**Four Cities of Galatia**

During Paul’s time, Galatia was a Roman province in central Asia Minor, now known as Turkey. The ancient name originated from the Latin “Gallia,” the land of the Gauls of western Europe. The Greeks called these people “Galatai.”

When Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians, this province was divided into two regions. The principal cities of the northern region were Ancyra, Pessinus, and Tavium. The cities of the south included Antioch (near Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul’s letter was probably addressed to the four southern churches, the ones he visited on his first missionary journey.

Paul was a native of Tarsus. The main roads leading away from his hometown passed through the southern part of Galatia, which was teeming with Jews.

Barnabas and Paul began their first missionary journey at Antioch in Syria, sailing for the island of Cyprus. From Paphos, on the western side of the island, they sailed for Perga, on the southern coast of Asia Minor. They then traveled overland some 140 miles to Pisidian Antioch. From there, they traveled 90 miles southeast to Iconium, another 18 miles south to Lystra, and yet another 60 miles southeast to Derbe.

Let’s take a journey to these ancient sites.



**Pisidian Antioch**

Ancient Antioch of Pisidia is 2 miles west of the modern city of Yalvac in Turkey. Seleucus I had named 16 different cities for Antiochus, his father. Therefore these towns had to have an added designation—in this case, Pisidian Antioch. It was founded in 300 B.C., and became a part of the Roman province of Galatia about 25 B.C. It was considered the capital of southern Galatia.

Excavations on this site have uncovered two large city squares, partially bordered with houses and shops. In the upper-city Square of Augustus, archaeologists uncovered an impressive stairway of 12 steps, some 70 feet in length. This led to the lower Square of Tiberius. Excavated were remains of its beautiful entrance gateway with three arches, in honor of Caesar Augustus. Archaeologists have also unearthed a copy of an important document, “Deeds accomplished by the Divine Augustus.” This shows that faithful Jewish worshipers lived alongside those who favored the emperor.

Also uncovered at Antioch was an outstanding water system, including pipes and ruins of a Roman aqueduct some 5 miles to the north.

The Roman colony of Pisidian Antioch had some exquisite ancient buildings, including a Roman theater and a temple honoring one of their chief gods, Men.

Ruins of churches, along with a small inscription bearing the name of Optimus, bishop of Antioch during the years 378-81, tell us that Christianity continued at Antioch long after the time of Paul and Barnabas.

Upon leaving Pisidian Antioch for Iconium, Paul and Barnabas traveled one of the famous Roman military roads. The Via Sebaste, a paved road, was built in 6 B.C.

Rome was known for its road-building. They were made of four layers of sand, lime, broken stones, and mortar, topped with stones or gravel set in concrete. Major roads were 20-25 feet wide, allowing couriers to travel up to 75 miles in a day.

**Iconium**

Iconium was an important city, mentioned six times in the New Testament. The modern city of Konya in Turkey is the site of the ancient city.

Iconium was located in a small plain, almost 3,400 feet above sea level. The high Pisidian mountains lay to the west, and mountains of lesser height lay to the east. Snow and rain provided moisture for growing wheat, flax, and other produce.

Coins found in excavations show the earlier Greek influence on Iconium after the third century B.C. Some of the coins show Perseus, believed to be the first ruler, exhibiting the head of a mythological, snake-like creature. Other coins show Zeus with a scepter, and the goddess Athena with a spear entwined by a serpent.

Another of the discoveries includes an altar with a Greek inscription dedicated to Men, the god worshiped by the Iconians. At one time, Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41- 54) prefixed his own name to the city, and came up with Claudiconium. This name appears on some of the coins that have been found.

**Lystra**

This was the hometown of Timothy. It was almost 20 miles south of Iconium on the Roman road Via Sebaste.

The site of the ancient ruins of Lystra has been verified by an ancient Roman altar found there. On it was the Latin inscription “Lustra.”

Around 6 B.C. Augustus sent troops to Lystra to capture it as a Roman colony. Coins show that the name of the city was changed to Julia Felix Gemina Lustra.

The inhabitants of Lystra worshiped Greek gods. It was here that Barnabas was mistaken for Zeus, and Paul for Hermes. In 1909, an inscription found near Lystra gave a list of several “priests of Zeus.” Coins have been discovered showing the founder of Lystra digging a boundary line with a plow pulled by a bull and a cow. Another coin shows the goddess of Lystra sitting on a rock and crowned with a crescent.

Unlike most other cities Paul visited, no record of a synagogue or a Jewish community has been found at Lystra’s site. It is possible that the Jews worshiped in a temporary location.

**Derbe**

Derbe was a secluded town, some 60 miles southeast of Lystra. The site was not confirmed until 1956. In that year, an inscribed block of limestone was found that had been dedicated in honor of the Emperor Antonimus Pius in A.D. 157 by the town council and the citizens of Derbe. It became known as the Derbe Stone.

The mound now over what was once Derbe measures about 900 feet in length, 600 feet in breadth, and stands 60 feet in height.

Derbe was the only town of the four cities that Paul and Barnabas visited in Galatia in which they were not persecuted.

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by Lorraine O. Schultz, a missionary & a student of biblical archaeology, now deceased

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