

## FROM ANTIOCH TO GALATIA

The initial missionary outreach westward from Antioch, Syria began with the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul/Paul (Ac. 13:2-3).<sup>1</sup> With John Mark, Barnabas' cousin (Col. 4:10), they traveled by sea to the island of Cyprus of which Barnabas was a native (Ac. 4:36). In general, the missionary team traveled by foot and by sea. All other things being equal, the average daily distance for a foot traveler to cover was about 20 miles, but to this must be factored in the reality that most travelers went from inn to inn, and further, rough country made the going much slower. In AD 333, a traveler known to scholars as the Bordeaux pilgrim followed Paul's itinerary in reverse from Galatia to Tarsus. Some of his distances were as follows:<sup>2</sup>

Tarsus to the Inn at Mascurinae (12 Roman miles)  
 Inn at Mascurinae to Post at Pilas (14 Roman miles)  
 Post at Pilas to Inn at Podanos (12 Roman miles)  
 Inn at Podanos to Post at Caena (12 Roman miles)  
 Post at Caena to City at Faustropolis (12 Roman miles)

Paul's distances were quite remarkable, the terrain frequently difficult, and the sea unpredictable, as he himself describes (2 Co. 11:25-27). Mountain passes could be blocked with snow, rivers could be swollen with spring rains, travelers could be compelled by Roman soldiers to repair equipment or carry military gear, and bandits were a perennial threat. By sea, one would have to secure passage



*Roman Road in Syria connecting Antioch with  
Chalcis*

on grain ships or other commercial vessels traveling from port to port (there was no passenger service as we think of it in the modern world). The distance for only one of his mission tours, his second one, has been calculated at over 3000 miles, nearly 1800 miles by land and nearly 1300 miles by sea.

### The Cities in Syria and Eastern Asia Minor

Antioch, Syria on the Orontes River was excavated by scholars from Princeton University between 1932-39. From the time of the successors of Alexander, the city grew rapidly, and after the Romans annexed Syria, the city's

<sup>1</sup> Luke switches back and forth between the names Saul and Paul, and when Paul began moving into the Greco-Roman world at Cyprus, he clarifies in Ac. 13:9 that the two names are for the same person. It is a common (but mistaken) explanation that the name "Paul" was a Christian moniker. This explanation has virtually no support among scholars. Rather, "Saul" was his given Hebrew name and "Paul" was his Roman *cognomen*. The naming conventions in the Roman world consisted of a *praenomen* (first name), a *nomen* (principal name), and a *cognomen* (additional name). If Paul also had a *nomen*, it is unknown to us.

<sup>2</sup> Twenty-five Roman miles is approximately equivalent to twenty-two modern miles.

great road was flanked by broad walkways and a colonnade. It became the third largest city of the empire, enjoyed its own Olympic style games, had a large Jewish population and a reputation for immorality. As a commercial center, it maintained trade connections all over the world. Geographically, it was the meeting place between the Hellenistic and Oriental civilizations.



*Roman ruins at Perge*

Religiously, it included adherents to the traditional Greco-Roman pantheons as well as to the Syrian worship of Baal and the Mother Goddess. The mystery cults, with their ideas of death, regeneration and the afterlife, also were part of the religious mix. The city was generally affluent and characterized by religious inquiry.

Leaving Antioch and going by ship to the Island of Cyprus (Ac. 13:4), the team stopped in Salamis on the eastern coast and Paphos on the western coast (Ac. 13:5-6). From there,

they sailed to the coast of Asia Minor and up the River Kestros to Perge (Ac. 13:13). At Perge, for reasons that can only be speculated, John Mark left them and went back to Jerusalem. They apparently did not stay long at Perge but pressed inland toward Galatia, for as Paul would indicate later, he was sick (Ga. 4:13). Perhaps he thought the inland climate might be an improvement.



*This Roman aqueduct carried water to Antioch, Pisidia, the first inland city Paul visited.*

Moving further westward and northward (Ac. 13-14), Paul visited the cities of Antioch (Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Galatia).<sup>3</sup> Part of the Antioch ruins from the Roman Period have been excavated, and they are replete with several temples demonstrating the proliferation of emperor worship as well as pagan superstition. Iconium, Lystra and Derbe have not been excavated, though various small finds have surfaced.

### **Gods, Goddesses, and the Worship of the Emperor**

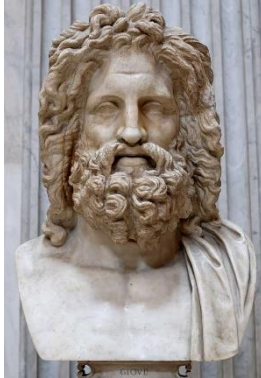
Religion in the Roman Period was extremely diverse. Paul describes it as the worship of “many gods” and “many lords” (1 Co. 8:5). At Lystra, after the

*A coin from Lystra in which the name Lystra can be seen at the very bottom.*



<sup>3</sup> There has been debate among scholars concerning the precise identity of Galatia to which Paul wrote the Galatian letter, since ethnic Galatia lay farther north while the Roman province of Galatia extended southward to include the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Here, I am following the south Galatian theory.

healing of a congenitally crippled man, he and his colleagues were reckoned to be gods themselves—an acclamation that Paul did not at first even understand, since it was voiced in a language he did not know (Ac. 14:11-13).



*Image of Zeus*



*Image of Hermes*

Multiple pagan religions coexisted side-by-side, and Greco-Roman paganism was nonexclusive. The worship of one deity or form of religion did not preclude the recognition of others. Further, there often was a blending of deities so that the Greek goddess Artemis became identified with the Roman goddess Diana, Zeus with Jupiter, Hermes with Mercury, and so forth. Hence, syncretism was the order of the day. Some cities might have a central patron god or goddess without eliminating the worship of the other deities. Artemis, especially, was venerated in Ephesus, while Poseidon

was prominent in Corinth due to the biennial Isthmian games dedicated to him. In virtually every city, temples in honor of these deities occupied prominent locations. Because of the proliferation of pagan religion, some of the most common structures to be exposed by archaeologists have been such temples and/or statues of the gods and goddesses.

In addition to the traditional pantheon, what are known as “mystery religions” also flourished in the time of St. Paul. The mystery cults urged that adherents could commune with the gods by secret ceremonies. Some of these religions had their origins in Egypt (based on the myth of Isis and Osiris), others developed around traditional Greco-Roman deities, such as, Dionysus (god of wine) or Demeter (god of grain). Still others were generated locally. The general pattern was a belief that humans contained a divine spark that had become obscured by earthly life. In sacred rituals, humans could purge away the accretions of earthly existence and rekindle the divine spark. In the worship of Dionysus, for instance, the ceremony included night-long drinking bouts after which the imbibing person, while in a state of ecstasy, allegedly would see the appearance of the god. Some of the cults, like the religion of Asclepius, were healing cults. Here, the sufferer spent the night in the god’s temple, was ministered to by healing snakes, awaking to relief. The temple of Asclepius excavated in Corinth, for instance, yielded a whole range of terra-cotta models of human body parts—arms, hands, feet, etcetera—all of which were supposed testimonies to divine healing. One of the most widespread of all cults was Mithraism, which arose at about the same time as

### THE TRADITIONAL PANTHEON

*The traditional Greco-Roman Pantheon was ruled by a council of twelve deities known as the Olympians:*

GREEK	ROMAN
Zeus	Jupiter (king of heaven)
Hera	Juno (Queen of heaven)
Poseidon	Neptune (sea)
Demeter	Ceres (grain)
Athene	Minerva (wisdom)
Hephaistos	Vulcan (fire)
Ares	Mars (war)
Aphrodite	Venus (love)
Apollo	Phoebus (sun)
Artemis	Diana (the hunt)
Hermes	Mercury (messenger)
Dionysus	Bacchus (wine)

*Some of the gods were based on human personality traits, others on elements considered necessary for human life.*





*An excavated medical complex dedicated to Asclepius, the god of healing, produced a range of terra-cotta body parts, symbols of claims for successful cures in Corinth.*

before the time of Christ. Julius Caesar was “deified” after his death, Augustus declared himself to be *divi filius* (= a divine son), and subsequent emperors, to greater or lesser degrees, accepted the honors of deification. Roman cities, as a gesture of loyalty to the state, began erecting temples to the emperors. While the emperors did not always demand worship during their lifetimes (Caligula was an exception, who ordered all in the empire to acknowledge him as “Lord and God”), the Roman Senate generally deified the emperors posthumously and added them to the imperial cult.

Everywhere the Christian missionaries traveled, they encountered the temples and statuary of the traditional gods and goddesses, the rites of the secret societies arising around the mystery religions, and the official sanction of the emperors as divine persons. To proclaim “Jesus as Lord” (Ro. 10:9) and to confess that there was but “one God, the Father”, and “one Lord, Jesus Christ” (1 Co. 8:6), cut directly across the religious milieu of every province in the Empire.

Christianity. Mithraism confessed a god whose powers transcended the cosmos, and its major adherents were Roman soldiers. Mithraic temples have been discovered throughout the Roman Empire from England to Caesarea Maritima.

Finally, the deification of the emperors was used as a tool for political unity. Given the syncretism of the culture, it was no threat to any pagan religion to hail the emperor as a god. Roma, the goddess who personified the Roman State, was venerated in Greece and Asia Minor even

#### IMPERIAL LANGUAGE OF DEITY

*A range of important words and titles accompanied the emperor cult, and some of them were in direct opposition to Christian claims.*

***Divi Filius*** (divine son)

***Kyrios*** (Lord)

***Euangelion*** (good news, Caesar’s birthday)

***Soter*** (savior/benefactor of the world)

***Epiphaneia*** (appearance of a god)

***Makaria elpis*** (blessed hope)

***Philanthropia*** (love for humanity)

***Chrestotes*** (kindness)

***Charis*** (grace)

*These words and expressions were all used to describe the imperial Caesars. In the New Testament, all these phrases are used counter-culturally and deliberately to refer to Christ.*