

CHAPTER 39

PAUL'S EARLY MINISTRY IN SYRIA AND CILICIA: THE SILENT YEARS

Gal 1:21; Acts 9:30

Mark R. Fairchild

KEY POINTS

- Two or three years after his conversion, the apostle Paul returned to Tarsus in Cilicia and began a ministry in Syria and Cilicia.
- The ministry in Syria and Cilicia is never mentioned in Acts and only briefly mentioned in Paul's letter to the Galatians (1:21).
- The specifics of Paul's Syrian and Cilician ministry cannot be known, but a plausible scenario can be determined based upon Paul's mission strategies together with an understanding of the history and geography of these regions.
- Paul's experiences in Syria and Cilicia likely affirmed the apostle's call and solidified many of his theological convictions regarding gentile believers.

INTRODUCTION

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul briefly chronicled his ministry in the years following his conversion. In the account, the apostle alluded to his work in Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:21). The Acts of the Apostles mentioned nothing of this ministry. Acts 9:30 cited Paul's retreat to Tarsus (the chief city of Cilicia), but nothing more was mentioned about Paul until Acts 11:25 when Barnabas traveled to Tarsus

to look for Paul and to enlist his help in Antioch. It appears that Paul spent seven to nine years in this ministry in Syria and Cilicia. At a time when Paul was grappling with his new faith, how did this ministry shape his beliefs? Over these several years, where did Paul go and how did these experiences pave the way for Paul's later journeys?

The dating of Paul's travels is an issue that cannot be precisely resolved. We

can identify a few solid anchors, such as Paul's visit to Corinth (Acts 18) at the time of Proconsul Gallio (AD 51–52) and the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Claudius' reign (AD 49). Likewise the intervention of Aretas IV the Nabataean king in the affairs of Damascus during Paul's visit (Acts 9; 2 Cor 11:32–33) is also helpful (AD 34–37). But between these dates, it is not easy to pin down the chronology.

Following Paul's conversion around AD 33, the apostle spent some time in Damascus. Later he moved to Arabia (the Nabataean kingdom) and in time returned again to Damascus. In his letter to the Galatians (1:18), Paul claimed that three years later he returned to Jerusalem and visited Peter for fifteen days. According to the Jewish manner of reckoning time (which counted portions of years), this journey to Jerusalem was probably anywhere between one and a half and two and a half years after his conversion. Taking the middle of these dates and times, this puts Paul's visit to Jerusalem at roughly AD 35.

After his short visit in Jerusalem, Paul stated that he traveled to Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:21). Unfortunately, Paul did not designate how much time elapsed during this journey. In all probability this journey is the same as that mentioned in Acts 9:30, where Paul was sent to Tarsus due to threats he received in Jerusalem. At some point, Barnabas traveled to Tarsus to find Paul and took him to Antioch where they ministered to the church for a full year (Acts 11:25–26). Another time marker in Gal 2:1 states that Paul returned to Jerusalem fourteen years later with Barnabas. This may refer to the famine visit mentioned in Acts 11:30 or it could refer to the Jerusalem Council

visit in Acts 15. If this visit refers to the Jerusalem Council visit, the fourteen years would include the time spent on the first mission to Cyprus and Galatia (around AD 45–47). This latter option seems most likely.

The result of this chronological survey suggests that Paul's ministry in Syria and Cilicia involved seven to nine years from AD 35 to roughly AD 42–44. This mission was longer than the time spent on any of Paul's journeys recorded by Luke in Acts. Thus, it is puzzling why so little of this mission was mentioned in Acts or Paul's letters.

Without offering any details, Paul briefly mentioned his mission in Syria and Cilicia in his letter to the Galatians (1:21). The narrative in Acts likewise skipped this period. However, in Acts 15:23 it was stated that the Jerusalem decrees were sent to new gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. A few verses later in 15:41, it was noted that Paul and Silas began their so-called second mission traveling through Syria and Cilicia "strengthening the churches." These statements were issued with no details, leaving the reader to fill in the blanks. Since Paul's first mission (according to Acts 13:1–14:28) came nowhere close to Cilicia, we have to assume that these churches were established by Paul during the seven to nine silent years after Paul's departure from Jerusalem.

When we consider the places that Paul may have evangelized during this period, we are led by two principles that Paul himself mentioned in his writings. First, Paul claimed that his priority was to visit cities, towns, and villages that had a Jewish presence. This conviction was expressed at the beginning of his letter to the Romans: "For I am not



The Synagogue at Çatiören

ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16; see also Acts 13:46–47).¹ If Acts is to function as a paradigm for Paul's missionary practices, the apostle almost always evangelized places with a Jewish population and began his work by preaching in the synagogue, rather than in the agora or elsewhere. This Jewish priority is consistently mentioned throughout the narratives in Acts: 9:20 (Damascus); 13:5 (Salamis); 13:14 (Pisidian Antioch); 14:1 (Iconium); 16:13 (Philippi); 17:1–2 (Thessalonica); 17:10 (Berea); 18:4 (Corinth); 18:19 (Ephesus); 19:8 (Ephesus); and 28:17 (Rome). In Acts 17:2 Luke declared that this routine was Paul's customary practice. After experiencing opposition from Jews in Pisidian

Antioch, Luke conveyed Paul's response: "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the gentiles." (Acts 13:46).

Second, Paul expressed his desire to preach the gospel in places where others had not shared the message. In his correspondence with the Corinthians, the apostle noted his plan "to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another" (2 Cor 10:16). Likewise, at the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul expressed his reasons for coming to Rome and Spain. "I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; but as it is

written, "They who had no news of him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand" (Rom 15:20–21). Here Paul cites Isaiah as support for his policy.

When we apply these principles to an investigation of the places that Paul may have visited during these silent years, we should look first for evidence of a Jewish presence in the locations of Syria and Cilicia. This is not to say that Paul preached exclusively to Jews. There is ample evidence to indicate that Paul preached to non-Jews throughout his ministry. However, Paul's intention was to target Jewish locations as a first priority. There were probably several reasons for this. First, the Jews believed that they were specially commissioned as a priestly nation (Isa 61:6). They were entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom 3:2). And they were uniquely called to minister to the nations: "you will call a nation you do not know, and a nation which knows you not will run to you, because of the LORD your God, even the Holy One of Israel; for he has glorified you" (Isa 55:5).

Second, as a traveling Jew, Paul would be offered hospitality in his travels and would be given an opportunity to address the congregation in the synagogue. And third, at the synagogues Paul would find God-fearers—monotheistic gentiles who were attached to the synagogue. Many of these God-fearers responded positively to the gospel and increasingly the gentiles became the bulk of the population in Paul's churches.

En route to various locations, Paul had to travel through places that had no Jewish population or only a nominal Jewish presence. He would have had to purchase food and provisions at these

sites and frequently found lodging in these cities and towns. His conversations inevitably would lead him to share the gospel message with the residents of these places. So, while Paul would avail himself of opportunities to share the gospel with the non-Jewish residents of cities, towns, and villages, these places were of secondary concern when Paul laid plans for his travels. If we are looking for the places where Paul most probably traveled, we need to find Jewish communities.

GEOGRAPHY AND PAUL'S MINISTRY IN SYRIA

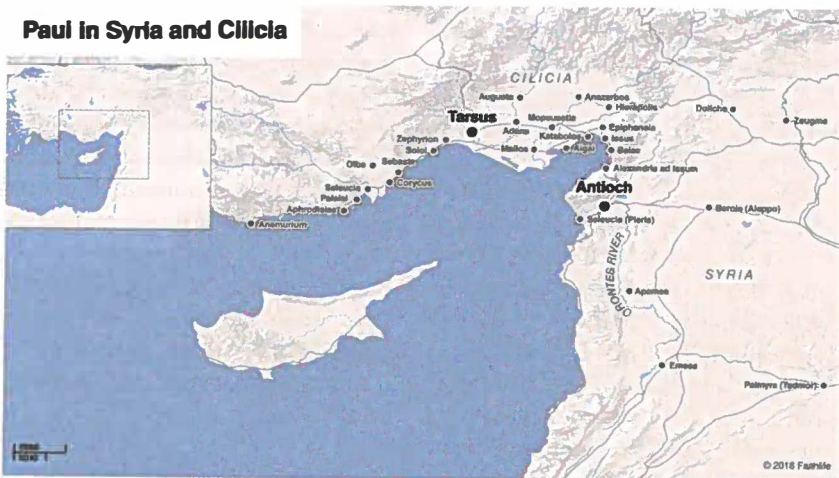
Strabo notes that Cilicia and Syria were divided by Mt. Amanus, a short distance to the north of Syrian Antioch (*Geography* 16.2.1). South of the mountain, the Mediterranean Sea formed the western border of Syria. The Roman province of Syria extended to the east of Mt. Amanus up to the Euphrates River and at times included the territory of Commagene to the north. In AD 17 the Roman emperor Tiberius annexed the Commagene kingdom and added it to the province of Syria. In AD 38 Caligula appointed Antiochus IV as a client king over Commagene and also gave him dominion over a portion of Cilicia. Caligula later revoked this appointment, but in AD 41 the new emperor Claudius restored Antiochus IV as king of Commagene and he ruled until AD 72.² At that point Vespasian reincorporated Commagene into Syria.

To the south, the territory of Syria spread as far as Arabia (Nabataea) and included Phoenicia and Judea. When Pompey expanded the Roman Empire to the east in 63 BC, Phoenicia and Judea were

1. All Scripture quotations are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

2. F. Miller, *The Roman Near East: 31 BC–AD 337* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 52–53, 59, 81–82.

Paul in Syria and Cilicia



added to the province of Syria. Strabo, writing in the early years of the first century, identified five regions within the province of Syria: Commagene, Seleucid Syria, Coele Syria, Phoenicia, and Judea. Strabo also mentioned that some ancient writers referred to this region by the individual parts (*Geography* 16.2.2). Frequently, Judea and Phoenicia were identified separately from Syria, even though the Romans administratively considered them to be a part of the Syrian province. For those living in or near the province, it was more common to be specific and to refer to the individual regions.

WHERE WAS PAUL LIKELY TO TRAVEL?

Where among these regions of Syria did Paul go? Paul made it clear that Judea was not included in this Syrian ministry. In Galatians 1:21–22 Paul distinguished between Syria and Judea and claimed that he was unknown to the churches of Judea. It is also important to note that Commagene was a client kingdom and was not considered a part of Syria at the time when Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians. Thus, it is not likely that Paul's

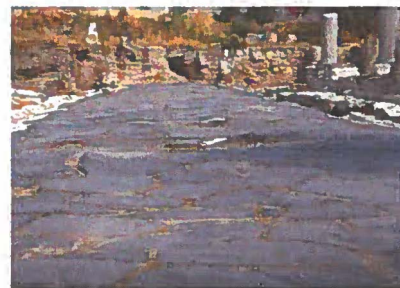
Syrian ministry involved Commagene. Likewise we can probably eliminate the Phoenician cities of Tyre, Sidon, Berytus, Byblos, and Tripolis. Acts 11:19 indicates that other unknown evangelists reached Phoenicia shortly after Stephen's martyrdom. Paul preferred to minister in places where the gospel had never been preached. The upshot of this is that it seems probable that Paul's reference to his ministry in Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:21) involved Cilicia and the regions of Seleucid Syria and Coele Syria.

After his conversion Paul preached in the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:20) and Arabia (the Nabataean kingdom, Gal 1:17). Then, he was sent away to Tarsus. Several years later, Barnabas was assigned to minister in Antioch (Acts 11:22). Shortly thereafter (11:25–26) Barnabas sought Paul and brought him to Antioch to work with him. But the question remains, where in Syria was Paul doing ministry prior to coming to Antioch?

Tarsus

When Paul was sent back to Tarsus, he probably spent the bulk of his time in

Cilicia. Since Tarsus was his hometown, Tarsus probably served as his home base and his ministry radiated out from there. It cannot be determined how much time he spent in Syria and how far into Syria he traveled. Paul traveled great distances in his later journeys, but the mission in Syria and Cilicia involved smaller distances. Acts 11:25–26 implies that he generally stayed close to his home base. When Barnabas sought Paul to join him in Antioch, he traveled to Tarsus to look for him. The verb *anazēteō* (ἀναζητέω) implies that Paul was not at Tarsus and that Barnabas had to look for him elsewhere in the region. After finding (εὕρισκω, *heuriskō*) him, they returned to Antioch.



Roman Street in Tarsus

The distance from Tarsus to the northwestern periphery of Syria was ninety miles (145 km). The road passed through Adana and Mopsuestia before traversing the Amanus Mountains. The distance to any of the major cities of Syria was even

further. What were the most likely sites for Paul's Syrian mission during this time? Josephus claimed that there were many Jews spread throughout Syria (J.W. 7.43)³ and Paul himself tells us that he specifically targeted Jewish communities.

Antioch

It is likely that Paul was doing ministry in Antioch before (or shortly after) other Christians arrived in Acts 11:19. Paul's seven to nine year ministry in Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:21) preceded his arrival with Barnabas in 11:26 and it is hard to imagine that he would not have been there prior to the time when he joined Barnabas in Antioch. Departing from Cilicia and turning south on the Roman road, a mountain pass through the Syrian Gates led travelers to Antioch on the eastern side of the Amanus Mountains. Antioch was the largest city in Syria and one of the five largest cities in all the region surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, Antioch was the closest large Syrian city to Paul's home in Cilicia and it included a large Jewish population.⁴ With such a massive population Paul may not even have been aware that a few other Christians had come to the city and were sharing the gospel. Later, when more Christian refugees arrived in Antioch from Judea and began a ministry among the gentiles, the church numerically exploded (Acts 11:19–21). When Barnabas arrived, Paul was elsewhere in Cilicia. Barnabas soon realized that the work was beyond what

3. Josephus claimed that the Jews were dispersed throughout the world and noted that they were particularly numerous in Syria, especially in Antioch. Elsewhere (J.W. 2:561) Josephus asserted that over ten thousand Jews were slaughtered in Damascus during the Jewish-Roman war.

4. E. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 71, claims that there were between twenty thousand and thirty-five thousand Jews in Antioch at that time, about 10 percent of the population.

he could manage. Paul's familiarity with Antioch and its people may have been a contributing factor in Barnabas seeking Paul in Tarsus, rather than looking for help from Jerusalem.



Orontes River at Antioch

Antioch was located about fifteen miles (24 km) upriver from the Mediterranean coast straddling the Orontes River. The city's Mediterranean port at Seleucia Pieria was likewise evangelized by Paul. It too possessed a sizable Jewish community.⁵ This was the port from which Paul, Barnabas, and Mark departed on their Cyprian and Galatian ministry (Acts 13:4).

Beroia

Another likely site of Paul's Syrian mission was the city of Beroia. Beroia (today's Aleppo) was fifty-five miles (88.5 km) due east of Antioch and could be

easily reached via a Roman road. A first century Jewish and Christian presence in the city can be inferred from Epiphanius' discussion of a sect of Jewish Christian Nazoraeans at Beroia.⁶ Additionally, a silver amulet with Hebrew and Aramaic text dated to the fourth or fifth century AD was found in a tomb at Beroia. The text referred to Yahweh, King David, and the God of Israel.⁷ Although the amulet and testimony of Epiphanius date to the fourth century, it is highly likely that the Jewish community in Beroia found its origins prior to the Roman period.

Apamea

Following the Orontes River south of Antioch for another fifty-five miles (88.5 km) Paul likely came to Apamea. That there were a large number of Jews in Apamea is confirmed by Josephus, who



Inscription from the Fourth Century Synagogue at Apamea

5. Few physical remains related to Jews in Antioch and Seleucia are known. An undated plaque with a menorah was found in Antioch and a first century BC or AD ossuary belonging to Eiras from Seleucia was found in Jerusalem. However, little archaeological work has been done in these cities. See David Noy and Hanswulf Bloedhorn, eds., *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis, Volume 3: Syria and Cyprus*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 115–17.

6. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 29. This is supported by Jerome as well, *De viris illustribus* 3.1. See A. F. J. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 14.

7. Noy and Bloedhorn, *Volume 3*, 12.



Palmyra Necropolis

mentioned that the many Jews residing in Apamea were protected during the upheaval surrounding the Jewish war with Rome (J.W. 2.479). Evidence of a Jewish presence in Apamea is also confirmed by an ossuary found in Jerusalem bearing the name of Ariston of Apamea.⁸ An ancient synagogue built during the fourth century has been discovered in Apamea, but earlier ones from the first century were probably the places where Paul first shared the gospel in Apamea.

Emesa

Further south another 50 miles (80 km) below Apamea lay the city of Emesa and in a southeastern direction the city of Palmyra was located at a distance of 120 miles (193 km) from Apamea. Not much archaeological evidence has been found at Emesa (modern Homs) to indicate an early Jewish presence,⁹ but the royal family in Emesa had cordial relations with the Jews to such an extent that

the king of Emesa Gaius Julius Azizus agreed to be circumcised in order to marry Herod Agrippa II's sister Drusilla (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.139).

Palmyra

There is much more evidence of an early Jewish presence at Palmyra (Tadmor). David Noy and Hanswulf Bloedhorn list several inscriptions and ossuaries from Beth She'arim and Jerusalem mentioning Jews from Palmyra dating to the second and third centuries.¹⁰ Additionally, several lamps were found at Palmyra containing menorahs along with a doorway inscribed on the lintel and doorposts with the words of Deuteronomy 6, 7, and 29. The houses in this area are dated in the second century, but the inscriptions may have been added later. More certain is the date of an epitaph on the lintel of a tomb in the necropolis at Palmyra. The tomb can be dated to AD 212 and was built by Zenobius and Samuel, sons of

8. Noy and Bloedhorn, *Volume 3*, 114. The ossuary has been dated to the first century BC or AD.

9. According to Noy and Bloedhorn, *Volume 3*, 68, a fourth or fifth century Latin sarcophagus was found in Concordia, Italy inscribed with the name Flavia Optata, wife of a soldier from the royal Jewish Emesene troops.

10. Noy and Bloedhorn, *Volume 3*, Appendix 1, 227–32.

Levi.¹¹ Even earlier evidence of Jews in Palmyra can be found in a rabbinic reference to a woman Miriam from Palmyra whose daughter had died (Mishnah, Nazir 6.11).

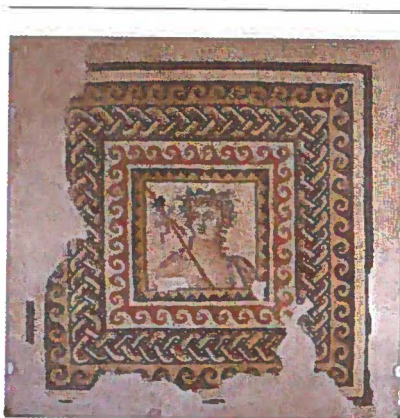
It is hard to say how deeply Paul penetrated Syria during this early period. If his ministry in this area was shallow, Palmyra may have been beyond Paul's scope. However, the seven to nine year period certainly offered the apostle enough time to evangelize Palmyra. The large Jewish presence at Palmyra indicated by the textual and archaeological evidence could have enticed Paul to make the journey to the city.

Doliche and Zeugma

Instead of going south to Antioch, Beroia, Apamea, Emesa, and Palmyra, an alternate Roman road coming from Cilicia traveled directly east to Doliche and Zeugma. Doliche was located about 95 miles (153 km) northeast of Antioch and another 25 miles (40 km) east of Doliche was Zeugma. The Roman road from Tarsus traversed a direct route to Doliche for 130 miles (209 km). There was a Jewish presence in Doliche, though the size of the Jewish community is unclear.¹² Doliche possessed the sanctuary for Jupiter Dolichenus, the chief deity of the city. The presence of Roman troops at Doliche helped spread the notoriety of Jupiter Doliche so that the deity became one of the most important gods in the empire in the second century AD. Along with the Roman troops, the city also possessed two Mithraea (sanctuaries for the

cult of Mithras), a popular mystery religion with the legions.

A mere twenty-five miles (40 km)



Roman Mosaic from Zeugma

east of Doliche lay Zeugma. At the time of the construction of the Birecik Dam in 1996, excavators conducted salvage excavations at Zeugma before the city was submerged under the waters of the reservoir. Dozens of beautiful mosaics were extracted from Zeugma and are currently displayed in the Zeugma Mosaic Museum in Gaziantep. Unfortunately, the waters limit the amount of research that can be conducted at Zeugma. Presently, there is no known Jewish presence at Zeugma, but Josephus' comments on the large number of Jews throughout Syria suggests that we cannot discount their presence there. If Paul ministered in Doliche, it is likely that he would have taken the short journey to Zeugma as well.

STRENGTHENING THE CHURCHES

Following the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), Paul chose Silas and passed through Syria and Cilicia "strengthening the churches" (15:41). The verb used here (ἐπιστηρίζω, *epistērizo*) indicates that Paul and Silas revisited churches that had already been established. Paul typically revisited churches that he personally had founded, so the implication is that these were churches that Paul evangelized during the seven to nine year period prior to his journey with Barnabas to Cyprus and Galatia. On this mission Paul's prime objectives were to revisit the churches of southern Galatia that he and Barnabas had established and to travel to Ephesus (Acts 16:6).

The point of departure for Paul and Silas was Syrian Antioch on the northwestern edge of Syria and only fifteen miles (24 km) from Cilicia. No large or mid-sized Syrian city lay on the direct route between Antioch and Cilicia, Galatia, and beyond. So, for Paul and Silas to revisit churches in Syria, the evangelists had to backtrack to the east and/or the south. It is possible that Luke never intended to include Syrian churches among those that were "strengthened," but if that were the case it would have been better for Luke to omit Syria from the text.

Perhaps the churches in the southern parts of Syria were already visited by Paul, Barnabas, and Silas when they returned from Jerusalem (15:30). Thus, I would tentatively suggest that Paul and Silas made a loop to the east visiting Beroia, followed by a trek northeast to Zeugma. At this point they traveled west to Doliche and on into Cilicia. The apostles may have been following the path

of the Judaizers who had unsettled the Antiochene church and then moved on to other Pauline churches.

GEOGRAPHY AND PAUL'S MINISTRY IN CILICIA

When Paul fled Jerusalem, Luke remarked that the disciples brought Paul to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). Since Caesarea was the major Mediterranean port for both Jews and Romans, the text implies that Paul sailed to Tarsus, rather than traveling by land.

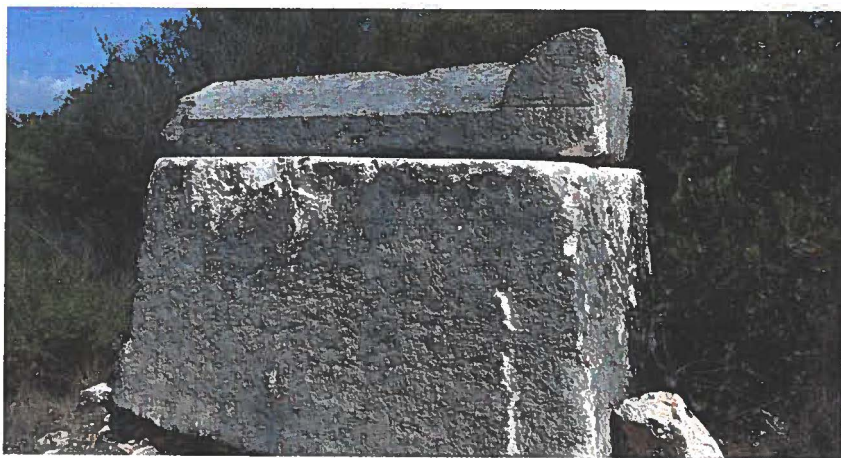
Cilicia spread to the west of Syria and south of the Taurus Mountains. Cilicia was bounded by the Taurus Mountains on the north and as the mountain range turned to the southwest, the coast followed. At Adana these mountains curved southwest and ran for 170 miles (273.5 km) before turning to the west and then bent northwest running another 70 miles (112.7 km) to the borders of Pamphylia and Lycia. Following the course of the mountains to the south was the sea. Thus, Cilicia encompassed a strip of land with sparsely inhabited mountains to the north, bordered by a band of foothills and a thin strip of flat coastal land terminating at the sea. North of the mountain range on the east was Cappadocia, further west was Isauria and even further west Homonadeis.¹³

Strabo explained that Cilicia was divided into two sections (*Geography* 14.5.1). The eastern portion known as *Cilicia Pedias* (Smooth Cilicia) had a much broader strip of fertile flatland bordering the sea. Over the years the Pyramos, Psaros, Cydnus, and Liparis Rivers deposited alluvial soil in this area resulting in a relatively broader plain before the sea.

11. Noy and Boedhorn, *Volume 3*, 76–79.

12. Benedikt Eckhardt, *Jewish Identity and Politics between the Maccabees and Bar Kokhba* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 207 n. 64. Michael Blömer and Engelbert Winter, *Commagene: The Land of Gods Between the Taurus and the Euphrates* (Istanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2011), 248–66.

13. See BAGRW, maps 66, 67, and 68.



Sarcophagus with Menorah at Corycus

Southwest of Soloi (Pompeiopolis) the coastal plain almost disappears. Strabo referred to this region as *Cilicia Tracheia* (Rough Cilicia) for good reason. The Taurus Mountains and foothills rise abruptly out of the sea, leaving little or no flatland. This area is some of the most tortured land in all of Anatolia. Rivers and streams have carved out deep canyons and ravines throughout the land. Massive cliffs and sinkholes pockmark the terrain. Luke referred to Cilicia seven times and Paul once in their writings and they never distinguish between Cilicia Pedias and Cilicia Tracheia.

THE JEWISH PRESENCE IN CILICIA

There are few ancient literary sources that describe life in Cilicia. However, the information that we are able to obtain indicates that there was a sizeable Jewish presence in Cilicia during the first century. Paul himself hailed from Tarsus

in Cilicia (Acts 9:11; 11:25; 21:39; 22:3; Gal 1:21) and Acts 6:9 referred to a synagogue of freedmen from Cilicia as well as Cyrene, Alexandria, and Asia.¹⁴ Josephus described a journey of Herod to Elaioussa Sebaste with his sons. Upon returning to Jerusalem he boasted of the benefactions that he bestowed upon the Jews of Cilicia (Ant. 16.131–133). Later in the first century Josephus mentioned Alexander, the son of Tigranes, a Jewish king of Armenia who was appointed king of Ketis in Cilicia by Vespasian (Ant. 18.140–141). Vespasian's appointment of a Jew to this position suggests that there was a large Jewish population in the area. Much the same can be assumed when Bernice married Polemo, the king of Cilicia, and convinced him to undergo circumcision (Josephus, Ant. 20.145–147). Philo as well wrote that Jews had settled throughout Cilicia (Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 281–282). Ben-Zion Rosenfeld and Joseph Menirav

cite several rabbinic sources that mention synagogues in Tarsus¹⁵ and the fourth century Epiphanius of Salamis passed on the story of Joseph of Cilicia, a Jewish official, who was flogged in the synagogue (Panarion 30.11).

There are a number of Jewish archaeological remains in Cilicia with most of those in Rough Cilicia. Some of Turkey's largest cities sit upon the remains of the largest ancient Cilician cities—Adana, Tarsus, and Mersin (Pompeiopolis) and the smaller city of Silifke is the site of Seleucia Ad Calycadnum. It is difficult to excavate these ancient cities. Many other ancient sites were located in the remote foothills and mountains of the Taurus range. Thus, relatively little archaeological work has been conducted in these places of Cilicia. However, the surface remains in the region confirm what the literary sources suggest—that there was a large Jewish presence in Cilicia.

Evidence from Inscriptions and Tombs

Two funerary inscriptions found at Joppa (Israel) refer to Jews in Tarsus: "Judas, son of Josos of Tarsus" and "Herein lies Isaac, elder of the Cappadocian [syna-

gogue], linen merchant from Tarsus."¹⁶ Also, an inscription probably originating from the necropolis at Joppa mentions Theodotus, son of Alexander from the city of Seleucia Isauria.¹⁷ A lead sarcophagus found at Aigai and currently in the museum at Adana contains four menorahs. The sarcophagus belonged to a Jew named Prokla and can be dated to the second to the fourth century.¹⁸

Both the literary sources and ancient remains suggest a much larger concentration of Jews in Rough Cilicia, specifically between the Lamas and Calycadnus Rivers.¹⁹ The necropolis at Seleucia Ad Calycadnum (Silifke) contains two Jewish tombs: one inscribed with the words "Tomb of a Hebrew" and the other marked with two menorahs and an inscription "Tomb of Theodorus, grandson of Theodorus."²⁰ Further north up the coast at Corycus, a necropolis contains twelve sarcophagi bearing the names of Jews along with menorahs.²¹ Inland at Diocaesarea, there is a tomb that held the remains of "M. Aurelius Zoilos and Diogenes, Jews."²²

North and inland from Elaioussa Sebaste is an ancient village now known

15. Ben-Zion Rosenfeld and Joseph Menirav, "The Ancient Synagogue as an Economic Center," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 58 (1999): 264.

16. Walter Ameling, ed., *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis: Kleinasien*, vol. 2 of *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 531–33, nos. 249–50.

17. Ameling, *Kleinasien*, 523–24, no. 246. Isauria neighbors Cilicia and this reference is likely to Seleucia Cilicia.

18. Ameling, *Kleinasien*, 497–98.

19. Mark R. Fairchild, "The Jewish Communities in Eastern Rough Cilicia," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 5 (2014): 204–16.

20. Ameling, *Kleinasien*, 521–23, nos. 244–45. Ameling dates these to the fourth century AD.

21. Ameling, *Kleinasien*, 500–520, nos. 232–243. Also listed in J. Keil and A. Wilhelm, eds., *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua. Denkmäler aus dem rauhen Kilikien*, vol. 3 of *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931). See also Margaret H. Williams, "The Jewish Community of Corycus: Two More Inscriptions," *Zietschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 92 (1992): 248–52.

22. Ameling, *Kleinasien*, 499–500, no. 231.

14. The Theodotus inscription found near the City of David in Jerusalem probably refers to this synagogue. See page 157 for an image of the inscription.

as *Kabaçam*.²³ The ancient name of the village is unknown, but the ruins date to the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine period. On the plastered walls of an underground granary, there was inscribed a large and unusual menorah. The menorah is elongated and shaped like a ship. There are six branches of the menorah flanking a centerpiece consisting of three branches that represent the ship's mast and sail. Elsewhere on the walls of the granary are inscriptions of two ships and a sheep. The granary appears to date to the Roman period and the inscriptions lead us to believe that Jews from *Kabaçam* were involved in the production, transport, and trade of grain. The ancient road from *Kabaçam* leads to the much larger seaside granaries located at *Tirtar Akkale* (ancient name unknown), where one would assume that the grain would be loaded onto cargo ships.

Evidence of Synagogues

There is evidence of ancient synagogues in this area as well.²⁴ Beneath the Armenian castle walls on the shore of Corycus there lies buried the lintel of what was probably a synagogue. A stylized Byzantine menorah is deeply cut into the lintel. The castle was erected upon the ruins of a Roman agora and the lintel itself may have been the doorway of a shop that was later converted into a synagogue during the Byzantine period.

Inland from *Elaioussa Sebaste* and west of *Kabaçam* is another unidentified ancient village known locally as *Çatiören*. During the Hellenistic period the site

functioned as a fortification guarding the road leading from the interior to the coastal city of *Elaioussa Sebaste*. Deeply cut ravines on both sides of a central



Menorah Carved into Synagogue Lintel at Corycus

ridge made the site a strategic place to guard settlements further into the mountainous interior. Most of the buildings on the central ridge were polygonally constructed structures dating to the Hellenistic period, including a well-preserved temple to *Hermes*, a watchtower, and a synagogue. The synagogue has a large crudely inscribed menorah on the exterior surface of the lintel standing next to an inscribed thunderbolt of *Zeus*. Another smaller menorah can be found on the inside of the lintel. Inside, there is a niche facing south in the direction of *Jerusalem*. A small mikveh, fed by waters from a cistern higher on the ridge, was attached to the outside walls of the synagogue and a rock-cut staircase led up to a second story of the building. A decree inscribed on the bedrock at the site men-

23. The ancient names of many sites in Rough Cilicia are unknown. In what follows, an italicized font designates the current Turkish names given to these locations, while the unitalicized normal font designates the known ancient name.

24. Mark R. Fairchild, "Turkey's Unexcavated Synagogues: Could the World's Earliest Known Synagogue Be Buried Amid Rubble?" *BAR* 38.4 (2012), 34–41, 65.

tioned Sabbath keepers, the synagogue official, and others who worshiped at the site.²⁵

JEWS AND WORSHIPERS OF THE HIGHEST GOD

A small altar found at *Diocaesarea* is currently on display in the museum at *Silifke*.²⁶ The altar has a five-branched lampstand depicted in relief on the front of the altar. The middle branch holds a star. The sides of the altar contain a pair of ears. Beneath the lampstand is the word *EYXHN* (*euchēn*, "vow"), but the words above the altar are damaged and unreadable. This was probably an altar created in fulfillment of a vow to the God who hears. A similar expression can be found on an inscription found at *Tanais* a colony of the Bosphorean kingdom north of the Black Sea: "In fulfillment of a vow [*EYXH, euchē*] to the Highest God who hears [*ΘΕΩ ΥΨΙΣΤΩ ΕΙΠΗΚΟΩ, theō hypsistō epēkoō*]."²⁷ The cult of the Highest God was common in Cilicia and ancient Anatolia.²⁸ The worshipers of the Highest God were monotheistic gentiles who frequently had associations with Jews in their communities. They often attended the synagogues and they may be identified with the God-fearers mentioned in

Acts. Throughout Paul's travels, many of his converts came from the God-fearers (Acts 13:16, 26, 43; 16:14; 18:7).



This unusual altar was found at *Diocaesarea* and is currently on display in the *Silifke Museum*

The question is: Does the lampstand on this altar depict a menorah? Rachel Hachlili notes that menorahs can be found containing three, five, seven, nine, and eleven branches, although seven branches are the most common.²⁹ I follow

25. E. L. Hicks, "Inscriptions from Western Cilicia," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 12 (1891): 233–37. Also see *Orientis Graecae Inscriptiones Selectae* 573.

26. Ameling, *Kleinasien*, 498–99, no. 230.

27. Struve, V.V. *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani* (CIRB) 1260 (Moscow: Nauka, 1965). Also at *Tanais* another inscription (CIRB 1280) is similar: "To the Highest God who hears" and yet, another dedicatory inscription from *Panticapaeum* (CIRB 64) is similar: "In fulfillment of a vow to the Highest God who hears."

28. Stephen Mitchell, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews, and Christians," in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 81–148; Mitchell, "Further Thoughts on the Cult of Theos Hypsistos," in *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, ed. by Steven Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 167–208.

29. Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah, The Ancient Seven-armed Candelabrum: Origin, Form, and Significance*, (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 200–202.

Serra Durugönül and Ahmet Mörel along with others who believe it is a menorah.³⁰

Similar five-branched menorahs can be found at several other locations in this area. Lintels found at unnamed ancient villages located at *Köşkerli*, *Örendibi*, and *Karaböcülü* all bear similarly shaped five-branched menorahs. Most ancient lintels have no distinctive markings, but those with symbols were important buildings in the community. These menorahs are all set in relief upon lintels of buildings that may have been synagogues.

Another five-branched menorah was located a short distance from *Örendibi* alongside an ancient road near the village of *Sömek*. This menorah was part of a shrine dedicated to Athena. The centerpiece of the shrine is a five-foot-high rock-cut relief of Athena set in a niche flanked by two pilasters. On both sides of the pilasters there were small busts of unknown figures that were recently removed by treasure hunters. On the right pilaster there remains a star with a crescent below it and Zeus' thunderbolt lower on the pilaster. The menorah is located further to the right. Shrines were commonly located along ancient roads so that travelers could implore the gods for protection in travel.

The presence of the menorah next to pagan symbols is unusual, but not uncommon in this area of Rough Cilicia.³¹ As mentioned above, the menorah on the synagogue at *Çatiören* stands next to Zeus' thunderbolt. Likewise, the menorahs at *Köşkerli*, *Örendibi*, and possibly *Karaböcülü* are likewise positioned next to thunderbolts. What was the relationship between these symbols of the Jewish faith and Zeus?



A menorah is carved into a pilaster of the Athena relief at *Sömek*. To the left is Zeus' thunderbolt and above that a star and crescent.

30. Serra Durugönül and Ahmet Mörel, "Evidence of Judaism in Rough Cilicia and Its Associations with Paganism" *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Abteilung Istanbul* 62 (2012): 303–22. Also Gilbert Dagron and Denis Feissel, *Inscriptions de Cilicie* (Paris: de Boccard, 1987), no. 14; Ameling, *Kleinasiens*, 49899, no. 230; and evidently Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 416 n. 824.

31. For that matter, the integration of Hellenistic religious elements with synagogues was not unique to Rough Cilicia or even the diaspora. In some of the synagogues of Palestine one can find depictions of Sol, Helios, and the Zodiac. Beautiful mosaic floors in ancient synagogues at Beth Alpha, Na'aran, Susiya, Hussaifah, Yaphia, Sepphoris and Hamat Tiberias have zodiac circles prominently displayed. These synagogues date to the third century and later, but it is clear that these tendencies existed earlier in many Jewish quarters.

Stephen Mitchell has identified 375 Greek inscriptions that refer to the worship of "the Highest God" (*theos hypsistos*). The bulk of these inscriptions come from Anatolia. Approximately one-third of these identify the Highest God as Zeus. Most of these inscriptions cannot be attached to local Jewish communities, but some of them indicate that the non-Jewish devotees of the Highest God associated with the Jews in their towns and villages. Several early Christian writers mentioned these people: Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius of Salamis, and Cyril of Alexandria. Gregory of Nazianzus provides the best description noting that the adherents observed the Sabbath, refrained from the consumption of certain meats, refused to worship idols, and otherwise observed Jewish law. However, they refrained from circumcision and had certain Hellenistic tendencies (*Orationes* 18.5). The similarities to the God-fearers mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles are unmistakable. The *Letter of Aristeas*, a second century BC Jewish writing, probably refers to a similar group of gentile monotheists: "These people worship God, the overseer and creator of all, whom all men worship, including ourselves, O King, except that we all have different names for him, such as Zeus and Yahweh." The connection between Zeus and Yahweh is important in this text because it clearly

indicates that some Jews endorsed the faith of non-Jewish monotheists.³²

The presence of several lintels in Rough Cilicia containing both the Jewish menorah and the thunderbolt of Zeus supports the conclusion that Jews and gentiles worshiped together in this area. The degree of integration between the two groups cannot be known precisely. Two late Hellenistic inscriptions found at *Çatiören* mention two groups of people: the religious members (*hetairois*) and the Sabbath keepers (*sabbatistais*). The larger inscription is a decree that rescinds curses that have been issued against others and levies heavy one hundred drachma fines against anyone who violates the decree of the Sabbath God.³³

It was resolved by the religious members and God's | Sabbath keepers, who have gathered together for the worship of the Sabbath God to create an | inscribed record which no one can invalidate. And after this is made | let it be strictly observed. If anyone wishes to deposit a curse against someone, | let a curse be deposited against the one who wishes. Protos says to crown | Dis Ibelion as the synagogue official. Of those who are being | condemned in the sanctuaries and who have been inscribed on | the steles and on the curse tablets, let no one be *condemned* nor excised |

32. Arthur Bernard Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1914), 232–237, shows a Phoenician quarter-shekel (probably from Gaza) dated around 350 BC depicting Yahweh as Zeus. Surrounding the head in Phoenician letters is the name Yahweh. Similarly, Cook shows an onyx amulet with Zeus holding his thunderbolt (p. 235) with the words ΙΑΩ ΣΑΒΑΩ (Iao Sabaoth) on the back.

33. Hicks, "Inscriptions from Western Cilicia," 233–36. Hicks' transcription was based upon a squeeze made by J. Theodore Bent (Bent, "A Journey in Cilicia Tracheia," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 12 (1891): 210–11.

from the record nor dismissed nor removed. And if anyone should deviate or | sin against the Sabbath God he will make payment to | the Sabbath God: one hundred drachmas and to the Sabbath keepers one hundred drachmas and to the city | one hundred drachmas and to the ruler (dynast) one hundred drachmas. This stele is an impartial record of the oath. No one | is to receive *others* into their home on this day. Let the priest distribute the offerings for God | for the maintenance of this place. (author's translation)

What is implied by this inscription is that previous tensions between the "religious members" and the "Sabbath keepers" have been resolved. The non-Jewish religious members were probably worshippers of Zeus Hypsistos and conflicts with the Jews at Çatiören resulted in curses that were deposited in the nearby temple of Hermes.³⁴ This inscription removed those curses and restored relations between the two groups. Additionally, the inscription installed Dis Ibelion as a synagogue official. Dis is a common appellation for Zeus and Dis Ibelion may have been a priest of Zeus Hypsistos. The appointment of this person to the office of synagogue official was a way of enhancing the relationship between the two groups.

PAUL'S MINISTRY IN ROUGH CILICIA

Paul's early ministry in this area of Rough Cilicia may have been the stimulus for Paul's understanding that the breadth

of God's grace was extended beyond the Jewish community and included non-Jewish people. Paul appears to have been one of the first Christians to fully grasp and articulate this understanding of God's salvation. The inclusion of non-Jews in God's plan of salvation was a massive step forward in Jewish and Christian thought. Acts documents the struggles of Jewish Christian believers in coming to grips with this concept. Peter's ministry to Cornelius and the gentiles gathered together in his house (Acts 10) was not enough for Peter to acknowledge a gentile ministry as a new benchmark moving forward in the future. Later when Peter came to Antioch, Peter's duplicity became evident. Paul confronted Peter with his hypocrisy and harshly rebuked him (Gal 2:11–14). Following his ministry in Rough Cilicia, however, Paul never wavered on the issue. Paul saw little difference between the circumcised and uncircumcised believers in Cilicia, and he realized that God's love and mercy extended to all who would respond to him in faith.

Paul still clung to the hope that the Jewish people would fulfill their mission as a "priestly nation" and minister to the gentile nations. But he also realized that God's mission would not be thwarted by disobedient people: "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it ... behold, we are turning to the gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Thus, Paul continued to prioritize his ministry to the synagogues with hopes that responsive Jewish people would fulfill their mission (Rom 1:16).



Fortification at Çatiören

So, how far did Paul penetrate into Cilicia? Eckhard Schnabel suggests that Paul visited the cities with a known Jewish presence and lists Anazarbos, Mallos, Soloi, Sebaste, Corycus, Seleucia, and Olba. He also notes that Paul could have visited cities with an unknown Jewish presence such as Baiae, Issus, Katabolos, Aigai, Epiphaneia, Hierapolis, Mopsuestia, Adana, Augusta, and Zephyrion in Smooth Cilicia and the Rough Cilician cities of Palaiai, Aphrodisias, and Anemurium.³⁵ Of these twenty cities, most of them are coastal cities (thirteen) or cities connected with known major thoroughfares (six). However, the body of work that we piece together from Paul's later travels and from his own words leads us to conclude that Paul did not always take the easy path. If Paul's Syrian and Cilician ministry consisted of a seven to nine year mission, I suspect Paul went deeper into the interior of Rough Cilicia.

The most direct route connecting Tarsus with Syrian Antioch passed

through Alexandria Ad Issus, Baiae, Issus, Katabolos, Epiphaneia, Mopsuestia, and Adana. A more southern route would have bypassed Mopsuestia and Adana and added Aigai and Mallos. It can be assumed that Paul would have evangelized all of these cities. North of Adana and Mopsuestia were the cities of Anazarbos and Hierapolis. I would likewise include these cities as likely places for Paul to have visited during this time. Rough Cilicia however, is a bit more complicated. The inland towns and villages were much more remote, and although there was a sizeable Jewish presence there, travel was not easy and there were many dangers.

The inland villages and towns of Rough Cilicia have been scarcely investigated by scholars and archaeologists. Consequently, it is hard to determine how many Jews occupied these mountains and foothills. From the little that is known, the area between the Lamos River and the Calycadnus River had a large number of

34. The Hermes temple at Çatiören was located at the top of the same ridge as the synagogue, less than 110 yards (100 m) away. Hermes was a chthonic deity that transported the deceased and carried messages to the underworld. It was common for people to write curses on tablets and to throw them into the temples of Hermes who supposedly carried them to Hades.

35. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary*, 69.

resident Jews and it is logical to assume that the data cited above is just scratching the surface of what will someday be discovered. I operate under the assumption that the Calycadnus River was the furthest western extent of Paul's reach into Rough Cilicia and that the cities further west—Palaiai, Aphrodisias, Anemurium, Antiochia Ad Cragum, and Coracesium were beyond the scope of Paul's mission. The density of Jews, large number of villages and the difficulties of reaching these places between the Lamos and Calycadnus Rivers was enough to occupy Paul for a long period of time.

This area of Rough Cilicia contains some of the most tortured land in all of Anatolia. The mountains and foothills run close to the shoreline and streams emanating far into the interior have carved deep gorges and canyons that empty into the Mediterranean. Cliffs drop off to the canyon floors as far as 1700 feet (518 m) below. The ancient road on the coast ran in a southwestern direction along the narrow stretch of flatland. In the interior, travel in the same direction was impossible. Instead, all roads into the interior ran in a northwestern direction, climbing, turning, and twisting as the canyons allowed. Most of the modern roads follow the same route. Many sections of the ancient roads can still be found in the region along with several Roman milestones.

Many of the villages and dwellings in this area were constructed for defensive purposes. They occupy strategic positions along the cliffs and places where the occupants could observe movement from the coastal areas into the interior. There are more than thirty watchtow-

ers between the Lamos and Calycadnus Rivers and no doubt many more existed in the past. Even more remarkably, many of the cliff faces have dwellings cut into the rock. Clearly, the residents feared trouble coming in from the coast.

With the exception of Diocaesarea and Olba, none of these settlements contained the usual structures associated with Hellenistic and Roman towns. Absent were the stadiums, theaters, odeons, public baths, water fountains, gymnasiums, and colonnaded streets. Instead, these were austere communities that were designed for protection and survival. Why did these people migrate to these inhospitable regions, why did they erect these rustic communities and what did they fear?

Starting at the end of the second century BC the entire southern coast of Anatolia from Lycia through Pamphylia to Cilicia was controlled by pirates who seized the coastal cities and forced the indigenous residents to pay tribute and to cooperate with them. Many of the native residents fled into the interior and established these crude settlements. Over the years, the Romans sent several of their best military leaders to the area to subdue the pirates and on each occasion the Roman propaganda claimed to eliminate the problem. But these were temporary fixes. The pirates retreated to the security of the mountainous interior and then returned to the coastal cities when the Roman troops departed. The last Roman general, Pompey, claimed to finish the job. However, there is no evidence to indicate that Pompey did anything to the pirates east of Anemurium.³⁶ By the end of the first century BC and

extending into the first century AD, Cilicia was rife with pirates who were deeply entrenched in the coastal cities and had made progress in infiltrating the interior.³⁷ Cicero was appointed proconsul of Cilicia in 51 BC and was given two legions to subdue the land. In his letters Cicero frequently alluded to the difficulties of fighting with the bandits of the countryside, the rebellious Cilician mountain men and the perpetual hostilities of the inhabitants (*Letters to Friends* 2.10; 15.1; 15.4). Extending even into the first century AD the men of Cilicia and Isauria were described by Cassius Dio as pirates who were creating havoc with their marauding expeditions (*History* 55.28). Paul probably had these places in mind when he described his journeys with dangers from rivers, dangers from pirates, dangers from his countrymen, and dangers in the wilderness, along with sleepless nights in hunger and thirst without food in cold and exposure (2 Cor 11:26–27).

Due to the large presence of Jews in Rough Cilicia, I would presume that Paul began his Cilician ministry in this area, sometime after first evangelizing Tarsus. The coastal road ran for forty-five miles (72.4 km) southwest from Tarsus before reaching Rough Cilicia. Along the way Paul would have passed through Zephyrion and Soli (Pompeiopolis). Rough Cilicia began at the point where the Lamos River emptied into the sea.

Once in the area of Rough Cilicia, Paul could have visited sites relatively near the coast including *Koşkerli*, *Kanyteleis*, and *Kabaçam* (see map on page 714). These places were agricultural com-

munities and occupied positions that were not easily defended. Traveling up the Lamos River and crossing over three Roman bridges one comes to the fortress of *Sömek* and the settlement of *Örendibi* on the south side of the canyon and the fortresses at *Hüsametli*, *Yeniyurt*, and *Tapureli* on the north. *Yeniyurt* and *Tapureli* were built at strategic cliff-side locations between 650 and 1600 feet (198–488 m) above the river. Large rock-cut reliefs of soldiers marked the sites. Cliff face rock-cut dwellings litter the canyon walls between these fortresses and ancient roads are still visible leading to *Sömek* and *Tapureli*.

Further to the southwest streams from the mountains formed ravines that deepened into canyons as they approached the coast. At the coast the harbor city of *Elaïoussa Sebaste* was established. A Roman road north led to the fortification at *Çatıören* with its synagogue and *İmirzeli*. On the other side of the ravine to the west another fortress at *Yapılı İn* was dug into the cliff side two hundred feet (61 m) above the valley floor. A large rock-cut relief of a soldier guarded the site and many dwellings were cut into the cliff surrounding the fortress. Yet another fortress was located southeast of *Çatıören* on the cliffs at *Hisarkale*.

A deeper canyon further to the southwest, known by the locals as *Satan's Valley*, was home to several ancient communities. Above the canyon on the north an ancient road led all the way from the coast to the Olbian kingdom's chief cities, *Olba* and *Diocaesarea*. Portions of the road can be seen today and the modern

36. Philip de Souza, *Piracy in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

37. Strabo, *Geography* 14.5.10, stated that residents of the interior (the Olbian kingdom) struggled with the pirates. Aba, the daughter of the pirate leader Xenophanes, was married to the priest of the temple of Zeus at Olba. No doubt, this was an attempt to resolve the problem of the pirate raids into the interior.

road follows the same path. The road was a main route to the interior and was guarded by several watchtowers. Starting from the coastal port at Corycus, the traveler would journey north to a fortification at *Adamkayalar* (550 feet [167.6 m] above the valley) preserved with several soldier reliefs. *Çambazlı*, *Diocaesarea*, and fortresses and watchtowers at *Kurşunlu* and *Olba* were further to the northwest. Large sections of Roman roads, milestones, and watchtowers are present along the route.

Other routes to *Diocaesarea* ran along the sides of another deeply cut canyon located further to the southwest. On the northeastern side of the canyon a road ran from *Korasion* on the coast north to fortresses located at *Paslı* and *Tekkadin* (both of them located 400 feet [122 m] above the canyon floor). On the southwestern side of the same canyon heading northwest from the coast one would encounter ancient towns at *Karakabaklı*, *Işıkkale*, *Akhayat*, *Sinekkale* and the cliff-side fortress at *Imamlı* (*Meydankale*—300 feet [91.4 m] above the canyon) before reaching *Diocaesarea*.

From *Seleucia Ad Calycadnum* two routes ran north into the mountains. The eastern route ran north to *Imbriogion* and then connected to *Meydankale* and continued north to *Diocaesarea*. Further to the west, a road led to the fortress at *Karaböcülü* standing 650 feet (198 m) above a valley leading to the *Calycadnus River*.

Did Paul's ministry involve all of these remote cities, towns, and villages? It is hard to say with any certainty. But, these places fit the criteria that Paul mentioned for ministry: places where nobody else had shared the gospel and places with a Jewish presence. Moreover, these were places close to his home in *Tarsus*, and the seven to nine years of Paul's ministry



The watchtower at *Kurşunlu* (ancient name unknown) guarded a small settlement located about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from *Olba* along a Roman road leading to the southeast. Over thirty watchtowers can be seen today in the region.

in this region afforded him enough time to scrupulously cover the territory.

It is common in contemporary scholarship to suggest that Paul's so-called second and third missions followed a route over the *Taurus Mountains* north of *Tarsus* through the *Cilician Gates* and into *Isauria*, *Lycaonia*, and *Galatia*. However, if *Acts 15:41*'s reference to strengthening the churches in *Cilicia* is understood to involve more than the region of *Cilicia Pedias* and to have included the region of *Cilicia Tracheia*, then the course of Paul's travels would have been different. The coastal road from *Tarsus* extended southwest all the way to *Seleucia Ad Calycadnum* and beyond. If Paul established churches in *Rough Cilicia* as far to the southwest



Overlooking a canyon that emptied into the *Calycadnus River* valley, *Karaböcülü* (ancient name unknown) was strategically positioned to observe travelers heading into the interior. A half buried lintel with a menorah suggests that a Jewish community resided here.

as *Seleucia*, the apostle's journey to the *Galatian interior* probably would have followed the *Calycadnus River* north through the *Taurus Mountains* and into *Isauria*, *Lycaonia*, and *Galatia*. It would make sense that Paul would follow up his ministry in these cities, towns, and villages of *Rough Cilicia* en route to the interior on his later journeys.

The *Thecla traditions* contribute to this conclusion. Even though the *Acts of Thecla* (part of the apocryphal *Acts of Paul*) is overlaid with doubtful legends, in my mind the early date, quantity of traditions, and the strength of these tradi-

tions is convincing enough to conclude that *Thecla* was a historical person converted under Paul's ministry in *Iconium*. The *Acts of Thecla* concludes with *Thecla* traveling to *Seleucia* and spending her remaining years there.³⁸ The ruins of three Byzantine churches commemorating *Thecla* remain there today and the place was a popular pilgrimage site throughout the Byzantine period. The transit of *Thecla* from *Iconium* to *Seleucia* suggests that this route via the *Calycadnus River* was commonly used in the Roman period. Additionally, the choice of *Seleucia* as the place of *Thecla's*

38. Most scholars date the *Acts of Thecla* in the early or middle of the second century, for example, Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jeremy W. Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla: A Critical Introduction and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); Barrier, J. N. Bremmer, T. Nicklas, and A. Puig i Tarrech, eds., *Thecla: Paul's Disciple and Saint in the East and West* (Leuven: Peeters, 2017).

final years indicates that a church was established in that place prior to Thecla's journey. This all points back to Paul's ministry in Rough Cilicia during the seven to nine silent years.

CONCLUSIONS

We cannot be certain regarding the specific details of the silent years of Paul's ministry in Syria and Cilicia. Nevertheless, we can posit a plausible scenario of these years based upon the history of those regions, the geography and topography of the land, and Paul's missionary strategies. In his early years, and perhaps until the end, the apostle believed that the Jews were an elect nation that was charged with the task of achieving God's purposes in this world.³⁹ For that reason, Paul targeted the cities and towns that had a Jewish presence. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that there was a large Jewish presence in Syria. Literary and archaeological evidence also indicates that Rough Cilicia also had a substantial Jewish population. It is reasonable to assume that Paul visited these cities, towns, and villages.

Paul also tells us that his desire was to preach the gospel in places where churches were not already established. During these silent years, Acts indicates that persecutions drove many Christians north from Judea into the regions of Syria. As they came to Syria, these Christians shared their faith and churches were established. One can assume from this that Paul did ministry in Syria in the early years of this seven to nine year period. But, when more Christians infiltrated Syria and more churches were

established, Paul increasingly turned his attention to Cilicia, particularly the region of Rough Cilicia and its numerous Jewish residents.

In Syria and Cilicia Paul became aware of the dangers of ministry. The mistreatment that Paul described in 2 Corinthians 11:23–28 cannot be completely harmonized with Paul's three missions as described in Acts. While writing to the Corinthians, Paul described the harsh travel and abuse that he experienced in all of his missions.

It seems that Paul's perspectives on the gentiles were broadened as a result of his work in Rough Cilicia. Through the close association of gentile worshippers of the Highest God with the Jews in the synagogues, Paul came to realize that God had opened the doors of salvation to uncircumcised people. The Jewish Christians in Judea struggled with this concept, but Paul was decades ahead of the Judaizers.

Perhaps it is going too far to suggest that Paul learned something about reconciliation during this time. In the first century Jewish and gentile relations were terrible and most rabbis forbade close relations with gentiles. We can imagine Paul standing at the inscription in the bedrock at Çatören. Here was a deeply fractured village where Jews and gentiles had hurled curses at one another. But through their common devotion to one God, the community found common ground, reconciled with one another, rescinded all curses, banned future curses, and levied heavy penalties against anyone violating the decree. Was

this experience in the back of Paul's mind later when he wrote to the Ephesians?

Therefore remember that formerly you, the gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision" ... remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who made both groups into one ... so that in himself he might make the two into one new person, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And he came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household. (Eph 2:11–19)

The ministry in Syria and Cilicia affirmed Paul's call and set the apostle on a course that would not conclude until his death. Paul lived life on the edge, realizing that death could come at any moment. His was a life without material comforts, without the pleasures of a wife and family, and a life of frequent opposition. Yet his was a life of joy, knowing that there were greater rewards in the hereafter. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

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39. See N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); Lionel J. Windsor, *Paul and the Vocation of Israel: How Paul's Jewish Identity Informs His Apostolic Ministry, with Special Reference to Romans* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

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