



On the Road...

Above: Ankara, Turkey

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As a child I would often sit for hours and gaze at maps, wondering about the distant and strange lands half a world away. One country that always fascinated me, though, was Turkey. Maybe it was a child's infatuation with one of his favorite holiday dishes, I'm not certain. But Turkey seemed to be this mysterious country that straddled both Europe and Asia, while retaining a flavor of the Middle East. My recent "on the road" chronicle takes me there, with students from Georgia, Zviadi Charkviani and Zaza Khinkhadzaladze. We were hoping to meet with a retired pastor and study options for evangelical work in the neighboring country of Georgia.

1 Peter 1:1- "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia"

It's not entirely certain if St. Peter actually got up to northern Turkey or only addressed the believers there, but it was remarkable to be finally traveling through the historic area of Pontus and Galatia, the recipients of Peter's first epistle. Much has changed since those 1st century days and yet there remain similarities. Forgoing an imitation of the apostle Paul, who most likely went on foot good portions of his journeys throughout Turkey, I made the modern concession of traveling on a comfortable Turkish bus.

As we crossed the border from Georgia into Turkey, I noted how a smooth highway runs along the southern coast of the Black Sea, making transportation quite reasonable for the modern traveler. And yet, as Peter said even in those days, much remains the same. Just as there were scattered believers in the first century, that is even more true today. Turkey is officially 1% Christian, a far cry from the 4th century when vast portions of what was then called Asia Minor had cast off the pagan traditions of the past and been converted to Christianity.



Traveling with us were many Georgians, most trying to make money in the comparatively prosperous Turkey. They would often buy and sell goods and then transport them back across the Georgian border, or they would work at manual labor for the 90 visa-free days they get as Georgian citizens. Travel to Georgia is likewise easier for Turks-(Americans have to pay only \$20.00 at the border for a one month pass).

Left: And so we came to Galatia...

Contributing to the traffic no doubt is the fact that the Turkish language is not dramatically different from Georgian; several of the travelers mentioned that they picked up the language within three months of their arrival in Turkey. Our guys also told me that almost 50% of the women who cross the border engage in prostitution. Now I became slightly suspicious when one young woman got off the bus at about midnight in a Turkish town, dressed for the night.

A notorious light sleeper, I kept mental notes of what I saw as we traveled along the highway and through several towns. I was struck in particular by the Christmas-tree-like lights halfway up the minarets and wrapped snugly around them. They cast an eerie green glow into the blackness of the night, reminding me of the consequences of the advance of Islam throughout history and especially, its results in modern Turkey. After a restless night on the bus and now nearing the end of our 24 hour bus ride, we approached the historic area of northern Galatia. Having just taught a course on this epistle at the Ingrian Lutheran Seminary, you will forgive me if I digress for a moment.

Coming to Galatia

There is a theological argument as to whether Paul was addressing the ethnic Galatians who were mainly situated in the north of the province in his epistle to the Galatians, or whether he was referring to the southern region which was not inhabited by ethnic Galatians. The book of Acts primarily describes Paul's journeys in what would have to have been the southern section, mentioning the cities of Antioch Pisidia, Lystra and Derbe. (The problem is that some scholars deny that there was a southern Galatia). One argument proposed by 19th century archaeologist William Ramsey is that the main highways were located in the south of what must have been considered the expanded region of Galatia, thus proving it difficult for Paul to journey in the northern half where such roads did not exist in his time. (Notwithstanding the fact that Paul does not appear to make an extensive journey to the north of Galatia in the book of Acts, although some believe Acts 16:6 refers to such a trip). As we approached Ankara, it was clear to me that the first major road in northern Galatia, built by the Romans around 70 A.D., must have taken a long time to build due to the mountainous terrain there. Naturally I think Acts gives us a

pretty good picture of Paul's travels and it seems that there would have been no other way to refer to the inhabitants of such cities as Lystra and Derbe together (in southern Galatia) except as "Galatians."

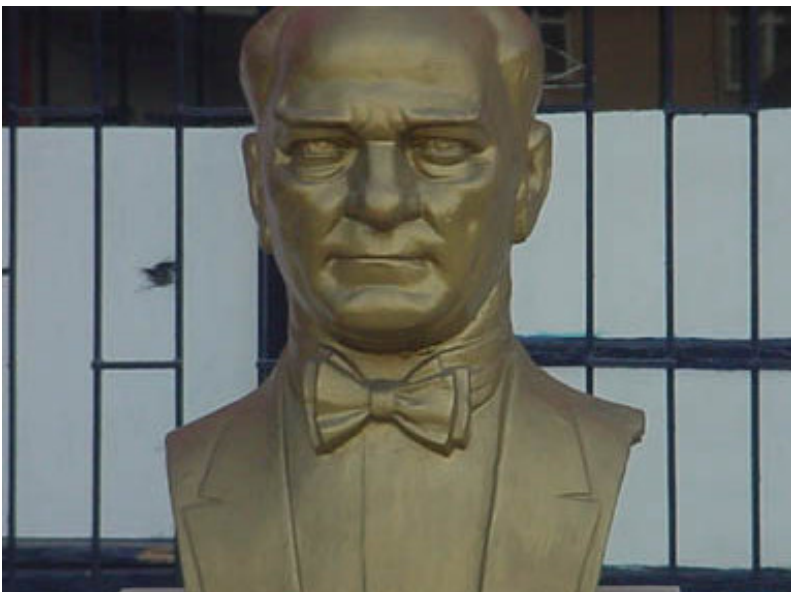


Theological arguments aside, traveling through the countryside today it is apparent that Islam dominates the landscape. I noted that even in smaller villages, it was not uncommon to have several mosques, some only a few blocks distant from each other. Well before we got into the range of Ankara, our guy Zaza had moved next to the woman who seemed to be a friend of the one I suspected was a prostitute. I didn't want to speculate about her planned activities in Ankara, but Zaza is a

friendly guy who had the bus in stitches with his yarns and jokes. He had befriended her and now spoke softly to her about the Christian faith and life while I silently prayed for God's light to shine in the life of this lonely young woman. *Above: Mosques and minarets dominate the Turkish countryside*

Arrival in Ankara

Once we arrived in Ankara there was time to try and actually catch a little sleep. After my bleary eyes had been refreshed and we walked around the city a bit, I made the not too startling conclusion that the revered founder of the Turkish Republic, Kemal Ataturk, is literally everywhere. He is the George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln of Turkey all rolled into one. His bust or picture is ubiquitous, often peering down upon you with a stern but dignified gaze. Turks themselves are actually quite friendly to outsiders; those who spoke English were very open and accommodating. But as we heard from several Christians, just start talking about Jesus and the atmosphere rapidly cools. Ataturk's genius, in the eyes of most Turks, is that he turned a Muslim society into a secular one. One might think that is a positive for evangelism in that country, but it's not quite that simple. Ataturk's secularism was



to caution anyone who took their religion too seriously, be it Christian or Muslim. Turkey would be a secular society- period. But within that secularism it is clear that Islam retains a dominant position.

Left: Ataturk is watching you!

The current debate over headscarves in Turkey encapsulates the controversy quite well. When I was a substitute teacher at Fordson High School in Dearborn, MI., I noted how many of the Arab girls wore headscarves, even during practice in track and field events. (Most of the girls were immigrants from Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen). In the American context of religious freedom, it was nothing too out of the ordinary. But in Turkey the wearing of headscarves has caused quite a scandal. Girls have been forbidden to wear the headscarf in classes, although Turkey is 99% Muslim. Once again, Ataturk's secularism rules. The controversy, though, has caused a constitutional crisis in Turkey today with the courts due to decide the question of banning the dominant AK political party (supporters of headscarves), which just so happens to be the party of Prime Minister Erdogan and President Gul! (Interestingly enough, I was amazed at the preponderance of headscarves in public in Turkey, and quite often I spied a very secular looking girl in tight jeans and a fashionable sweater walking arm and arm with another girl who wore a headscarf and was covered from head to toe, only her face remaining uncovered).

Turkey is clearly at a historic crossroads, hoping to join the European Union, although influential countries like Germany and France are opposed. Much of what I saw in Turkey reflected a clean and civilized country, obviously modern, with the accompanying high prices. It will be interesting to follow the arguments on Turkey's entry into the E.U., especially as it regards issues of religious freedom.



Next month, some reflections on my month and a half in Georgia and work with our Lutheran students.

God's peace be with you,
Matthew Heise

Prayer Requests: Thank God with me for safe travels during my two month exile from Russia. Pray with me for a safe return to Moscow on April 22.

Please pray also for the delegation from LCMS World Mission who will be traveling to Russia and the Baltic States next week.

Pray also for our Georgian evangelists, that God would bless and lead them in their future service to Him.

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To support my work financially, you can send a tax-deductible gift to: LCMS World Mission, 1333 S. Kirkwood Rd., St. Louis, MO 63122-7295. Make checks payable to LCMS World Mission. Mark checks "Support of Matthew Heise.

If you would like to partner with me in my ministry with ongoing support as an individual or congregation, please contact Debra Feenstra for information on Together in Mission or Mission Senders at 1-800-248-1930 Ext. 1651 or Debra.Feenstra@lcms.org Thank you and God bless you!