11 km) east of the city on the Saronic Gulf, and Lechaion, on the Corinthian Gulf. The *diolkos*, a narrow stone roadway, was built during the reign of Periander in the sixth century BCE to transport goods from one seaport to the other (Verdelis 1956:51–59).

The most prominent topographical feature of Corinth is its towering acropolis, the Acrocorinth, rising to an elevation of 1,886 feet (575 m) above sea level. On its pinnacle was the renowned temple of Aphrodite that Strabo suggests also contributed to the wealth of Corinth.

And the temple of Aphrodite was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple slaves, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess. And therefore it was also on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich; for instance, the ship captains freely squandered their money, and hence the proverb, "Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth." (Strabo *Geog.* 8.6.20)

As in the previous Greco-Roman cities on Paul's journey, the Apostle was drawn to the Jewish community in Corinth. We have no evidence for the beginnings of a Jewish presence in Corinth. Philo mentions a Jewish community

there already in the time of Gaius Caligula (37–41 CE; Philo *Leg.* 281). In the Book of Acts, Luke refers to the synagogue of Corinth and identifies Priscilla and Aquila, a Jewish couple who had recently arrived, "because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome" (Acts 18:2).

Suetonius likewise reports that Claudius expelled Jews from Rome: "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] expelled them from Rome" (Suet. *Claud.* 25:4). The Roman historian's testimony is interesting because it attests not only to Claudius' order of expulsion but to early activity by the fledgling Christian movement in Rome (Stern 1974: 2:114). The Claudian edict curtailing a Jewish presence in Rome stands in contrast to Josephus' presentation of the Emperor's restoration of the rights of the Jewish people (Ant. 19:280–296) and his friendship with Agrippa I (Ant. 19:274; War 2:215).

Paul's activities in Corinth again stirred controversy. His proclamation that "the Christ is Jesus" provoked bitter Jewish opposition, so that he abandoned the synagogue and went to the home of a God-fearer named Titius Justus, who lived "next door to the synagogue" (Acts 18:7). No archaeological structures from the first-century synagogue have been identified, but in 1898 Benjamin Powell discovered a fragmented Greek inscription that reads, "Synagogue of the Hebrews" (Powell 1903:60–61). Initially, it was proposed that the inscription belonged to a first-century synagogue. Subsequent paleographic examination, however, determined that the inscription belonged to a later period.

Paul's efforts appear to have had some measure of success, because he stayed in Corinth for eighteen months. The church at Corinth later was the recipient of his epistolary activity. Jewish opponents to Paul brought him before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia (Murphy-O'Connor

1993:315–317), but he refused to intervene (Acts 18:12–17).

A short while after this dispute, Paul decided to depart for Syria, taking with him Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18). Before embarking on his journey from Corinth's eastern port of Cenchreae (cf. Rom 16:1), Paul cut his hair apparently for reasons related to a personal vow (Bruce 1977:377). Luke does not specify the reason for the vow (εὐχήν: Acts 18:18, 21:23), but mention that the Apostle cut his hair suggests that it was related to the vow of a Nazirite (or Nazarite, as in ch.22?) (Num 6:1–21; Milgrom 1972:907–910).

New Testament scholarship has struggled to understand the significance of Paul's actions in Cenchreae (Fitzmyer 1998:634). Typically, the Nazirite cut his hair at the end of the period of his vow. So, Paul's actions have been understood (Bruce 1977:377). The difficulty in the present episode is that the Nazirite was restricted to conclude the vow with the shaving of his hair only in Jerusalem (m. Naz. 6:7), and accompanied with the necessary offerings in the Temple.

During the first century CE, we hear that Queen Helena of Adiabene initiated a Nazirite vow abroad and completed it only after coming to the Land of Israel (m. Nazir 3:6). The Mishnah also records that Nazirites came to Jerusalem shortly after its destruction to complete their vows but found the Temple in ruins (m. Nazir 5:4). The obligation to be in Jerusalem at the conclusion of the Nazirite vow has led some to speculate that Paul cut his hair in Cenchreae to mark the beginning of his vow (Dunn 1996:246). However, as Barrett notes, we have no evidence for such a practice, and he raises questions whether or not this may even be a Nazirite vow (Barrett 1998:877).

What is often overlooked is that the requirement to shave one's hair in Jerusalem pertains to the conclusion of the Nazirite vow. If the Nazirites became ritually unclean



Seleucia Harbor: Paul would have traveled in and out of this harbor on his journeys. (photo R. S. Notley)

during the period of their vow, they were required to shave their head to mark the renewal of their vow (Num 6:9). This act of renewal does not seem to have been limited to Jerusalem (Jastrow 1914:274, 278). While Luke does not tell us the reason for Paul's actions, the most probable explanation is that he cut his hair in Cenchreae to renew his Nazirite vow.

Paul launched from Cenchreae, on the Saronic Gulf, across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus, the most important Roman port on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor. Paul stayed in the Asian city only a brief time and refused the offer to stay longer. His haste may have been related to as yet unfulfilled duties pertaining to his Nazirite vow.



Priene: remains of this very early synagogue emphasize Jewish presence in Asia Minor. (photo R. S. Notley)

The obligations of the vow could only be fulfilled with offerings in the Temple in Jerusalem (Num 6:13–20; Ant. 4:72). For our present study, what is important is the recognition that Paul's need to fulfill his Nazirite vow in Jerusalem helps us to explain his unusual itinerary.

Paul's stated destination is Antioch in Syria. Yet, rather than sailing directly from Ephesus to Seleucia, the port of Antioch, Paul is next in Caesarea—about 300 miles (483 km) to the south. His out-of-the-way port-of-call is neither an accident nor the result of unfavorable winds (pace Bruce 1977:379 and Dunn 1996:247). Although Luke does not specify a visit to Jerusalem, there seems little question that such a visit is the reason for Paul's arrival to Caesarea (Acts 18:22). Otherwise, a journey from Ephesus to Antioch in Syria by way of Caesarea is inexplicable. After landing at Caesarea, he went up (ἀναβάς; i.e. to Jerusalem) and greeted the church (Acts 14:27; 15:3, 5). Later, he went down (κατέβη; i.e. from Jerusalem; Acts 11:27, 15:30) to Antioch.

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

The Apostle's final missionary journey begins with little fanfare, no special appointment and no laying on of hands. "After spending some time [in Antioch] he departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples" (Acts 18:23). Luke's lack of geographical detail may correspond to the fact that this portion of Paul's journey is not part of the "we section" that presumably records the journeys to which the author of Acts was a firsthand witness (Hemer 1990:312–334; Acts 16:6–17, 20:5–15; 21:1–18, 27:1–28:16 [and 11:28 in Codex Bezae]). Accordingly, we are not told whether Paul traveled from Antioch by land or by sea. Neither are we told in which cities of Galatia and Phrygia Paul strengthened the disciples (Gal 4:13).

Next Paul passed "through the upper regions" and came down to Ephesus (Acts 19:1). The precise location of these "upper regions" or "inland regions" (τὰ ἄνωτερικὰ μέρη; Liddel and Scott 1996:170) is unknown. Paul may have returned north retracing a portion of his previous journey. On the other hand, he may have taken a more direct route from Ephesus on the Royal Route

first mentioned by Herodotus (Hist. 15.54.1) that connected Asia Minor through the Cilician Gates to Susa, the ancient capital of Persia (Ramsay 1890:27–35).

A Jewish presence may be attested in Asia Minor already in the fourth century BCE. Clearchus of Soli, a student of Aristotle, records that his teacher encountered a Jew "who not only spoke Greek, but had the soul of a Greek," during his travels between 348 and 345 BCE (cf. Apion 1:176–182; Stern 1974:1:47–52). According to Philo, by the first century CE Jews resided throughout Asia Minor (Philo Leg. 245): "...those countries which have large numbers of Jews in all their cities, namely Asia and Syria." Material evidence of Jews in Ephesus is lacking. Yet, Josephus relates that Jewish residents of Ephesus were granted citizenship in the early Hellenistic period of the Diadochi (Ant. 12:125; Apion 2:4). Under Roman rule Jews in Ephesus gained special privileges to practice their ancestral customs and received exemption from military service (Smallwood 1981:139–143; Philo Leg. 40; Ant. 16:167–168, 172–173). Although a century of archaeological investigations at Ephesus has not unearthed the location of the synagogues there, historical attestations suggest that they did indeed exist (Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1986:3:22–24; Bammer 1997:2:252–255; Bean 1972:160–184; Akurgal 1985:142–170, 378–384).

Paul had promised the congregation in Ephesus on his previous visit that if he were able, he would return and spend more time with them. On this occasion Paul taught and ministered in Ephesus for two years. While there Paul met followers of John the Baptist, who "had not yet heard that the Holy Spirit had been received" (Acts 19:2 [in Codex Bezae]; Notley 1991:266–270). These had only heard John's call to repentance and baptism in anticipation of the coming of the Redeemer, whose advent would coincide with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. IQS 4:19–26; Leaney 1966:37:1–56, 158–161). Paul informed the disciples that John's proclamation had been fulfilled in the person of Jesus. They accepted Paul's message, were baptized, and "the Holy Spirit came upon them" (Acts 19:6).

Luke records that Paul continued to speak daily in the synagogue and in the hall of Tyrannus, "so that all the residents of Asia heard of the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). After awhile Paul determined "to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and to go to Jerusalem, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome'" (Acts 19:21). Following a riotous protest in the theater of Ephesus against Paul and the local church which was instigated by Demetrius, a silversmith who made shrines for the local cult to Artemis (Tribilco 1994:316–338; LiDonnici 1992:389–415), the Apostle set out for Macedonia. The author does not indicate whether his journey from Ephesus began by land or by sea, but Paul continued through the region of Macedonia until he came to Greece (Acts 20:1).

Plots once again surfaced against Paul, so he determined to return to Syria through Macedonia. A number of his party went on before Paul and waited for him in Alexandria Troas (Acts 20:4–5). Presumably, Paul retraced his steps through Macedonia along the Via Egnatia to the port of Philippi (Neapolis) and from there sailed to Troas (Acts 20:3–6).

The ports-of-call on the journey to Syria indicate that Paul traveled primarily by ship



The third missionary journey of Paul.

from Troas to Antioch, and “the sequence of places mentioned in these verses is entirely correct and natural” (Hemer 1990:125). The recorded stops are either island settlements or port cities on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor. The only exception is Paul’s trek on the Republican road (French 1994:55) from Troas to Assos (Strabo Geog. 13.1.51, 57–58; Pliny Nat. Hist. 2.211, 5.32, 36.131–133; Wescoat 1997: 1: 223–225; Yamauchi 1992: 1:503), a city situated on the southern coast of the Troad, looking across the Gulf of Adramyttium toward the isle of Lesbos.

We set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there; for he had arranged, intending himself to go by land (from Troas). And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. (Acts 20:13)

The harbor city of Mitylene is the chief city on the eastern side of the isle of Lesbos. The ship moored there overnight and the next day continued c. 28 miles (47 km) to the island of Chios (Strabo Geog. 14.1.35; Herodotus Hist. 6:8; Thuc. 8: 15; Ant. 16:18–19; Smallwood 1981:81). The following day they “touched at Samos (παρεβάλομεν)” (Ant. 16:23–24; Smallwood 1981: 81; Avi-Yonah and Shatzman

1975:404; Wineland 1992d: 5:948) just one mile off the coast of Asia Minor. A Jewish community is mentioned in Samos already in the period of the Hasmoneans (1 Macc 15:23; Tcherikover 1975:288).

Western and Byzantine Greek text traditions read that Paul did not stay at Samos but continued a short distance to the mainland, “and they remained in Trogyllium” (Metzger 1994:423–424; Hemer 1990:125; Fitzmyer 1998:672). Trogyllium was a small settlement situated on a promontory of the mainland that faced across the narrow channel c. 1 mile (2 km) from Samos. Whether Paul’s ship stayed overnight at Samos or Trogyllium, it undoubtedly coursed through this strait on its way to Miletus.

The following day the ship traveled c. 28 miles (47 km) to Miletus (Strabo Geog. 14.1.6; Herodotus Hist. 1.17–20, 141; 6:6; Arr. Anab. 1.18; Edwards 1997b: 4:26–27), an Ionian city near the mouth of the Meander River. The famous port lies due south (c. 30 mi./50 km) of Ephesus. Its street design follows the rectangular grid plan associated with the local architect, Hippodamus (Bean 1972:219–230). A Roman period synagogue has been suggested near the center of the city (Gerkan 1921:177–181; Kraabel 1979:488–489; McRay 1992c: 4:825–826). A Jewish presence in Miletus is also attested by an inscription found *in situ* on the fifth row of seats in the theater: τῶπος Εἰουδέων τῶν καὶ Θεοσεβίων. The phrase is grammatically awkward and has been translated by some, “a place of the Jews who are (also called) God-fearers” (cf. Bertram 1966:125). In other words, the designation “God-fearers” describes members of the Jewish community. Others have noted that a pagan reference to the religious piety of the Jewish community within the setting of a Roman theater is at the least

strange. Accordingly, the awkward grammatical structure of the inscription is corrected to read, “a place of the Jews and God-fearers” (Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1986: 3:167–168). Such a reading would then designate seating for both Jews and Gentile God-fearers who had become closely identified with the Jewish community (Levinskaya 1996: 5:65–66).

Paul stayed in Miletus rather than nearby Ephesus, because he was in haste to be in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost. Nevertheless, he invited elders from the congregation in Ephesus to visit him in Miletus. After their time together, Paul set sail for Jerusalem continuing ports-of-call at the Greek islands of Cos and Rhodes. Paul seems to have done little more than stay overnight in Cos (Stern 1974: 1:274; cf. 1 Macc 15:23; Ant. 14:112, 14:233; Strabo Geog. 14.2.19; War 1:424). A small island in the Aegean Sea, it was famous for being the birthplace of Hippocrates, the father of medicine, and a temple to Asclepius.

Likewise no mention is made of Paul’s activities in Rhodes. Historical sources attest to a Jewish presence in Rhodes (Suet. Tib. 32.2; 1 Macc 15:23), and it is here that Herod the Great came to swear his loyalty to Caesar Augustus after the Battle of Actium and the death of Mark Antony (Ant. 15:187; War 1:387). Herod also contributed to the rebuilding of the temple of Apollo at Rhodes (Ant. 16:147; War 1:424).

From Rhodes Paul journeyed east to Patara, a harbor town on the southern coast of Lycia and 7 miles (12 km) east of the Xanthus River. “Prevailing winds of the area made the direct sailing route from Asia Minor to Phoenicia possible” (Nickelsburg 1992: 5:177). Some manuscripts add “καὶ Μύρα” in Acts 21:1 to the ports visited on Paul’s journey (Metzger 1994:427; cf. Acts 27: 5; Paul and Thecla 40; cf. Schneemelcher, ed. 1992:246–249). Geographically, a stop in the well-known port



Lighthouse at Patara, site visited by Paul. (photo R. S. Notley)

of Myra is natural on the journey eastward to Phoenicia (cf. Acts 27:5–6).

Leaving Asia Minor Paul found a ship going to Phoenicia. They sailed “within sight of Cyprus,” but continued along the island’s southern coast (Acts 21:3: καταλιπόντες αὐτὴν εὐώνυμον) and landed at the legendary Phoenician port city of Tyre (Ward 1997:247–250). There is minimal inscriptional evidence of Jewish settlement on the Phoenician coast (Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1986: 3: 15). Nevertheless, coins minted in Tyre (כסף צור) were used in the Roman period for the Temple tithe in Jerusalem (m. Bek. 8:7; t. Ketub. [12] 13:4; Meshorer 1997:69–73). Paul stayed in Tyre seven days after discovering a community of Christians (Acts 21: 4). The believers in Tyre attempted to discourage Paul from going to Jerusalem, but he boarded a



Greek inscription found on theater seat at Miletus: “Seating for the Jews and God-fearers.” (photo R. S. Notley)

ship and continued southward along the coast towards the Holy City.

The ship stopped at the biblical port of Acco, which had been transformed into a Hellenistic polis and renamed Ptolemais during the rule of the Diadochi Ptolemy II (1 Macc 5:15; *Eus. Onom.* 30:10; Dothan et al. 1993:16–31). Paul stayed with fellow believers in Ptolemais one day, and then he continued his journey to the final port-of-call at Caesarea. Paul stayed in Caesarea with Philip and his family, where he was again cautioned not to go up to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem, and upon arriving in the Holy City he stayed with Mnason of Cyprus, “an early disciple” (Acts 21:16).

THE ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT OF PAUL

After some time Paul went up to Jerusalem to meet with James (cf. *Eus. Hist. eccl.* 2.1.2) and the elders of the church. He reported to them the events of his journeys and what the Lord had done among the Gentiles. James responded that,

many among the Jews have also believed; they are zealous for the law (cf. Acts 22:3; Gal 1:14; Tit 2:14; IQS 4:4: וְקִנְיָהּ זָרָק מִשְׁפָּטֵי צֶדֶק), and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs. (Acts 21:20–21)

In order to dispel the false rumors surrounding Paul’s message, they recommended that he offer to pay the expenses for four men concluding a Nazirite vow (*m. Naz.* 1:3).

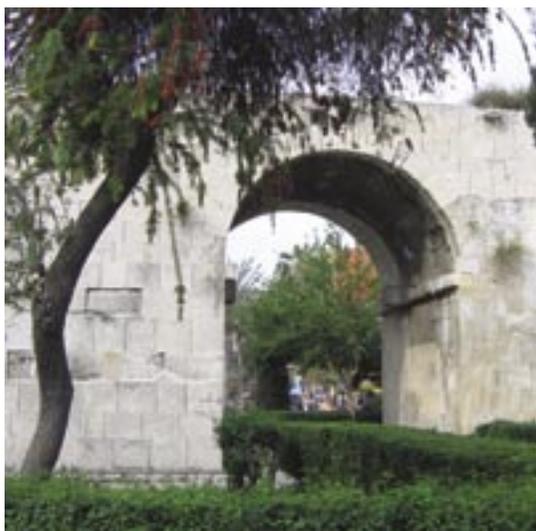
They also proposed that Paul accompany the men and purify himself (ἀγνίσθητι; cf. Jn 11:55), in other words, that he join the men in the rite of ritual immersion before ascending to the temple precincts (cf. Acts 21:26, 24:18; cf. *P. Oxy* 840). “Thus, all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself live in observance of the law” (Acts 21:24b). As we noted in connection to Paul’s own vow described in Acts 18:18, fulfillment of the Nazirite vow was purely voluntary, and sometimes intended to demonstrate one’s commitment to Torah observance.

Paying the costs for devotees, who could not afford the expenses involved in the concluding rites of their Nazirite vows, was also considered an expression of religious piety. Josephus reports that King Agrippa I performed just such a charitable act upon his return to Jerusalem (cf. *Ant.* 19:293–294). His actions were indicative of his reported religious character.

He enjoyed residing in Jerusalem and did so constantly; and he scrupulously observed the traditions of his people. He neglected no rite of purification, and no day passed for him without the prescribed sacrifice. (*Ant.* 19:331)

At the end of the prescribed seven days, the period of purification (Acts 21:27; cf. *Codex Bezae*: συντελουμένης δὲ τῆς ἐβδόμης ἡμέρας [“When the seven days had ended”]; וְיָמֵי טְהוּרָה Num 6:9, 18–19), Paul and the men went to the Temple, but Jews from Asia recognized him and stirred up the crowds against him with serious charges: “This is the man who is teaching men everywhere against the people and the law and this place; moreover he also brought Greeks into the temple, and he has defiled the holy place” (Acts 21:28). They accused Paul of bringing a non-Jew beyond the partition into the inner courts of the Temple, an act forbidden in Jewish law.

Proceeding across this (outer court) towards the second



Cleopatra’s Gate at Tarsus, the home of Paul. (photo R. S. Notley)

court of the temple, one found it surrounded by a stone balustrade, three cubits (4.5 ft./1.4 m) high and of exquisite workmanship; in this at regular intervals stood slabs giving warning, some in Greek, others in Latin characters, of the law of purification, to wit that no foreigner was permitted to enter the holy place.

(*War* 5:193–194; *Ant.* 15:417; *Philo Leg.* 212; cf. *Eph* 2:14).

Two remnants from this warning, sometimes called “the Thanatos [i.e. death] Inscription” have been discovered (Bickerman 1946–47:387–405; Segal 1989:79–84).

As violence broke out, a Roman tribune of the cohort that was responsible for maintaining order in Jerusalem arrived to arrest and take Paul to the barracks (cf. Acts 21:34: τὴν παρεμβολήν; 23:10; i.e. Antonia Fortress [Fitzmyer 1998:699]). He was about to question Paul under the lash, when the Apostle informed him of his Roman citizenship. No details are given how Paul merited citizenship, only that he was born a Roman citizen. This presumes that his family had been settled in Tarsus for quite a long time.

On the next day, the commander wanted to determine further the basis of the accusations against Paul, so he brought him before the Sanhedrin. In a heated exchange Ananias, the high priest, had Paul struck on the mouth. Paul reviled the Sadducean leader, and those who stood by rebuked the Apostle that he would speak with such disrespect to the high priest. In a creative reply, full of irony, Paul responded, “I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people’” (Acts 23:5). His use of Exodus 22:27 in this context conveys a stinging reproach of the high priest and reflects a turn of the passage heard from Israel’s Sages.

Why does Scripture specify “among your people”? [Isn’t this phrase superfluous? We should understand this addition to imply, only] when they [the rulers] behave in a manner that befits “your people.”

(*Mek. on Ex* 22:28 *Mishpatim* 19 [ed. Horowitz and Rabin p. 318]; cf. *Safrai* 1998:34–37)

Paul’s excuse was not that he did not know the high priest, but that Ananias had not behaved in a manner that “befits your people.” The Apostle’s rabbinic-styled use of Scripture anticipates his self-identification with the Pharisees, who were included in the Sanhedrin. Knowing that there were both Pharisees and Sadducees present, Paul defended himself: “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial” (Acts 23:6; *Ant.* 18:14, 16; *War* 2:163, 165; cf. *Dan* 12:2–3; 2 Macc 7:14, 12:43).

As Paul undoubtedly anticipated, dissension broke out among the religious council. In the *mélée*, the Roman tribune thought it best to remove Paul and return him to the barracks. A plot against Paul’s life was uncovered, and the Romans transferred Paul at night to Caesarea (Acts 23:23–30). They arrived at Antipatris (Acts 23:31; *Ant.* 16:142–143; *War* 1:417; Kochavi 1989:2–20) and the following morning continued their journey to Caesarea, where they turned Paul over to Felix, the governor of Judea (Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1973: 1:459–466). Tacitus mentions the appointment of Felix to the province of Judea.

The [Herodian] princes now being dead or reduced to insignificance, Claudius made Judea a province and entrusted it to Roman knights or to freedmen; one of the latter, Antonius Felix, practiced every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of a king with all the instincts of a slave; he married Drusilla, the granddaughter of Cleopatra and Antony, and so was Antony’s grandson-in-law, while Claudius was Antony’s grandson.

(*Tac. Hist.* 5:9; cf. *Tac. Ann.* 12:45; *Ant.* 20:137)

Drusilla, the wife of Felix mentioned by Tacitus, was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, and one of three wives that he married, who came from royal families (*Suet. Claud.* 28). Josephus recounts how Felix lured Drusilla away from her first husband, Azizus, king of Emesa (*Ant.* 19:354–355, 20:138–144; *War* 2:220). His marriage to the Jewish princess may explain why Felix was “well informed about the Way” (Acts 24:22), the name by which the fledgling Christian movement is sometimes called in Acts (Acts 9:12, 19:9, 19:23, 24:14, 24:22; cf. *Did.* 1:1–2).

The Romans held Paul in *Herod’s praetorium* (ἐν τῷ πραιτωρίῳ τοῦ Ἡρώδου), the residence of the Roman procurators at Caesarea (Acts 23:35; cf. *Mk* 15:16). Charges were brought against Paul, and Luke reports his defense, first before Felix (Acts 24:1–26) and two years later before his replacement, Porcius Festus (Acts 24:27; Schürer, Vermes and Millar 1973: 1:467–468), “who succeeded Felix as procurator, proceeded to attack the principal plague of the country; he captured large numbers of the brigands and put not a few to death” (*War* 2:271). In *Antiquities*, Josephus provides a fuller description of steps taken by Festus during his two-year tenure (60–62 CE) to bring the brigandry in the countryside under control.

When Festus arrived in Judea, it happened that Judea was being devastated by the brigands, for the villages one and all were being set on fire and plundered. The so-called *sicarii*—these are brigands—were particularly numerous at that time. . . . They would also frequently appear with arms in the villages of their foes and would plunder and set them on fire. Festus also sent a force of cavalry and infantry against the dupes of a certain impostor who had promised them salvation and rest from troubles, if they chose to follow him into the wilderness. The force which Festus dispatched destroyed both the deceiver himself and those who had followed him. (*Ant.* 20:185–188)

Luke records that the new procurator went directly to Jerusalem to meet with the high priest and other Jewish leaders (Acts 25:1). There he heard the accusations against Paul and invited his accusers to return with him to Caesarea. In a hearing before Festus, Paul renewed his defense against those who had come from Jerusalem. “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended at all” (Acts 25:8). Festus desired to gain favor with his new Jewish subjects, so he encouraged Paul to accommodate their request that he go to Jerusalem and be heard again by the Sanhedrin. Instead, Paul exercised his right to appeal to



Paul's arrest and imprisonment, 59–62 CE.

Caesar, and Festus agreed (Acts 25:11–12).

Prior to his departure, Paul was given the opportunity to speak before King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice. Agrippa was the brother of Drusilla, the wife of Felix. Paul once again recounted the story of his encounter on the road to Damascus and his subsequent work among the Gentiles. He reiterated his innocence.

My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion, I have lived as a Pharisee. (Acts 26:4–6)

This is now a second time that Paul emphasized his identity as a Pharisee (cf. Acts 23:6; Phil 3:5). When he concluded, Agrippa shared Festus' opinion. "This man could have been set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar" (Acts 26:32).

At the first opportunity, Paul and the other prisoners being held in Caesarea were placed on a ship from Adramyttium, "which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia" (Acts 27:2). It was likely bringing grain or cargo from Egypt back to Adramyttium, in the region of Mysia in northwest Asia Minor, between Pergamum and Alexander Troas. The ship's return destination made it clear that it would not take them to Italy. Its stated intention "to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia" befits travel close to the coast of Asia likely because of the approaching winter season.

The first port-of-call was Sidon, on the



Harbor and Hadrianic granary at Myra: Paul is brought here from Caesarea on a "grain ship" and they change ships to Italy. (photo R. S. Notley)

Phoenician coast from which the ship "sailed under the lee of Cyprus" (Acts 27:4). The strong headwinds from the northwest prevented the ship from continuing northward along the coast of Syria and Asia. Instead, the crew used the isle of Cyprus to protect the ship from northern winds, and they passed the seacoast of Cilicia and Pamphylia (Acts 27:5). West of Cyprus the ship turned north, crossed the open seas and arrived at the important Lycian port of Myra.

The port of Myra was well known by the Roman grain fleet for its role in the storage and distribution to Asia. A large granary built by Hadrian still stands visible today. The centurion responsible for Paul's transport arranged for another passage on a ship that had arrived from Alexandria and was bound for Italy. However, strong headwinds also impeded this ship's progress. At Cnidus, a town on the southwestern tip of Asia Minor, the ship turned south-southwest, to Salmone (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 4.12.58, 4.12.71; Strabo *Geog.* 10.3.20, 10.4.3) on the eastern edge of Crete. The crew once more used the landmass of the island to protect the ship from the heavy northern winds. "Coasting along with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea" (Acts 27:8).

As Luke remarks, weather had delayed their passage, and it was already after "the Fast" (τὴν νηστείαν; i.e. Day of Atonement). This is the author's way of noting the time of travel at the beginning of the winter season, making travel on the Mediterranean Sea difficult. The southern Cretan port of Fair Havens was not considered suitable for a winter dock, so the captain continued with the hope of reaching Phoenix (Hemer 1986[9?]:139) on the southwestern tip of Crete. However, strong winds blew the ship off course, "under the lee of a small island called Cauda" (Acts 27:16).

The crew began throwing their cargo overboard to try and lighten their load in the stormy seas. Nevertheless, after a number of days they ran ashore on an island that they later learned was Malta (Acts 28:1; Strabo *Geog.* 6.2.11, 17.3.16; Diod. Sic. 5.12.2–3). It was here that Paul survived a snake bite to the amazement of his fellow travelers (Acts 28:2–6). Finally, after three

months the party continued on to Italy on a ship that had originated from Alexandria. First they arrived at Syracuse. "And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium; and after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli" (Acts 28:13). As they traveled overland from Puteoli to Rome (cf. Strabo *Geog.* 17.17; Life 16), Paul was met by fellow believers who came to meet him at the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns. Both of these towns are situated on the *Via Appia* leading to Rome.

When Paul arrived in Rome, he was placed under house arrest. However, he could receive visitors. First, local leaders of the Jewish community came to meet Paul.

When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in great numbers. And he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, while others disbelieved. (Acts 28:23–24)

Luke concludes his story about Paul with the Apostle still under house arrest. According to Christian tradition, Paul was martyred during the persecution of Christians by Nero after the fire of Rome in 64 CE (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15:44; Suet. *Nero* 16:2; Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 2.25). Yet, Luke gives no hint in his work of knowledge of Paul's death. Instead, at the time Luke concludes his work, Paul is still presented in the final lines of the Book of Acts engaged in active ministry.

And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered. (Acts 28:30–31)



Model of Sidonian merchant ship, 2nd–3rd centuries CE.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF THE APOCALYPSE

Incorporated into the larger work of the Apocalypse, the author includes seven letters to churches in Asia Minor. No explanation is provided why these churches are deemed worthy of the author's attention, or why others are excluded. Ramsay suggested that they follow in a circular order, perhaps reflecting a mail route (Ramsay 1994:137). In that regard, then, the letters were not to be read individually but as an encyclical. As a corpus they addressed the spiritual concerns of the church of Asia Minor.

Physical evidence for Ramsay's suggestion is lacking. However, the overlapping and repetitive nature of the letters does indicate that these letters reflect the spiritual challenges facing the church of Asia Minor in the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian during the last decade of the Common Era.

Ephesus (Rev 2:1–7). The city served an important role for the ancient Ionian people; according to Strabo's testimony it was "the royal seat of the Ionians" (Strabo Geog. 14.1.3). During the Archaic period (in 555 BCE) Croesus, the last king of Lydia, conquered the Ionian city (Herodotus Hist. 1.26), only to be followed a short time later by the Persians and Cyrus in 546 BCE. Following the Persian wars, it was a member of the Delian League, but sided with Sparta against Athens in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE). It returned to Persian hegemony in 386 BCE until the conquest of Alexander, in 334 BCE.

The Diadochi Lysimachus (323–281 BCE) insisted that the residents move the city from its earlier setting to its present location between the two hills of Panayir Dag and Bülbül Dag. The new city was laid out according to a Hippodamian street plan (Paus. Descr. 1.9.7) and surrounded by the impressive Lysimachian wall (Strabo Geog. 14.1.21). An important topographical feature of Ephesus was its harbor. Strabo speaks of the problem of the silting of the Caÿster River (Strabo Geog. 14.1.24), but efforts to dredge the harbor appear to have kept Ephesus as a major commercial and shipping power in the Roman period.

The city was subject to the Pergamene rulers until it was willed to Rome upon the death of Attalus III, in 133 BCE. Its relationship with Rome in the early years of the empire was an unsettled one, but under Augustus the city flourished. It was awarded the title, "First and Greatest Metropolis of Asia" (Oster 1992: 2:543). Its importance in the province of Asia may explain the considerable amount of time that the Apostle Paul spent there, and perhaps even its place as the first city addressed in the Seven Letters of the Apocalypse.

The temple of Artemis at Ephesus was considered one of the wonders of the ancient world (Herodotus Hist. 1.148; Paus. Descr. 4.31.8, 7.5.4). The Greek goddess was the equivalent of the local Anatolian deity Cybele, goddess of hunting and fertility. Later the Ephesians claimed that both Apollo and Artemis were born in Ephesus and not Delos, the sacred isle (Tac. Ann. 3.60–63; cf. Strabo Geog. 14.1.20). The legendary sanctuary was



The great library at Ephesus. (photo R. S. Notley)

destroyed and rebuilt on several occasions over the following centuries, but remained one of the most important in the ancient world (Ant. 15:89; Acts 19:23–41).

In contrast to the abundance of historical evidence, little actual physical evidence has been unearthed to attest the presence of the Jewish community at Ephesus. Josephus mentions a large Jewish community there already in the third century BCE (Ant. 12:125–126, 166–168, 172–173). Paul encountered followers of John the Baptist at Ephesus who were incorporated into the fledgling church (Acts 19:1–7). Christianity flourished at Ephesus, and the Ephesian church became an important center in Asia (e.g. Acts 18:19–28, 19:1, 20:16–17; 1 Cor 15:32; 1 Tim 1:3; 2 Tim 1:18, 4:12). According to Eusebius, the Apostle John wrote his gospel at Ephesus (Eus. Hist. eccl. 5.8.4), and Ignatius of Antioch attests to a Christian presence here at the beginning of the second century (110 CE; Ign. Eph. 1:3, 6:2). The city's importance continued into the Byzantine period, and it was the site of the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE.

Smyrna (Rev 2:8–11). Overshadowed somewhat by its sister port city to the south, Smyrna possessed its own illustrious past. According to Greek legend and local tradition, the city was the birthplace of Homer in the eighth century BCE (Strabo Geog. 12.3.27, 14.1.37; Paus. Descr. 7.5.12), and it was refounded on its third occasion by Alexander the Great (Aelius Aristides Or. [??] 17.3–5, 18.2; Paus. Descr. 7.5.1–3). Under the Romans it was the early site of a temple to *Dea Roma* (Tac. Ann. 4.56), and later Tiberius awarded it with the coveted title of νεωκόρος (temple-warden) for the cult of Tiberius, Livy and the Senate (Tac. Ann. 4.55–56).

Apart from the letter of Revelation, no other reference is made to Smyrna in the New Testament. Nevertheless, the city is well attested in the Apostolic Fathers (Ign. Eph. 21:1; Ign. Magn. 15:1; Ign. Trall. 1:1, 12:1; Papias 2:1), indicating that the beginnings of Christianity in Smyrna were early. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, was the victim of early Roman persecution of the Christian faith in Asia Minor (cf. Ferguson 1998:933–934; Martyrdom of Polycarp).

Evidence of a Jewish presence in Smyrna is likewise not in abundance, but an interesting inscription may touch on a line in our letter. An inscription from the Hadrianic period speaks of a public works project carried out by ΟΙ ΠΟΤΕ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ, which may be rendered, "the former Jews" or "those formerly of Judea" (cf. Kraabel 1982: 455). The author of our letter refers to "those who say they are Jews and are not" (Rev 1:9). The question, of course, is whether he intended this to refer to those who were born Jewish, but who in his estimation no longer lived worthy of that identity. Or, instead, whether he referred to those who were proselytes to Judaism (or God-fearers), who, though they were identified with the Jewish community, likewise in the author's estimation failed to live worthy of that association. In either event, the subsequent caustic description that they were "of the synagogue of Satan" (Rev 2:9) should not be read as an anti-Jewish invective. Nearly identical rhetoric is heard in the Dead Sea Scrolls from the Qumran Congregation, charging that their Jewish adversaries belonged to the *Congregation of Belial* (עדת בלעל: 1QH^a 10:22).



The Seven Churches of the Apocalypse (Rev 1:4–3:21).

Pergamum (Rev 2:12–17). Sixteen miles (26 km) from the Aegean Sea in the region of Mysia, the acropolis of Pergamum rises 1,000 feet (305 m) above the plains of the Caicus River. The city gained little attention until the Hellenistic period. Lysimachus, one of the Diadochi of Alexander the Great and king of Thrace, took possession of the territory and treasures of Antigonos Monophthalmos, after the latter's defeat and death at the Battle of Ipsus in 301 BCE (Diod. Sic. 20.107.3). The king appointed Philataerus to govern at Pergamum and entrusted to him his wealth for safe-keeping (Strabo Geog. 13.4.1). When Lysimachus was killed by Seleucus I in 281 BCE, Philataerus retained possession of Lysimachus' treasury and used it to establish an independent principality ruled by the Attalid dynasty.

Under the Attalid, Eumenes II, Pergamum was able to free itself from Seleucid domination with the help of the Roman general, Scipio Africanus. Together they defeated the Seleucid, Antiochus III, at the Battle of Magnesia in 189 BCE. Pergamum was rewarded with independence and control of the Seleucid's territory in Asia Minor. The city-state entered its golden era and during this time founded its famous library and school of sculpture. Its identity as an independent kingdom ended with the last of the Attalids, Attalus III, who died in 133 BCE. He bequeathed his kingdom to Rome, which incorporated the territory into the Province of Asia.

Josephus records the Pergamenes' response to the decision by the Roman Senate in regard to a matter pertaining to the Jews of Pergamum (Ant. 14:247–255). Thus, it seems already in the days of John Hyrcanus a Jewish presence was known in this city. Cicero also mentions that Flaccus (c. 80 BCE) had secured at Pergamum the gold of the Jews from Asia that was intended for Jerusalem (Cic. Flac. 28.68).

Among the impressive buildings that cover the acropolis of Pergamum, two important structures may shed light on the elusive identity of "the throne of Satan" in our letter (Rev 2:13). To commemorate the defeat of the Celts in 230 BCE, a monumental altar to Zeus was constructed. Sacrifices continued on the altar night and day,



Theater and Altar of Zeus at Pergamum, one of the churches of Revelation. (photo R. S. Notley)

seven days a week (Aune 1997:180). In addition, two centuries later, in 29 BCE, Pergamum was the site of the first temple in Asia, dedicated to *Dea Roma* and the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus (Dio Cass. 51.20.6; Tac. Ann. 4.37). Yet, the mention of persecution and martyrdom of a certain Antipas, “who was killed among you where Satan dwells” (Rev 2:13), suggests that the persecution experienced during the reign of Domitian—as well as the identity of the throne of Satan—was related to Roman emperor worship and not to the pagan cult of Zeus.

One other reference is worthy of brief mention. The author speaks of those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:15) and the teaching of Balaam (Rev 2:14). The Nicolaitans have already been mentioned in the letter to Ephesus (Rev 2:6), but we possess no other contemporary witness for the Nicolaitans or their teachings (Ferguson 1998:814–815). Nevertheless, the collocation in the letter to Pergamum of the Nicolaitans and those who hold to the teaching of Balaam may indicate that these two groups are to be identified.

The content of their teaching is further clarified by an explanatory statement about Balaam, “who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality” (Rev

2:14). The author’s interpretation of the actions of the Transjordanian prophet belongs to the fascinating reinterpretation of the figure in post-biblical Judaism (Kugel 1998:801–810).

The trajectories of interpretation were driven by the moral and spiritual challenges that faced the Jewish community living in the Diaspora, as well as the early church. Although not guilty of these charges according to the biblical description, Balaam was recast to embody the dangers of idolatry and sexual immorality that endangered the early church and the Jewish community living in the Greco-Roman world. To that end, creative exegesis was employed to exploit aspects in the contours of the biblical narrative.

First, immediately following Balaam’s departure the account in Numbers mentions the twin sins of “the teaching of Balaam”: “While Israel dwelt in Shittim the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate, and bowed down to their gods” (Num 25:1). Together with this, the Hebrew wording in a subsequent mention of Balaam retains some ambiguity. The daughters of Moab are described by Moses,

Behold, these caused the people of Israel, in the matter of Balaam (בְּדִבְרֵי בַלְעָם), to act treacherously against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord. (Num 31:16)

The phrase, בְּדִבְרֵי בַלְעָם, can be variously rendered, “in the matter, thing of Balaam” or “by the word of Balaam” (cf. LXX Num 31:16: τὸ ῥῆμα Βαλααμ). Later, interpreters used these words as the genesis to clarify the sudden and unexplained idolatry and sexual immorality committed by the Israelites in Numbers 25:1–2. Some interpreters even went so far as to record the very wording of Balaam’s advice.

“You have in your countrymen, king,” [Balaam] said, “women of outstanding beauty, and there is nothing to which a man more easily falls captive than a woman’s beauty. . . . But you must instruct them not to allow their wooers to enjoy their charms at once. . . . One of those (women) should say, with saucy air: ‘You must not be permitted to enjoy my favors until you have left the ways of your fathers and become a convert. . . if you are willing

to take part in the libations and sacrifices which we offer to idols of stone and wood and other images.”

(Philo Moses 1:294–298; cf. Midr. Tanh. Balaq 18)

It may be of some significance that at least in his reading of the biblical episode pertaining to Balaam, the Christian author demonstrates the same approach to the narrative as his Jewish contemporaries.

Thyatira (Rev 2:18–29). Situated between Pergamum and Sardis, Thyatira was a Macedonian settlement, according to Greek tradition (Strabo Geog. 13.4). Its history fell under the shadow of the Pergamene state and it served as a frontier outpost in the Hellenistic period. In antiquity it lay at the crossroads between Mysia and Lydia on the plains of a lesser Lycus River, a tributary of the Hermus River. Little archaeological evidence has been uncovered for this relatively obscure city. As Hemer remarked, “the longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to the least known, least important and least remarkable of the cities” (Hemer 1989: 106). Inscriptional finds refer to a local guild of wool workers, dyers and fullers (Stambaugh 1992: 6: 546). Accordingly, in Acts 16:11–15 we encounter Lydia, a Jewish sympathizer living in Philippi, “from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God (σεβουμένη τὸν θεόν)” (Acts 16:14).

The author’s concern with idolatry and sexual immorality on the part of the churches of Asia Minor is continued in the letter to the



Byzantine basilica at Thyatira, one of the churches of Revelation. (photo R. S. Notley)

church at Thyatira (Rev 2:20). Whereas the author employed the biblical figure of Balaam to epitomize the spiritual dangers that faced the church at Pergamum, he found Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, a fitting metaphor for a prophetess in Thyatira, who was “teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols” (Rev 2:20). The caution against eating foods sacrificed to idols is voiced repeatedly, both in the New Testament (cf. Acts 15:28–29) and early Christian literature, “As for food, bear what you can, but be very much on your guard against food offered to idols, for it is worship of dead gods” (Did. 6:3; cf. Van de Sandt and Flusser 2002:238–270).

Sardis (Rev 3:1–6). The relative obscurity of Thyatira stands in stark contrast to the city of Sardis, an inland city on the banks of the Pactolus River. According to ancient legends, gold washed down in the river formed the basis for the wealthy Lydian kingdom. Sardis served as the capital and home to the legendary Lydian



Pergamum: Temple to Trajan. This reinforces the presence of emperor worship at Pergamum; its letter in Revelation speaks of those martyred there, probably because they refused to participate in the emperor cult. (photo R. S. Notley)



Sardis—forecourt of one of the largest synagogues in the Roman world. (photo R. S. Notley)

King Croesus (560–547 BCE). His rule marked the end of the Lydian kingdom, when he suffered defeat at the hands of Cyrus, king of Persia. “The city served in turn as the seat of a Persian satrap, as an administrative center for the Seleucids, and as a leading city of the Roman province of Asia” (Pedley 1992: 5:982). Historians record a devastating earthquake in 17 CE (Tac. Ann. 2.47; Pliny Nat. Hist. 2.86.200; Suet. Tib. 48.2; Strabo Geog. 12.8.18), but the city recovered and was rebuilt with help from Tiberius and Claudius.

Until recently the only structure still visible from Sardis’ glorious past was the temple of Artemis at the western base of the precipitous acropolis that rises 1,500 feet (460 m) above the Hermus plains. Major excavations in recent years have unearthed a Roman civic center with an expansive gymnasium (Greenwalt 1997: 4: 484–487). Passage from its colonnaded palaestra to the Roman baths was through the Marble Court, a two-story arcade that has been mostly reconstructed.

Another significant archaeological discovery from the Roman period is what the archaeologists claim is one of the largest Jewish synagogues from antiquity. Even more intriguing, the synagogue shared a wall with the gymnasium complex. Its considerable size, with an estimated capacity of one thousand people, and its location demonstrate the prominent place of the Jewish community in this ancient city. The beginnings of the Jewish community in Sardis are unknown; however, some scholars read the mention of Sepharad in Obadiah 20 to be a reference to Jewish exiles at Sardis, “and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad (סְפָרַד) shall possess the cities of the Negeb.” In addition, Josephus informs us that Antiochus III settled Jews in Asia Minor (Ant. 12:148–149) and later Jewish communities in the region appealed successfully to Caesar Augustus (Ant. 16:171).

Philadelphia (Rev 3:7–13). Today there is little to see from this ancient Asiatic city founded by Eumenes II, the king of Pergamum (197–159 BCE) or his brother Attalus II, whose loyalty to his brother earned him the nickname “Philadelphus” (Gasque 1992b: 5:304). The devastating earthquake that struck nearby Sardis, in 17 CE, likewise ruined Philadelphia (Strabo Geog. 12.8.18; 18.4.10; Pliny Nat. Hist. 2.85.200). In a sign of appreciation for the benefaction of Tiberius to rebuild their city, the citizens added “Neocaesarea” to its name.

Still later, under Vespasian, the city took another imperial name, Flavius (Gasque 1992b: 5:305). Hemer has suggested that these actions may provide the background for the notion that Philadelphia will be a new city with a new name (Rev 3:12; Hemer 1989:157–158).

The author’s description of the one who is holy and true (Rev 3:7) draws from the wording of Isaiah 22:22, “And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.” He also repeats phraseology used earlier in his letter to the church at Smyrna (Rev 2:9) to describe the church’s adversaries, calling them “a synagogue of Satan” and those

“who say they are Jews and are not” (Rev 3:9). The author’s statement presents a fascinating comparison to the letter of Ignatius of Antioch written about twenty years later to the same city, “But if anyone expounds Judaism to you,



Byzantine church remains at Philadelphia. (photo R. S. Notley)

do not listen to him. For it is better to hear about Christianity from a man who is circumcised than Judaism from one who is not” (Ign. Phld. 6:1). It is unclear whether Ignatius knew our canonical letter, but his description of the uncircumcised man who teaches about Judaism presents an intriguing parallel to our author’s denunciation of those who say they are Jews but are not.

Laodicea (Rev 3:14–22). The city was founded on the southern banks of the Lycus River by the Seleucid king, Antiochus II, and named in honor of his wife, Laodice (c. 255 BCE). Pliny informs us that the king built the city on the site of a previous settlement called Diopolis (Pliny Nat. Hist. 5.105), so called after its patron deity Zeus. Its location shaped the city’s history, 6 miles (10 km) south of Hierapolis, 10 miles (16 km) west of Colossae, and positioned on an important crossroads. “At Laodicea a northbound road left the Iconium-Ephesus highway and ran by Hierapolis to Philadelphia and the Hermus valley” (Bruce 1992: 4:229).

Like other cities in the region, Laodicea suffered from devastating earthquakes. During the reign of Caesar Augustus, the Roman Senate agreed to provide resources for the rebuilding of the city (Suet. Tib. 8). By contrast, when the city was hit with another major earthquake in 60 CE, it had the economic means (cf. Rev 3:17) to

reconstruct the city without Rome’s assistance (Tac. Ann. 14.27.1).

Two other attributes to the city attested by ancient authors provide background to our letter. The wool from the local sheep was said to have been of a very high quality and black in color (Vitr. De Arch. [abbrev. for what?] 8.3.14; cf. Rev 3:18). It also seems to have been the primary medical center for the region of Phrygia (Bruce 1992: 4:230). Ramsay drew significance from this and Galen’s recommendation of an eye-salve made from Phrygian stone to suggest that it was the background for the author’s charge to attain “salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see” (Rev 3:18; cf. Ramsay 1994:309).

Imagery in the opening and closing of the letter also draw from the local setting. Still visible today on the hills adjacent to Laodicea are remnants from the ancient siphon system that brought water to the city. On the site itself, remnants still stand of the water tower for distribution to the city’s residents. Cold water was brought from Colossae and thermal waters from hot springs at nearby Denizli. Both the hot and cold water that were brought to the city had their useful purposes. The challenge lay in the transport of the water. If it became tepid in transport, then it became useless. The author uses the imagery of the city’s water supply to describe the spiritual challenge for his readers. In their tepid spiritual state they have lost their usefulness to the Lord.

The author concludes with the image of the unexpected visitor, particularly apt for a city at an important crossroads in Asia Minor. Jesus and other first-century sages used the same imagery in story-parables to depict an owner, landlord or king who goes away on a long journey and returns at an unexpected hour. His return marks the hour to assess the diligence of his servants or subjects during their master’s absence. The image of the unexpected return is to encourage his readers to remain diligent in their faithfulness to the Lord.



Laodicea: remains of the ancient siphon system that brought water to the city. (photo R. S. Notley)