

ISTANBUL 2024

Nearly all the biblical story takes place around or near the Mediterranean, in the (modern) countries of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Macedonia, Malta, Syria, and Turkey.

Ancient Anatolia, corresponding roughly with the modern nation of Turkey, is constantly in the background of the O.T., with a number of explicit references to the powerful Hittite Empire centered here. Two of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World were located here: the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, where the goddess was worshipped for 1000 years, as well as the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus.

But it is in the N.T. that Turkey emerges front and center on the biblical stage. Paul ministers extensively in Asia Minor, as does (later) the apostle John (based in Ephesus). In fact, skim the Book of Acts and the N.T. letters and it quickly becomes clear that the greatest number of congregations were established in Turkey: Ephesus, Colossae, Hierapolis, Laodicea, Smyrna, Pergamum, Miletus, Philadelphia, Sardis, Thyatira, Lystra, Derbe, and many more. Provinces in Turkey familiar to N.T. readers include Asia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, Cilicia, Pamphylia, and Galatia.

50+ Biblical Sites / Regions in Turkey*

Adramyttium	Cnidus	Lycaonia	Pergamum
Antioch, Pisidian	Colossae	Lycia	Philadelphia
Antioch, Syrian	Cyprus	Lydia	Phrygia
Aram-naharaim	Derbe	Lystra	Pisidia
Ararat (mountain range)	Edessa (Ur?)	Meshech	Pontus
Ararat (Urartu)	Ephesus	Miletus	Sardis
Ashkenaz	Euphrates River	Myra	Seleucia
Asia (province)	Galatia	Mysia	Smyrna
Assos	Gozan	Mytilene	Tarsus
Attalia	Haran	Padan-Aram	Thyatira
Cappadocia	Hierapolis	Pamphylia	Tigris River
Carchemish	Iconium	Patara	Troas
Cilicia (Kue)	Laodicea	Perga	Tubal

For early church history, important countries are Israel, Syria, Egypt, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. Further, in the fourth C., the capital of the Roman Empire was relocated from Rome to Constantinople (modern Istanbul). Numerous Christian councils met in this land (at Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus, Chalcedon). For example, Ephesus was the site of the worship of the great mother goddess, and it was (coincidentally?) at the Council of Ephesus (431) that the church affirmed Mary as the Mother of God. However, after the expansion of Islam (from 622 AD), most of Turkey became Muslim.

Turkey matters

Turkey has had a major impact on our world. Apart from its essential role in Christianity and Islam, its numerous cultural contributions include kebabs, the unforgettably powerful Turkish coffee, and Turkish delight. Major historical figures include the phenomenally wealthy King Croesus of Lydia (6th C. BC), Suleyman the Magnificent (16th C. AD), and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the great reformer (1923+) and founder of modern Turkey, now with a population of c.80 million. Turkey also takes pride in at least two Roman emperors, Constantine the Great (early 4th C. AD) and Justinian (6th C. AD). Equally impressive, though Muslim, Turkey has modeled the successful secular state.

If this feels like a lot of data, here are a few bullet points to take away:

- The ancient land of Anatolia corresponds roughly to modern Turkey—in later times called Asia Minor.
- The plurality of congregations mentioned in the New Testament are in Turkey.
- As the power center of the Roman Empire (4th C. on), once the empire embraced Christianity, Turkey hosted the (so-called) Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787 AD).

Thank you for your interest in learning more about the background of the Scriptures, and for your commitment to expand your knowledge of the Word and your heart to make it known to others.

* It is likely churches were established early on in Alabanda, Alinda, Antioch ad Maeandrum, Aphrodisias, Apollonia, Colophon, Erythrai, Herakleia, Klazomenai, Labraunda, Magnesia, Metropolis, Notion (Notium), Nyssa, Orthosia, Priene, Stratonikia, Teos, Tralles, and Tripolis.

