ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE MINISTRY OF PAUL

A VISUAL GUIDE



David A. deSilva

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Baker Academic
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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most fundamental principle of solid biblical interpretation is "Context is important." A great deal of what I was taught—and what I now endeavor to pass along to my own students—about learning to listen to our Scriptures has to do with immersing ourselves in the various contexts of whatever passage one happens to be studying. How does it relate to its immediate literary context; that is, how do we hear it differently and with greater precision when we consider it not on its own but as part of a larger piece of communication? How does it relate to the context of the shared traditions available to its author and its readers—for example, resonating with or even reciting older texts—and to what end? What is going on historically, what social and cultural circumstances surrounded the audience at the time the work was being composed and heard, and what connections is the audience being asked to make? And of course, what is our own context as readers and interpreters of these ancient texts, and to what extent is *our* context exerting pressure on what we will be able to see in or hear from these texts?

I was a professor of New Testament for almost fifteen years before I began traveling to visit what archaeologists have recovered of the everyday spaces, the material culture, and the monumental architecture of the cities in which these writers and audiences lived and moved and had their being. In retrospect, this should have been an obvious step for me to have taken much earlier, given the importance of context for understanding these texts. It was nothing short of transformative for my engagement with the writings of the New Testament (above all, the letters of Paul) as pastoral addresses and interventions in the collective lives of actual groups of Christ-followers living in the cities of the first-century eastern Roman Empire. These texts moved in a new and dramatic way away from presenting themselves as words on a printed page

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toward presenting themselves as carefully crafted instructions targeting living Christian communities, whether their members were facing more general challenges shared across the early church or challenges more particular to their own geographic and social locations.

In order for us to enter into these texts more fully as what they are—namely, time-sensitive pastoral interventions—it helps to be able to think in an informed way about questions like: What did these believers see around them? What messages and ideologies were represented in what they saw around themselves every day? What social practices were occurring around them? What tugs (or all-out shoves) did they experience in regard to joining in these practices once again? And how is Paul marshaling the pastoral resources of Scripture, the Spirit, and the community to help them persevere in investing themselves fully in the formation of a *new* social body with *new* practices? The fruits of archaeology, visible for us in well-curated sites and museums, provide us with a great deal of raw material for such reflection.

My goal for this book is to introduce readers to these fruits in regard to the majority of sites associated with the ministry of Paul, as far as this can be known from the Acts of the Apostles and from Paul's own writings. I am particularly interested in helping my readers connect what archaeologists have recovered from these sites with the situations of Paul's churches as reflected in his letters and with the responses Paul urges his converts to embrace in regard to those situations. With such goals in mind, I have sought throughout to focus on what has been recovered of these cities as Paul would have encountered them during his lifetime and only rarely to draw on finds from the late first or early second centuries AD (or beyond). As a result, the reader should not expect a comprehensive guide to these sites but rather a focused exploration of the relevance of these sites for the writings, ministry, and communities of the apostle Paul. We will walk together alongside Paul, as it were, through Philippi, Corinth, and Ephesus as he would have encountered them—and as his converts would have continued to encounter them as they sought to embrace a new way of life in the midst of the old structures and their supporters. I have in mind as my audience primarily those who might never be able to visit the sites firsthand, since travel is expensive and often physically demanding. The book, however, will be of obvious value for those who anticipate visiting some number of these sites—for example, on a "Journeys of Paul" tour.

The book is divided into three unequal parts. Part 1 is devoted to sites connected with the beginning of Paul's preaching ministry, a period during which he is not known to have organized communities of converts into "assemblies" (*ekklēsiai*) or congregations that would persist after his departure. This section includes some of the least well-excavated sites. Part 2, by far the longest,

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treats cities in which Paul and his team were known to have planted congregations, several of which (Pisidian Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and Colossae) were also the recipients of the letters now contained in the New Testament.[1] Connections between artifacts and archaeological remains from these sites, on the one hand, and the contents of those letters, on the other hand, will be a particular focus of the relevant chapters. Part 3 is devoted to the sites connected with the last journeys of Paul recorded in Acts—his journey to Jerusalem to deliver the collection that led, in turn, to his arrest and his eventual journey to Rome in his quest for a resolution of the charges brought against him in Jerusalem.

Individual chapters typically open with a section on the connections between the particular city and Paul's ministry when Paul's engagement with the inhabitants of that site spans more than a single period. The largest share of each chapter explores the archaeological and literary evidence for thinking about the "lived spaces" of a particular city and the ways in which this evidence illumines the situation of the members of the assemblies Paul planted, the challenges they faced, and the instructions Paul gave in his letters. In instances where the sites are stunningly well documented (e.g., Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome), the discussion will be broken up into subsections.

I generally follow the trajectory of Paul's ministry as it has been constructed by the author of the Acts of the Apostles (whom I will refer to as Luke). The reliability of Luke's narrative as a historical source for the life and work of Paul and his team has met with significant challenges from the scholarly community. At the very least, every reader of Acts must acknowledge Luke's selectivity. From Acts we would never guess that Paul wrote letters to his churches, that he had some significantly difficult dealings with his churches in Galatia and Corinth after he moved on from his founding visits, that he conducted missionary work in Illyricum and probably Crete, or that he had an important coworker named Titus. Acts tells us almost nothing about Paul prior to his encounter with the glorified Lord and nothing after his period of house arrest in Rome. Luke is telling the story *his* way for his own purposes, not to satisfy our historical interests and curiosities. There are also significant challenges to reconciling Luke's story of the early part of Paul's postconversion ministry and his interactions with the Jerusalem-based apostles with Paul's own account of the same in Galatians 1–2.

The primary focus of this book, however, is on the archaeology of discrete sites and their relevance for thinking about Paul's missionary activity and,

1. Rome and the connections between its lived spaces and Paul's letter to the Roman Christians will be treated in the third part.

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above all, his congregations and letters, rather than on the problems with reconciling or otherwise resolving the tensions between the narrative of Acts and the piecemeal data about Paul's movements and mission from his letters. For such a purpose, Acts—consistently tweaked with reference to Paul's own firsthand testimony concerning his activities—provides a sufficiently useful geographic arc to follow.[2]

A book like this would have been impossible to write had I not been able to travel to most of these sites. I want, therefore, to express my deep appreciation to those who helped make such travel possible: Mr. Abdullah Gur of Meander Travel, based in Kuşadası, who arranged for my first extended visit to Ephesus, among other sites; Mr. Levent Oral of Tutku Tours, based in Izmir, who arranged for my most recent visit to multiple sites in Türkiye (and who was a lifeline for me when I fell ill on an earlier solo trip!); and Mr. James Ridgway of Educational Opportunities (EO) Tours, based in Lakeland, Florida, who gave me multiple opportunities by means of EO's "Lands of the Bible" cruises and land-based tours to visit sites in almost all the countries represented herein. A number of the chapters in this book began their lives as presentations I gave to groups traveling on these cruises. Some of these, then, became the basis for essays published in the *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation* (edited by Barry Beitzel), and I am grateful to Doug Mangum of Lexham Press for securing permission for me to adapt and expand those essays for inclusion here. I wish also to thank Dr. Bryan Dyer, senior acquisitions editor at Baker Academic, for warmly receiving my proposal for this volume and its sequel; Dr. Dustyn Keepers, acquisitions associate, for going above and beyond working with the hundreds of photos that are included in this book, coordinating with the design team, and keeping track of the required permissions; and Ms. Melisa Blok, project editor for this volume, for her meticulous work throughout the copyediting process. It was a joy to work with people of such diligence and competence. Finally, I wish to thank the trustees and administration of Ashland Theological Seminary for study leave opportunities and for professional development funds, which largely subsidized the solo tours of Italy, Greece, Türkiye, and Israel that I have undertaken since I began prioritizing visiting relevant Greco-Roman-period sites in 2011.

2. On the historical questions surrounding the presentation of Paul and his mission in Acts, see further deSilva, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 328–32; deSilva, *Letter to the Galatians*, 33–38, 48–58.

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PART I

BEGINNINGS

According to Luke, Paul encountered the glorified Christ and understood that encounter as his commissioning to announce the deliverance that God had prepared for people from every nation—and to do so without delay. As Paul is remembered to have put it in his hearing before the procurator Porcius Festus and King Agrippa II, "After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance" (Acts 26:19–20 NRSV). In Paul's own recollection of his activity after that encounter, he speaks of his activity in this regard in Damascus, Arabia, Cilicia, and Syria (2 Cor. 11:32–33; Gal. 1:15–24).

If Paul was able to organize communities of believers during this early period, neither he nor Luke tells us explicitly. There are oblique hints that he did—for example, Paul and Silas returning "through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches" (Acts 15:41 NRSV), concerning which Luke gives his readers no origin stories or specific locations apart from Tarsus and Antioch-on-the-Orontes.[1] This section, therefore, will be necessarily brief, focusing on what archaeological work has revealed of those places specifically

1. There were many cities named Antioch in the eastern Mediterranean, since these were founded (or re-founded) by the rulers of the Seleucid Empire, many of whom bore the name Antiochus. The two of concern in this book are Antioch-on-the-Orontes in the Roman province of Syria and Pisidian Antioch in the Roman province of Galatia.

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named in connection with Paul's earliest missionary endeavors—and in the three key cities of Damascus, Tarsus, and Antioch-on-the-Orontes, archaeological work has been terribly disappointing in this regard. Paphos in Cyprus, the first site highlighted by Luke in Paul and Barnabas's first apostolic mission from their base in Antioch-on-the-Orontes, offers a good deal more in the way of archaeological activity. It is included here because, according to Luke, the mission there did not result in the planting of a congregation. Despite the fact that both Luke and Paul attest to some preaching activity on Paul's part in Jerusalem at this earliest stage, exploration of the relevance of the archaeology from Jerusalem for Paul's story is deferred here to part 3 ("Endings"), where the evidence is more directly related to the events.[2]

2. This treatment will be limited since Jerusalem will figure so largely in my forthcoming volume, *Archaeology and the World of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025).

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1

TARSUS

Tarsus in the Ministry of Paul

Although Paul himself never mentions his connection with Tarsus in his letters, Luke pointedly identifies him as "from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city" (Acts 21:39; see also 9:11; 22:3). As a result, Pauline scholars have been keen to learn all they can about Tarsus for the light that Paul's native city might shed on the apostle and his formative upbringing. Luke has Paul returning to Tarsus after his dramatic and course-altering encounter with the glorified Christ and his provocative proclamation about Jesus first in Damascus and then in Jerusalem (9:19–30). We do not hear about him again until Barnabas seeks him out in Tarsus to enlist his help for the work of the gospel in Antioch-on-the-Orontes (11:25). Paul himself recalls how, between the third and fourteenth year after his conversion to faith in Jesus as Israel's Messiah, he "went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia," as a result of which time the churches in Judea "heard it said, 'The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy'" (Gal. 1:21, 23 NRSV). The implication is that Paul was active in evangelistic work throughout both regions, with Tarsus the likely center for his early missionary work in the Roman province of Cilicia (cf. Acts 15:23, 41).[1]

1. See Fairchild, "Paul's Early Ministry in Syria and Cilicia." Fairchild suggests that Paul engaged in a wide-ranging evangelistic ministry both in the eastern lowlands and in the more mountainous western parts of Cilicia, noting that Paul's own account of his ministry, and especially the variety of hardships he endured in the course of his work (2 Cor. 11:23–28), demands a good deal more missionary activity than Acts recounts ("Paul's Early Ministry in Syria and Cilicia,"516). See also Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch*, 151–77, on Paul's work in Tarsus and Cilicia.

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The Archaeology of Tarsus

Ancient Tarsus remains almost entirely inaccessible under modern Tarsus, with the result that very little of Paul's city has been recovered. The foundations of a hippodrome from the first century AD were found on the premises of the Tarsus American College, with the remnants of a Roman theater discovered close by.[2] At Cumhuriyet Square, about 600 yards north of the college, a street from the late Hellenistic or early Roman period, made from basalt paving stones and about 24 feet wide, was uncovered.[3] The remains of the houses and porticoes (column-lined, roofed walkways) flanking the road, however, are from the late Roman period. The so-called Cleopatra Gate, 400 yards west of the college, is a late Roman or Byzantine rebuild of the city's older western gate that would have stood on the site in Paul's time. A late Roman period well, popularly called St. Paul's Well, led archaeologists to first-century Roman remains in its vicinity, 10 to 15 feet below present ground level. Finally, a Roman bridge of uncertain dating marks where a channel of the Cydnus River flowed prior to its being redirected in the Byzantine period to solve issues of flooding.[4]



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The Roman-period road in Tarsus, slightly convex to allow drainage into the gutters on either side.

2. Fant and Reddish, *Biblical Sites*, 325.
3. Fant and Reddish, *Biblical Sites*, 327; Wilson, *Biblical Turkey*, 132.
4. Wilson, *Biblical Turkey*, 132.

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A bronze door from a temple in Tarsus from the Hellenistic period (second century BC). In the ninth century AD, Emperor Theophilus moved the door to Byzantium to grace a side entrance to Hagia Sophia.

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As an important Greek city, Tarsus would have had all the typical structures and institutions appropriate to that status. Strabo (*Geogr.* 14.5.12) mentions a gymnasium—the institution dedicated to the education and physical formation of the next generation of the elite—beside the Cydnus River, which flowed through ancient Tarsus. According to him, Tarsus's elite were so enthusiastic about Tarsus's educational system, extending to the tertiary studies in philosophy and rhetoric, that they rivaled Athens and Alexandria (*Geogr.* 14.5.13). Tarsus would also have had markets, administrative buildings, and temples, though nothing of these from the Hellenistic and early Roman periods has been identified.

Paul was born into Roman citizenship in Tarsus. A good number among the elite of Tarsus might have been awarded with Roman citizenship in connection with the various factions within Rome seeking to consolidate their power during the civil wars that marked the period of transition from the Republic to the Principate. Pompey, Julius Caesar, Antony, and Augustus are all known to have bestowed benefits and granted privileges to Tarsus between 64 and 31 BC.[5] An inscription in the Hatay Archeology Museum (*IGLSyria* 3.1.718) records privileges and honors that Octavian granted to one Seleucus of Rhosos (a city in Roman Syria) in gratitude for his service to Octavian in the war against Sextus Pompeius, son of Pompey the Great (rival of Octavian's adoptive father, Julius Caesar). The privileges included granting Roman citizenship to Seleucus, his family, *and* his descendants. We may never know how Saul of Tarsus acquired Roman citizenship, but a legacy from an ancestor who gained favor with a prominent Roman official is one possibility. At the other end of the social spectrum, slaves of Roman citizens who were manumitted (liberated) as a reward for decades of faithful service also became Roman citizens, a status passed on to their children. It is also possible that Paul received his Roman citizenship in this manner: being born (see Acts 22:28) to Jewish parents (or to the children of Jewish parents) who had been thus enslaved—perhaps in the course of Roman punitive expeditions in response to seditious activity in Galilee or Judea during the period after Rome assumed oversight of the region (63 BC and after)—deported to Tarsus, and later manumitted.[6]

5. Ramsey, *Cities of Saint Paul*, 197–98, 205.
6. Walker, *In the Steps of Saint Paul*, 34–35.

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2

DAMASCUS AND ARABIA

Damascus in the Ministry of Paul

According to Luke's reconstruction of the history of the early Jesus movement, Paul's ministry began in Damascus. His goal for his journey there was radically changed by his encounter with the glorified Christ at some point near the end of the 160-mile journey from Jerusalem along the ancient trade route known as the King's Highway. Luke portrays Paul, within days of this encounter, proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah in a number of the Jewish synagogues in Damascus (Acts 9:19–22). That there was a large Jewish presence in an important city located not far north of Israel's historic territory is to be expected. Josephus (*J.W.* 2.559–61) confirms that Damascus had quite a large Jewish population when he writes of the massacre of 10,500 Damascene Jews by their Gentile neighbors in AD 66—in the wake of the activity of the Jews of Judea on the eve of the First Jewish Revolt. We learn, incidentally, that a significant number of the Gentile Damascenes' wives had converted to Judaism (a move that women were understandably readier to make than men). It is possible that Paul's activity in the synagogue had such Gentile converts and God-fearers in particular view from the beginning, in keeping with Paul's commissioning as envoy to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:16).

Paul attests firsthand to his presence in Damascus at a very early point in his ministry in connection with a trip "into Arabia" (Gal. 1:17). He also corroborates Luke's claim that he had to make a hasty and rather unconventional departure from Damascus, being lowered in a basket down the

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outside of the city wall from an aperture (Acts 9:23–25; 2 Cor. 11:32–33). Luke attributes this to the hostility of the Jewish population; Paul names the deputy of Aretas IV (king of Nabatea from 9/8 BC to AD 40/41), who was responsible for regulating the internal affairs of the Nabatean community in Damascus, as the source of the danger.[1] Both parties may have cooperated in the attempt to silence a troublesome and outspoken preacher. The presence of a sufficiently large Nabatean population in Damascus—a fair distance north of Aretas's territory proper—attests both to the importance of Damascus's location at a hub on both north-south and east-west trade routes (the Via Maris and the King's Highway) and to Nabatean interest in this trade at that time.

The Archaeology of Damascus

Damascus has been continuously occupied since antiquity; the Roman-period street lies about 15 feet below the surface of the modern road.[2] If significant excavation of the old city were possible, we could hope to find traces of the temples of Baal and Atargatis—principal Syrian deities featured on the reverses of coins of the Seleucid king Demetrius III (95–88 BC), which were minted in Damascus[3]—as well as remnants of the theater and the gymnasium complex, the construction of which Herod the Great, ever seeking to aggrandize his own reputation and that of his realm, subsidized (Josephus, *J.W.* 1.422). As it is, the only major witness to the Roman period is the Bab Sharqi, a gate on the southeastern side of the old city of Damascus that preserves portions of a third-century AD Roman gate. There are also a number of points at which the Roman-period city wall has been exposed, including a stretch that is traditionally associated with the location of Paul's escape from the city.

The streets of Damascus appear to have been laid out in a grid pattern that was very common in cities throughout the Greek and Roman world—though it is difficult to square this with the fact that one street, in particular, would become known as the "street called Straight" (Acts 9:11). The most common explanation is that this street was the main east-west thoroughfare

1. Some scholars regard 2 Cor. 11:32–33 as evidence that Damascus was under Nabatean control during Paul's lifetime, as it had been for a short period in the late Roman Republic (Josephus, *Ant*. 13.391–92), but the majority favor the view that the city merely had a Nabatean *politeuma*, a sizable Nabatean population under the jurisdiction of one of their own (an ethnarch). See Kennedy, "Syria," esp. 734–35; Graf, "Aretas," esp. 375.

2. Walker, *In the Steps of Saint Paul*, 26.

3. Negev, *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, 95–96.

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The Bab Sharqi, the gate on the southeastern side of the old city of Damascus that opens onto Straight Street.

(thus, the principal *decumanus*). It is still visible in the street plan of Old Damascus today.[4]

Arabia in the Ministry of Paul

Paul does not specify his purpose for going "into Arabia" immediately after his encounter with the glorified Lord (Gal. 1:17). It has been common in the history of interpretation to infer that Paul took that time—perhaps the greater part of the "three years" between that encounter and his first visit to Jerusalem to make Peter's acquaintance (1:18–20)—for personal reflection on his changed assessment of Jesus and his own role in the messianic era. It is equally possible, however, to infer that he went "into Arabia" to act immediately on the divine commission to proclaim God's Son to the Gentiles (1:16).[5] While much of the territory referred to in the first century as "Arabia"

4. As in McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, 233–34, though he calls this a cardo—the more typical name for north-south streets.

5. So Murphy-O'Connor, "Paul in Arabia"; Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch*, 106–20; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1032–38; deSilva, *Letter to the Galatians*, 157–58.

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A beautiful example of a winepress from the late Hellenistic / early Roman period. The higher, square section on the right was for pressing the grapes, the lower cistern to the left for collecting the juice.

was deserted or only sparsely populated, it also encompassed, and thus was frequently used to refer to, the Nabatean Kingdom, a people group the Israelites believed to be descended from Ishmael and their closest neighbors to the east and southeast of Judea.[6] The Nabateans had frequent interactions with Judea and Galilee throughout the Hasmonean and Herodian periods through trade, intermarriage at the uppermost echelons, and military conflict. Their cities represented a sensible first step for the apostle to the Gentiles as he set off to fulfill his new commission.

It is, of course, impossible to say which Nabatean city or cities Paul would have visited, if the latter view is correct. One's thoughts almost automatically go to Petra, the Nabatean capital (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.14–16) and the most impressive—and impressively excavated—Nabatean site. It might be more plausible to imagine Paul working in Nabatean cities further north than Petra, though such notable scholars as Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer believe that Paul not only spent significant time in Petra but traveled even further south into Nabatean territory to the city at Hegra.[7]

6. This is frequently the case in Josephus. See also Strabo, *Geogr.* 17.1.21; Beitzel, "Meaning of 'Arabia,'" esp. 528.

7. Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch*, 113–18. Paul's familiarity with the site of Hegra (and its traditional, though almost certainly incorrect, association with Mount Sinai) is suggested by Gal. 4:25.

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The Archaeology of Nabatean Arabia

The ornately carved monumental rock tombs of the Nabatean royalty and nobility are the most iconic images from Petra, but Petra was a city for the living as well. A theater was built during the reign of Aretas IV but was significantly expanded after Rome annexed Nabatea and created the province of Arabia Felix in AD 106.[8] A colonnaded east-west street, showing the marks of the citywide facelift given to Petra by Trajan in the form visible today, was already a main thoroughfare in the time of Aretas IV.[9] Two or three commercial forums were located alongside the south side of the street (the middle "forum" may have served a different function, possibly as a parking lot for traders' camels and other mounts).[10] To the west of these markets sat the Great Temple, erected by the middle of the first century AD and showing a blend of Hellenistic and Nabatean architectural styles.[11] The temple complex occupies an area 180 feet wide and 420 feet deep from the *cardo* (a north-south street); a forecourt takes up the northern half of this area, the temple and its surrounding porticoes the southern (rear) half.



The theater of Petra. In its present form it shows the expansion of the cavea in the early second century AD that resulted in the elimination of the front areas of several rock-carved houses and tombs.

8. Bourbon, *Petra*, 56.
9. Browning, *Petra*, 138; Bourbon, *Petra*, 74.
10. Browning, *Petra*, 137.
11. Bourbon, *Petra*, 77.

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The remains of the Great Temple, dating from the first century AD.



A carved relief of Atargatis, an important fertility goddess worshiped throughout Syria and Nabatea, that once adorned the space above an entrance to the Nabatean temple of Atargatis at Khirbet et-Tannur in Jordan (Jordan Archaeological Museum).

North of the cardo sat the so-called Temple of the Winged Lions (so named for decorative blocks found on the premises featuring the common griffin motif). It is thought to have been a temple to the Syrian fertility goddess, Atargatis, often identified with Aphrodite in the Greek pantheon.[12]

12. Browning, *Petra*, 139.

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The west end of the colonnaded street terminated at a gate that gave access to the sacred precincts of the temple known as the Qasr al-Bint, plausibly identified as the temple dedicated to Dusares, the principal deity of the Nabatean pantheon. The temple itself is estimated to have once stood 95 feet tall, 100 feet wide, and 105 feet deep. An inscription naming Aretas IV suggests that it was constructed during his reign or that of his predecessor, Obodas III (30–9 BC).[13] As is typical throughout the Mediterranean, the altar stood on a platform erected some distance in front of the temple proper. The decorations are again an interesting mix of Greek and Nabatean features. It is believed that the deity, in more typical Nabatean fashion, was represented by something more like a block or an obelisk than a statue.[14] A sacred place overlooking Petra appears to have been dedicated to Al Uzza, the principal goddess of the Nabateans, in conjunction with Dusares—both represented there by two obelisks, each 20 feet tall.[15] These are remarkable for having been created by leveling the mesa and *leaving* the obelisks rather than erecting them.



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The so-called Qasr al-Bint, a massive temple to Dusares, the principal Nabatean deity.

13. Bourbon, *Petra*, 81; Browning, *Petra*, 153.
14. Browning, *Petra*, 159.
15. Browning, *Petra*, 207.

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Paul's evangelistic activity somewhere in the Nabatean heartland, where his call to abandon the indigenous gods represented everywhere by idols would have been as unpopular as anywhere in Türkiye or Greece, also helps to explain why the deputy of Aretas IV in Damascus would take a personal interest in hunting him down when he showed up there after causing a stir in "Arabia" (2 Cor. 11:32–33; Gal. 1:17).

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3

ANTIOCH-ON-THE-ORONTES

Antioch in the Ministry of Paul

Antioch is remembered as the city in which Greek-speaking Jewish Christians began to announce the good news in Christ to Gentiles as well as to their fellow Jews (Acts 11:19–20). This might have been a consequence of the fact that Antioch was notable for the number of Gentiles attracted to Judaism (Josephus, *J.W.* 7.45). The city became the focus first of Barnabas's church planting and nurturing work and then of Paul's after Barnabas fetched him from Tarsus to join him (Acts 11:22–26). Luke asserts that Christ-followers were first labeled *Christianoi*—"Christ-lackeys," "Christ-partisans"—there (11:26). It was a mission-minded Christian community, commissioning and sending Barnabas and Paul off on their apostolic journey to Cyprus and Southern Galatia (13:1–4) and receiving them again after this particular mission had been completed (14:26–28). Antioch was targeted by Jewish Christians apparently more conservative than Paul and Barnabas on more than one occasion (Acts 15:1–2; Gal. 2:11–14), the occasion in Acts prompting the so-called Apostolic Conference or Jerusalem Council, which was convened to settle the matter of what would be required of Gentile converts to join the people of God in Christ.[1] Paul would return to Antioch to communicate the consensus decision of that council (Acts 15:22–35) and visit the assemblies there once again between his mission work in Achaia and Ephesus (18:22–23).

1. On the complexities of reconciling Paul's narrative in Gal. 1:11–2:14 with the narrative of Acts 9–15, see deSilva, *Letter to the Galatians*, 48–58, and the literature discussed and cited therein.

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The Archaeology of Antioch

The archaeological remains of Antioch in modern Antakya are disappointingly small compared to the importance of the city in the Greek and Roman periods. It was the capital first of the Seleucid Empire and then of the Roman province of Syria; it was also the location of a vibrant, missional Christian community that was a touchstone for Paul's ministry. The late Hellenistic and early Roman city is estimated to lie between 9 and 12 yards below the surface,[2] sitting below many layers of continuous settlement and building activity. The comparatively little excavation that has been done here and there throughout the modern city of Antakya, which sits atop every previous period's remains, has tended to reach only as far as the late Roman period.

Literary sources and smaller finds do provide some insight into the city's landscape. Antioch sits about 400 miles from Jerusalem by way of the King's Highway. The city was founded by Seleucus I Nicator in or around 300 BC alongside the Orontes River and was laid out in the by then customary grid pattern (Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.4). Seleucus I had intended the port city of Seleucia Pieria, a harbor on the Mediterranean some 20 miles west of Antioch, to serve as his capital. His son, Antiochus I Soter, however, moved the capital to Antioch, which was more strategically located on a major east-west land route (commonly referred to as the Silk Road) as well as north-south routes during a time when the Orontes River was still easily navigable for most ships moving to and from the Mediterranean at Seleucia.[3] Seleucus I built an agora (commercial market) for Antioch on the banks of the Orontes within easy reach of the river and the warehouses that no doubt lined its quays. Between 187 and 175 BC, Seleucus IV built a temple in honor of Isis.[4] Around 175 BC, Antiochus IV provided the city with a new council hall and agora while also expanding the residential capacity of Antioch



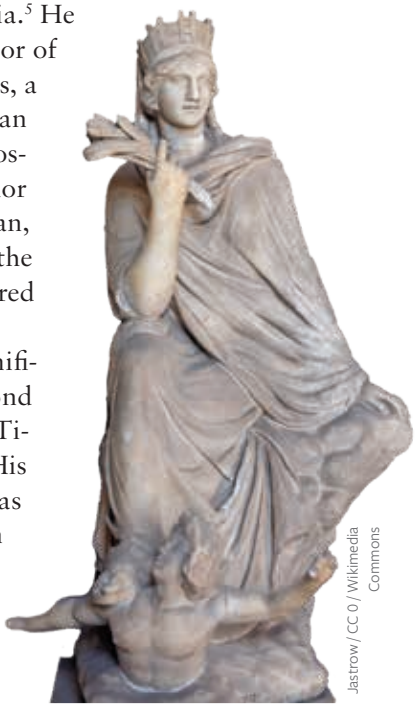
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A first-century representation of the Orontes River personified as a deity.

2. Lassus, "Antioche à l'époque romaine," 58.
3. Hansen, *Silk Road*, 6–8.
4. Wilson, *Biblical Turkey*, 74.

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by adding a new quarter, the Epiphania.[5] He also built a monumental temple in honor of Zeus in the guise of Jupiter Capitolinus, a sign of his hearty embrace of the Roman culture in which he was raised while a hostage in Rome to ensure the good behavior of his father, Antiochus III. Dionysus, Pan, Artemis, Ares, Hercules, and Tyche—the city's guardian goddess—also had sacred sites throughout Antioch.[6]



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An early Roman-period statue of Tyche of Antioch (Vatican Museums).

The Seleucid Empire declined significantly in the second half of the second century BC. Antioch was annexed by Tigranes, king of Armenia (83–69 BC). His gains would prove to be short-lived, as Pompey the Great arrived in the region in the mid-60s BC, brought the Seleucid Empire to a complete end, and created the Roman province of Syria, with Antioch as its capital.[7] Anywhere between two and four legions were then stationed in this province on the eastern frontier. By that time it had become the third most populous city in the Roman Empire, after Rome itself and Alexandria, Egypt. Estimates run from three hundred thousand to as high as a half million inhabitants.[8] As such, Antioch—the "metropolis of Syria" (Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.5)—could be expected to have all the typical structures of a major city.[9]

Julius Caesar gifted the city with a new aqueduct, an amphitheater (suggesting the introduction of Roman-style entertainment, like gladiatorial combat), a theater, a bathhouse, and a basilica—a large columned hall that typically served judicial functions in Roman cities.[10] Such celebrities of the late Republic as Antony, Cleopatra, and Octavian all visited the city, with

5. Phillips, "Geographic Importance of Antioch," 272.
6. Lassus, "Antioche à l'époque romaine," 69; Wilson, *Biblical Turkey*, 73.
7. Wilson, *Biblical Turkey*, 72–73.
8. Kraeling, "Jewish Community," 136; McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, 227; Longenecker, "Antioch of Syria," 9.
9. Translations of ancient sources are the author's own unless otherwise indicated.
10. Longenecker, "Antioch of Syria," 12–13.

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A tetrapylon from Jerash, suggestive of the sort of monumental structures with which Tiberius graced several intersections in Antioch.

Octavian (as Augustus) bestowing significant public works on the city. Herod the Great paved Antioch's principal street—which was a width of about 30 feet and a length of almost 2 miles—with marble (Josephus, *Ant*. 16.148; *J.W.* 1.425). Either Herod or Tiberius provided colonnades on either side of the thoroughfare, a gift that required 3,200 columns.[11] Tiberius also furnished the funds for several bathhouses and for decorative tetrapylons (quadruple-gated structures) at the city's major intersections.[12] Caligula helped the city to rebuild after a devastating earthquake. All this suggests that the city would have had a positive view of Rome's emperors and client kings, many of whom took an interest in benefiting the city.

A large Jewish community existed in Antioch from its beginnings under Seleucus I (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.39; *Ant*. 12.119). These early settlers were largely veteran soldiers and their families, who would have been given land grants upon being discharged. Jews generally enjoyed significant privileges under the Seleucids and then under Roman rule, no doubt including the right

11. Longenecker, "Antioch of Syria," 13; Fant and Reddish, *Guide to Biblical Sites*, 148.
12. McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, 230.

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A mosaic designed to ward off the evil eye. Note the many forces attacking the eyeball—the dog, snake, scorpion, sword, trident, bird, cat, and centipede—as well as the goblin's erect phallus working its countermagic.

to regulate their own community life in accordance with their ancestral law, and thus Antioch was an attractive center for diaspora Jews (Josephus, *J.W.* 7.43–45). The Jewish community may have reached a population of forty-five thousand by the time of Augustus.[13] Prior to Paul's activity, Jews demonstrated en masse in Antioch before the Roman governor Petronius. Caligula had ordered that a statue of himself be placed in the temple of Jerusalem. This was not merely an act of megalomania (though that no doubt played a part) but also a specific reprisal for the actions of the Jews in Jamnia against a locally erected shrine to Caligula. Petronius, faced with an impossible task, was eventually persuaded to intervene on the Jews' behalf, but only after the Jews had made it clear that they were prepared to die rather than see their temple thus desecrated. A little more than two decades after Paul's early activity in Antioch, brutal and devastating anti-Jewish pogroms would erupt in the city in connection with the later years of the First Jewish Revolt (Josephus, *J.W.* 7.46–62)—instigated by an apostate Jew.

13. Kraeling, "Jewish Community at Antioch," 136. Eckhard Schnabel (*Paul the Missionary*, 71) suggests a figure between twenty thousand and thirty-five thousand.

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The Hatay Archeology Museum is a treasure trove of Roman mosaics. Unfortunately, all (or virtually all) of them date from the second century AD and later. Some of the earlier mosaics appear to have been the ancient equivalent of welcome mats, bearing a number of symbols intended to ward off the evil eye and bearing the Greek legend *kai su*—in effect, "the same to you." These bear important witness to something that is rarely considered in the texts of the New Testament or in other literary sources: the intense superstition that gripped many members of the population and the accompanying fear of malign spiritual forces that could be harnessed by one's enemies.

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