

Regions Mentioned in 1 Peter 1:1

Pontus.

Roman province in northeastern Asia Minor, located along the southern coast of the Black Sea. Galatia, Cappadocia, and Armenia bordered Pontus. About 1000 B.C. the first Greeks started to colonize the southeastern coast of the Black Sea, founding Sinope and Trebizond. Here Xenophon and his men reached the sea after their great eastern adventure. The famous geographer Strabo, to whom is owed knowledge of the ancient history of Pontus, was born in the inland city of Amasia. Mithradates Eupator, king of Amasia, was, according to the Romans, the most formidable enemy the Republic ever encountered. He waged three wars against the Romans until his final defeat by Pompey around 60 B.C.

Aquila, the tentmaker, whose wife Priscilla was a helpful co-worker of the apostle Paul, was born in Pontus. Unlike Paul, however, he was not a Roman citizen; hence, he was subject to the edict of Claudius and expelled from Rome because he was a Jew (Acts 18:2; 22:25–28).

The Christians who were resident there in Peter's day (1 Pt 1:1) were probably converts of those who returned from Jerusalem after the first Pentecost when Peter spoke (Acts 2:9).¹

Galatia.

Ancient kingdom resulting from migrations of Gallic people from the west and settlement on the central plain of Asia Minor. An earlier migratory movement resulted in the sack of Rome by the Gauls (or Celts) in 390 B.C., but in a later attempt to overrun Greece the Gallic invaders were repulsed. That unsuccessful invasion into Greece led the Gauls to turn their attention to Asia Minor. They penetrated the larger part of the area but were defeated by Attalus I in 230 B.C. As a result they became restricted to that part of Asia later known as Galatia. By that time, the Gauls consisted of three tribes, the Trocmi, Tolistobogii, and Tectosages, which settled into the towns of Tavium, Pessinus, and Ancyra, respectively. In 189 B.C. these Galatians were subdued by Romans but were allowed to govern themselves.

After the death of Amyntas in 25 B.C. Galatia became a Roman province. Within its boundaries were the ethnic areas of Galatia proper, Lycaonia, Isauria, and part of Phrygia and Pisidia. The new province, therefore, included the towns of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch, all of which the apostle Paul visited on his first missionary journey. The term "Galatia" was used in two different ways, one to describe the area occupied by the Gauls in the north, and the other to describe the whole Roman province, including the southern towns. That ambiguity has given rise to a problem over the destination of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

The original inhabitants of north Galatia were Phrygians, many of whom still remained in the 1st century A.D., together with some Greeks and a fairly large community of Jews. Although the area was cosmopolitan, the Celtic element predominated. These people were known for their sturdy independence, but also for their drunkenness and revelings. They were of an inquisitive disposition and were easily impressed with new ideas, particularly of a religious kind. They were nevertheless easily turned aside and had a reputation for fickleness. In religious matters there is evidence that they were highly superstitious and were especially attracted to the wild rites of the goddess Cybele. It is not difficult to imagine the impact the Christian gospel may have made on a people of such temperament. Paul's letter to the Galatians reflects several of the traits of the Gallic peoples.

In towns of the southern region, Greek influence was more pronounced, especially among the more educated members of the communities. But the Phrygian element was still strong among the humbler inhabitants. They too were predominately devotees of Cybele, although there the cult had become modified by Greek influences. In Pisidian Antioch, for instance, the goddess was known as the Genius of Antioch, while in Iconium she was known as Athena Polias.

Geographically the northern towns, situated on a well-watered plateau and served by a major road from the Aegean shores to the west, became prosperous centers of commerce. But access from north to south was difficult and communication poor because of the mountainous terrain leading up to the plateau. The southern towns were situated on the route between Syria and Asia. Their strategic location explains why churches were established in those towns on Paul's first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13, 14).

Galatia, linked with Phrygia, is mentioned in Acts 16:6 and 18:23, but it is not clear whether Paul ever visited or established churches in the northern area.

The only other references to Galatia in the NT are probably to the southern towns (1 Cor 16:1; 2 Tm 4:10; 1 Pt 1:1).¹

Cappadocia.

Plateau region of eastern Asia Minor intersected by mountain ranges. The name Cappadocia does not occur in the Hebrew OT. Passages that mention Caphtor or Caphtorim (Dt 2:23; Am 9:7), however, were rendered "Cappadocia" in the Septuagint (ancient Greek translation of the OT). A few scholars suggest that Cappadocia was the original home of the Philistines.

In the NT, Cappadocia was the homeland of some of the visitors to Jerusalem who were amazed at hearing their own languages spoken on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5–13). Cappadocia was later one of the places in Asia Minor where Christians settled, and to whom the apostle Peter addressed his first letter (1 Pt 1:1).

Cappadocia was bordered by Pontus on the north, Syria and Armenia on the east, Cilicia on the south, and Lycaonia on the west. Noted for its wheat, cattle, and horses, it also exported alabaster, mica, silver, and lead. The region was traversed by important trade routes, such as the route through the Cilician gates northward to Pontus. The area was controlled or dominated in turn by Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Seleucids, and Romans.

Reference to a letter to Ariarathes, Cappadocia's king (1 Mc 15:22), may indicate that a significant Jewish settlement was there at the beginning of the 2nd century B.C. Jews from that community were apparently visiting in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost. Christianity seems to have spread northward into Cappadocia along the road from Tarsus. Cappadocia became a region of strong Christian church leaders by the 4th century A.D.¹

Asia.

In NT times, the Roman province immediately east of the Aegean Sea. The province was established in 133 B.C. out of the kingdom left to the Romans in the will of Attalus III, king of Pergamum. Greek geographers generally employed the name Asia to denote the whole eastern continent, but from the second century B.C. on the Romans generally referred to the kings of Pergamum as "kings of Asia." Hence the custom of using "Asia" for the peninsula alone (i.e., Asia Minor) gradually crept into popular usage.

Extent.

The extent of the province of Asia differed at each stage of its history. Before Roman occupation the word was used to refer to the kingdom of the Seleucid dynasty (founded by

Seleucus I; 305/4–281/0 B.C.). The Apocrypha referred thus to Asia (1 Mc 8:6; 11:13; 12:39 13:32; 2 Mc 3:3), as did the early Jewish historian Josephus in his *Antiquities*. When the territory was wrested from Seleucid control by the Romans in their war against Antiochus the Great, the Romans gave it to their allies, the Attalids; Attalus III willed it to the Romans. The limits of Roman control were not firmly established until an extensive revolt had been put down. The borders then included Mysia, Lydia, Caria, and Phrygia, and (nearer the Aegean) Aeolis, Ionia, and Troas. The islands off the coast (Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Rhodes, Patmos, etc.) were also included. The mainland now forms part of modern Turkey.

In 116 B.C. the province was enlarged to include Greater Phrygia. Its geographic limits were then Bithynia to the north, Galatia to the east, Lycia to the south, and the Aegean Sea to the west. Even then the boundaries were not solidly fixed, for in 25 B.C. Augustus Caesar augmented Rome's dominion by combining other parts of Phrygia, Lyconia, Pisidia, and possibly Pamphylia into a province called Galatia. Those geographical limits remained until A.D. 285, when the province was greatly reduced in size and the term Asia became restricted to the coastal areas and lower valleys of the Maeander, Cayster, Hermus, and Caicus rivers.

During Roman occupation the capital of the province was Pergamum. By the time of Augustus, however, the residence of the Roman proconsul was at Ephesus.

Natural Resources and Trade.

The Roman province of Asia was the richest and best endowed of all the provinces of the peninsula. In the first century B.C., Cicero wrote: "In the richness of its soil, in the variety of its products, in the extent of its pastures, and in the number of its exports, it surpasses all other lands." Its cities were centers of culture where the sciences, philosophy, and literature flourished.

In the interior the rich natural resources were developed into thriving industries. Woolen fabrics, particularly from Laodicea, were world renowned. The economy was brisk. Trade routes from the east passed down the valleys of the province to the coastal ports where costly merchandise was shipped to Greek and Roman ports to the west. Goods from western countries followed the same routes in reverse, as wealthy entrepreneurs traded with eastern importers. The Roman province of Asia became the crossroads of the empire.

With an expanding economy, banking as a profession came into prominence in Asia. Importers and exporters needed agents to arrange letters of credit, facilitate the transfer of funds, exchange one currency for another, and collect money on their behalf. Such duties were performed by bankers in all the leading cities.

Importance in the NT.

In the NT, Asia generally meant the Roman province of that name. Sometimes the concept was primarily geographical, at other times primarily political. For example, at the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem there were Jews who had come from "Asia." These included other provinces governed by Rome, such as Cappadocia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia (Acts 2:9, 10). This seems to indicate that Luke, the writer of Acts, used the term to describe the province originally bequeathed to the Romans by Attalus III. Luke used the word again in Acts 6:9, providing tacit evidence of the strength of Jewish communities in Asia Minor as a whole and confirming the use of "Asia" in the restricted sense of the Roman province.

On Paul's second missionary journey, he and Timothy were prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching in Asia (Acts 16:6–8). Evidently, from the context, Luke again had the old boundaries of the province in mind. On Paul's return from Greece he stopped briefly at Ephesus (Acts 18:19–21). On his third missionary journey he remained in Ephesus for more than two

years, so that from this capital city “all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).

Luke further referred to Asia in Acts 19:26, 27; 20:4, 16, 18; and 27:2. Paul also made several references to it (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Cor 1:8; 2 Tim 1:15). The apostle Peter likewise used the term (1 Pt 1:1). In the NT the risen Christ was the last to refer to Asia. He instructed the apostle John, then living in exile on the island of Patmos, to write letters to seven specific churches on the mainland of Asia (Rv 1:1–4).

Other cities in this Roman province mentioned in the NT include Colossae and Hierapolis (Col 4:13), the lesser-known Adramyttium (Acts 27:2), and Assos (Acts 20:13, 14).¹

Bithynia.

Roman province located in the northwest corner of Asia Minor. The apostle Paul and Silas wanted to preach the gospel in Bithynia on Paul’s second missionary journey (c. A.D. 50), but were prevented by the Holy Spirit from doing so (Acts 16:7). The apostle Peter may have ministered in Bithynia and other provinces of Asia Minor, since he addressed his first letter to believers there (1 Pt 1:1). Christianity entered Bithynia somehow, possibly through Peter.

Bithynia was occupied by a Thracian tribe that established a prosperous kingdom there in the 3rd century B.C. In 75 B.C., when Bithynia’s last king, Nicomedes III, willed his kingdom to the Roman people, it became part of the Roman empire. For administrative purposes it was generally linked with the province of Pontus to the east.

After NT times Bithynia figured significantly in church history. Early in the 2nd century its Roman governor, Pliny the Younger, elicited from the emperor Trajan the earliest stated imperial policy on persecution of Christians. Later, the church councils of Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451) were held in two of Bithynia’s western cities. The Council of Nicaea declared the full deity of Christ; the Council of Chalcedon made pronouncements on the nature of the person of Christ and the canonicity of the 27 NT books.

The Roman province of Bithynia was bordered on the north by the Black Sea, on the west by the Propontis (modern Sea of Marmara), on the south by the province of Asia, and on the east by Galatia and Pontus. Bithynia was mountainous, with Mt Olympus in the south rising to 7,600 feet, but had districts of great fertility near the seacoast and in its interior valleys. Beside producing fruit and grain, the province had fine marble quarries, good timber, and excellent pasturage. The principal river was the Sangarius (modern Sakarya), which flowed from south to north into the Black Sea. Transportation was largely along the river valleys.¹

¹ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (216–217). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House.