

Major Cities of Asia Minor in order of importance

CITY, PROVINCE	EPHESUS, ASIA	PERGAMUM, ASIA	SMYRNA, ASIA
LOCATION	Coast, where River Cayster enters the Aegean Sea	Valley of the Caicus River, 15 miles inland from the Aegean Sea	At the mouth of the Hermus River, on a large sheltered harbor of the Aegean
STATUS	Provincial capital of Asia	First capital of the Roman province of Asia, by the first century relegated to co-capital of Asia behind Ephesus	Second most important commercial city of Asia
POPULATION	400,000 (4th largest of Roman Empire)	100,000	200,000–250,000
ETHNICITY	Primarily Greek, also Lydian, some Jews, some Romans	Greek and Phrygian	Greek
FOUNDATION	c. 1000 B.C. by Ionian Greeks	c. 700 B.C.	c. 900 B.C. by Aeolian Greeks
GOVERNMENT	Residence of Roman proconsul of Asia; local town council (<i>boule</i>)	Roman quaestorian deputy of proconsul of Asia; town council administration (<i>prytanis and boule</i>)	Town council (<i>boule</i>) and council of elders (<i>gerousia</i>)
ECONOMIC	Primary commercial and trade center of Asia Minor	One of three great intellectual centers of the Roman empire with the world's second largest library and most prestigious medical school	Greatest port of Asia and most important trade center
CHRISTIAN PRESENCE	Asia's primary Christian center. Residence of Paul for three years, residence of Apostle John for several decades. Traditional residence of Mary, Mother of Jesus, at the end of her life. Large Christian population, first of the seven churches of Asia in <i>Revelation</i> (Acts 15, 18–19; Rev 2)	Mentioned as one of seven churches of Asia, Christian community since time of Paul, but it remained small due to the heavy local influence of cults of Zeus and Asclepius (Rev 2)	One of the seven churches of Asia, large Christian community, perhaps founded by John; Apostolic father Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna (Rev 2)



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CITY, PROVINCE	MILETUS, ASIA	NICOMEDIA, BITHYNIA-PONTUS	TARSUS, PRE-A.D. 60 SYRIA, POST-A.D. 60 CILICIAN CAPITAL
LOCATION	On the coast where the Meander River joins the Latmian Gulf of the Aegean Sea	West coast of the Propontis (Sea of Marmara), 50 miles east of Byzantium	12 miles north of the Mediterranean and 25 miles southeast of the famed Cilician gates
STATUS	For centuries the most prosperous city of Asia, chief city of the Ionian League, destroyed by Persia in 494 B.C.; though rebuilt, it never attained its former greatness	Capital of small Hellenistic kingdom of Bithynia in late 3rd and early 2nd century B.C.; provincial capital of the Roman province of Bithynia-Pontus	Capital of Cilicia
POPULATION	150,000	50,000–75,000	100,000–150,000
ETHNICITY	Greek	Greek	Cilician, Greek, Syrian, large Jewish center
FOUNDATION	c. 2400 B.C. by Minoans, conquered by Mycenaean Greeks c. 1400	264 B.C. by Nicomedes I	c. 2400 B.C.
GOVERNMENT	Town council administration (<i>prytanis</i> and <i>boule</i>)	Roman proconsular governor, town council	Roman proconsular governor resident but is self-governing under local elected officials
ECONOMIC	Endowed with four fine harbors, Miletus was one of the great trade centers of the Mediterranean	Trade and agriculture	Major center of higher education, agriculture, and trade; the great Asia Minor road from the west and eastern caravan routes terminated at port
CHRISTIAN PRESENCE	Paul visits and meets with elders of Asia there to bid farewell (Acts 19)	A large Christian population is attested by A.D. 115 in the correspondence of Pliny to Trajan requesting information about how to try persons accused of being Christian	Paul's native city and site of his early missionary efforts (Acts 9)



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CITY, PROVINCE	SARDIS, ASIA	ANTIOCH-CAESAREA, PISIDIA	LAODICEA, ASIA
LOCATION	On the River Hermus in the great plain of Sardis, 50 miles east of Ephesus and Smyrna	In central Anatolia on the major road from Phrygia to Galatia	On the upper reaches of the Lycus River, 90 miles east of Ephesus
STATUS	One-time capital of the Lydian Empire	Roman citizen colony	Important regional center
POPULATION	50,000	40,000	50,000
ETHNICITY	Overwhelmingly Lydian, some Greek, large Jewish center	Greek, some Italian, large Jewish center	Greek
FOUNDATION	c. 1200 B.C.	c. 400 B.C.	c. 250 B.C. by Seleucid ruler Antiochus II
GOVERNMENT	Town council	Roman propraetorian governor, town <i>aediles</i> and <i>decuria</i>	Town council administration (<i>prytanis</i> and <i>boule</i>)
ECONOMIC	Wealthy and prosperous center of fertile agricultural region and productive gold mining area	Agriculture	Important wool production and banking center
CHRISTIAN PRESENCE	One of the seven churches of Asia (Rev 3)	Paul visits on first, second, and possibly third missionary journeys through Asia Minor (Acts 13)	One of the seven churches of Asia, recipient of Paul's non-extant Epistle to the Laodiceans (Rev 3)



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Explanation

The most prosperous of Rome's provinces was Asia, encompassing what is now the western half of modern-day Turkey. Populated by Greeks and the original people of the eastern Aegean region, Asia boasted rich and powerful cities like Pergamum and Smyrna. Most important was Ephesus, the fourth largest city of the empire. Jewish synagogues and many ethnic groups were found amidst these diverse cosmopolitan urban centers.

In all these cities there were soon to be found significant Christian populations. The important role of Antioch is made clear in Acts, but Ephesus and the cities of Asia Minor possessed the largest numbers of Christian inhabitants. Indeed, after the first decades of Christianity and for centuries to follow, Asia Minor was the most important Christian area.

References

- David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950).
- James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 259–91.

