

Wandering and Wrestling, Whirling and Worshipping

Turkey ~ Part 3~



Izmir is the third largest city in Turkey. First built around 3,000 years ago, its ancient name was Smyrna. Revelation 2:8 reads: “*And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write...*” The last book of the Bible is speaking about the church in this very city!

Not far from where I live stands a town with a church, a post office and store fronts. You can park anywhere you’d like and you won’t find any of the sidewalks crowded. That’s because no one lives in the town anymore. That grey, dilapidated town, no more than an empty shell of lonely buildings, is called a ghost town. But really, not even ghosts live there!

Today is the perfect day to hop on our floating *kilim* and wander through a Turkish ghost town—one that thousands of people visit every day!

Kindly navigate our carpet up the Aegean Coast of Turkey, where waves lap warm on the coastline. (Can you locate the Aegean Coast of Turkey on your map?) The many cities along the Aegean, like the bustling Izmir, (Can you find Izmir?) are hard at

work, manufacturing clothing and cars. Vineyards and groves of olive trees flourish in the sunshine. From our carpet seats, we can certainly agree with the historian Herodotus who wrote that the Aegean Region of Turkey has “the most beautiful skies and the best climate in the world.”

In the midst of the cities, towns and peoples of the Aegean coast stands Turkey’s most famous ghost town: Ephesus. No one lives or sleeps or works in Ephesus, but Ephesus’ streets swarm with people: tourists and explorers like you and me! For this abandoned town of Ephesus is a town like none other. Ephesus was built **2,000** years before Jesus was born. And a hundred years after Jesus ascended into heaven, Ephesus was a city of nearly a half million people!

After Jesus returned to heaven, his mother Mary and the Apostle John are believed to have come and lived here in Ephesus. Did you know that you probably have a letter in your house that was written to the people who once lived in Ephesus? No, your mailperson did not mistakenly deliver the letter to your house. Open up your Bible and you’ll find that letter! Remember the Apostle Paul who was born in the Turkish



The Library of Celsus contained approximately 15,000 scrolls. It was built 110 A.D. to honor Celsus Polemeanus, a Roman senator, who was buried beneath the library floor.

Photo courtesy of holylandphotos.org

A Child's Geography: Explore the Holy Land

city of Tarsus? In 50 B.C. he wrote a letter to the Christians in Ephesus. His letter is in your Bible as the book of Ephesians—for that is what the hundreds of thousands of people who lived in Ephesus were called. Paul actually came to live in the city for awhile and during that time, wrote another letter you'll find in your Bible: 1st Corinthians. If you turned to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, you'll read how an angel spoke to the Apostle John, saying, "*Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea*" (Rev. 1:11). Every single one of those seven churches spoken of by the angel were once located in the country we now call Turkey! And did you take note of the first church mentioned? Yes, the church of Ephesus!

In these old stone walls of Ephesus we will not find a church building, but oh, the buildings we do find! For wandering through ruins, Ephesus is better than Rome itself!

The library in my hometown is a simple, one-story building, but the library of Ephesus' towers three stories high. Standing in front of this stone structure and its reaching columns, we can almost imagine the librarian from 2,000 years ago, handing out scrolls to inquiring readers, and Ephesians sitting in the reading rooms facing towards the East. Can you guess why the library reading room faces to the East? Yes, so that the rising morning sun might stream in and light those darkened rooms. God's design of Earth determines the details of our lives.

Just a short walk from the Ephesian library is Ephesus' amphitheater. A dramatic sight to behold, the theater in Ephesus took 60 years of digging to create more than 25,000 stone slab seats for people to sit on and behold spectacular plays! Though no one lives in Ephesus any more, tourists and visitors still arrive in hordes to see live plays performed on the same stage where the Apostle Paul himself once spoke out against the worship of false idols.



All that remains of the Temple of Artemis is a lone marble column (located in the foreground of this picture). Archaeologists have found evidence that the Temple was destroyed and rebuilt at least four times.
Photo courtesy of holylandphotos.org

Ephesus was indeed a city of idol worship. The Ephesians built a temple to the false goddess Diana, the Temple of Artemis, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. A man named Anitpater who stood before this Ephesian Temple of Artemis over 2,000 years ago exclaimed, "When I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other [Seven Wonders of the World] lost their brilliancy, and I said, "Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand!" The Apostle Paul obviously cared little for the Temple's status as one of the Seven Wonders, and from the stage of the Ephesian theater he "*persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people [from the worship of the false goddess Diana], saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all!*" (Acts 19:26)

Today, as we peer down at where the splendid Temple of Artemis once stood, a brilliant Wonder of the Ancient World, we see not much of anything at all. One lone column rising out of the

marshland is all that remains of the monumental building; the first in the world to be constructed entirely of marble. The Apostle Paul was right, wasn't he? Diana's temple has been reduced from a celebrated Wonder of the world to one disappointing stone column. The truth of God still stands: "*Heaven and earth may pass away, but my Word will never pass away.*" Only stones and ruins now testify to this once bustling Turkish city. As you leave Turkey's most famous vacant town, think on how "*all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens*" (1 Chron. 16:26).

Field Notes

*A ghost town, a library and a theater...Oh, do tell me all about the wondrous sights you've just seen! **Press Record and talk to me...***

~ **about the Aegean Sea Region:** Where do we find this region in Turkey? What city do we find in this area? Describe some of the sights of this region. What is produced in this area of Turkey?



~ **about Ephesus:** The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the people of Ephesus. If we wanted to read that letter today, where would we look? What would it be like to visit Ephesus today – and how is it different than it once was? What was the library once like? And what is it like today? How was Ephesus' amphitheater built? Does it look the same today? Tell me about the Temple of Artemis. What do we read about this temple in God's Word? What remains of this Wonder of the Ancient World today?



Turkish oil wrestling, called Yaglı Gures (literally, "oiled wrestling,") dates back to the 1600's. Wearing tight short leather trousers called "Kispet," wrestlers cover themselves, and their heavy shorts made of water buffalo leather, with olive oil. What do you think that feels like? Photo courtesy of allaboutturkey.com

When I was young, a memorable Sunday School picnic game was to slather a pig in oil and compete to be the first to cleverly wrestle down the slippery, fast-as lightning hog. Any Turkish child could have outwitted us for Turks know all about wrestling and oil and they do it like no other peoples you've ever seen!

A long time ago, to protect themselves from the mosquitoes on the Anatolian plain, Turks slathered themselves with olive oil. When a dispute broke out, they often ended up "oil wrestling!" Today, dressed in short leather trousers made from the heavy hide of water buffalo, young boys, not just from here in the Aegean, but from all over Turkey, learn the art of wrestling by apprenticing under the tutelage of a master oil-wrestler.

As if watching the spectacle of oiled men glistening in the sun as they wrestle each other for 40 minutes weren't surprising enough, here in the city of Selcuk, not far from the once grand Ephesus, you may see the butting heads and wrestling of elaborately dressed camels! Milky saliva runs from the mouth and nostrils of the excited camels which aggressively lean on each other until one gives in and charges off into the crowd! Watch out! Spectators hurriedly scramble out of the way of nearly 1 ton [1,000 kilogram] charging camels!



Camel wrestling is more for fun than for sport. The camels are elaborately dressed and their owners have great fun bragging about the strength of their animals. Part of the fun for the crowd is racing to get out of the way of a runaway camel!

A day of oil and camel wrestling may be very entertaining, but I think Turkey's Children Day may be the most amusing day of all for Turkish children. I knew a little boy who often asked, "If Mother's Day is in May and Father's Day is in June, when is Children's Day?" In Turkey, Children's Day is celebrated every year on April 23rd with a holiday off school, candies and treats, and week-long festivities! Children, dressed in brilliant costumes, perform their traditional dances and parades in huge stadiums for the whole country to observe! Other children from around the world even travel to Turkey for Children's Day to represent their own cultures alongside the Turks. Turkish parents and grandparents gather around their television sets to watch these colorful performances of children from different countries all over God's globe!



An Islamic mosque in Turkey. Notice the tall minaret where the muezzin calls the faithful to pray. How is this building different or the same as where you gather to worship?

Have you ever dreamed of becoming the President of your country? On Children's Day, Turkish children get to do just that. The President, Prime Minister, and provincial governors gather in Turkey's capital, the city of Ankara, on the Anatolia (can you find that on your map?), and allow children to govern the country for the day! What worthwhile endeavors would you undertake if you were made President of Turkey on Children's Day? Today's children are indeed the future governors of their countries. May you grow to be a man or a woman with a voice to help your "*nation come and worship before Lord, and glorify [His] name*" (Ps 86:9)!

Nearly all the peoples of Turkey follow the teachings of the Qu'uran, written by Muhammed, the founder of the religion of **Islam**. As Muslims, Turks worship in buildings called **mosques**. Early in the morning darkness, from all over the country of Turkey, men called **muezzins** climb the mosque's towers, or **minarets**, and shatter the stillness of dawn with the loud song, "*Hayya-la-l-faleah Hayya la-l-faleah*." Having heard the Call to Prayer, called the

"**Athan**," Turks rub sleep from their eyes, kneel down on their prayer mats and offer up prayers to **Allah**, whom they worship. The name Islam actually means "submission to Allah," which Muslims believe they do by practicing the Five Pillars of Islam.

A faithful Muslim believes and practices these five pillars or five core beliefs:

1. Allah alone is worthy of worship and Muhammad is Allah's Prophet.
2. Pray five times daily.
3. Care and give to the poor.
4. Purify through fasting.
5. If at all possible, make the pilgrimage to the city of Mecca once during one's life.

Turkish Muslims also believe that submitting to Allah includes refusal to eat pork (which is why you will find many wild hogs in some regions of Turkey). During the month-long celebration of **Ramadan**, Turkish Muslims also fast every day from sunrise to sunset. But don't fret: at the close of the fast of Ramadan, they celebrate **Seker Bayrami**, meaning the Sweet Fest in Turkish, when they feast for three grand days on chocolates and candies!



A Turkish worshipper at an Islamic mosque. Notice that the man has removed his shoes before kneeling to pray.

Have you ever known a little girl who loved to wear a dress that whirled gloriously about her if she twirled around and around and around? That kind of whirling and twirling is exactly what we will see if we turn our Turkish kilim back to where we began, Istanbul, and into the only Muslim Dervish lodge in the city. The word **Dervish** refers to a certain group of Muslims who are known for their simple lifestyles and indifference to material possessions. One group of these Muslim Dervishes in Turkey, called the Whirling Dervishes, tries to meditate through a spinning dance - and if we hustle into the Dervish lodge with the other tourists, we may catch a glimpse of the whirling Dervishes and their seven centuries-old tradition of twirling! The beat of the drum and the melody of the reed flute fill the large room. Cloaked in long white robes, tall brown hats perched on their heads, the men spin round and round with their arms crossed. Spinning faster, their bell-like skirts unfurl, their



The Dervishes' effortless-looking spinning comes with much practice. Spinning for a quarter hour at a time to the drone of ancient Islamic hymns, the dervishes whirling is a prayer trance to Allah.

Photo courtesy of allaboutturkey.com

arms rising up. The rush of the Whirling Dervishes, their skirts billowing, is like a gust of wind blowing through the hall, sweeping us up.

Marveling at the spinning rotation of the circling dancers, one question begs an answer: how do they do whirl like that and not fall over with dizziness? The answer lies in the black shoes under their floating white skirts: for years they carefully practice the work of keeping their right foot planted on the floor as their left foot pumps them counterclockwise. After the ceremony closes, a Dervish turns to us and proclaims, "If Islam is the main body of the [Turkish] tree, we are the flower on that tree." Let us say goodbye and leave the whirling Dervishes to their bell-like



Don't you think the Church of the Hagia Sophia (meaning Church of Divine Wisdom in Greek) is beautiful under this fresh powdering of snow? Considered the finest example of Byzantine architecture in the world, the church was constructed by the Emperor Justinian in 537 A.D. With a force of 10,000 workers, the dome atop the church of Hagia Sophia was built in record time: it took just five years, ten months, and four days to complete! Today, it is the fourth largest cathedral in the world. *Photo courtesy of allaboutturkey.com*

Empire, Justinian, in 537 A.D. If we leave our kilim outside and step into the cool, dim oasis inside, we are taken by this magnificent dome hovering 180 ft [54 m] in the air over us. The forty windows that circle the dome's base make it seem as if the dome is floating, as if heaven has descended upon us, like a magnificent umbrella held above an open room, light entering all around. When Emperor Justinian first stood in this breathtaking space, on a Christmas night, he is said to have whispered, "Glory to God that I have been judged worthy of such a work. Oh Solomon! I have surpassed thee!"

On the very same spot, almost one thousand years later, Mehmet the Conqueror, who had just captured Constantinople (what we now call Istanbul) from the Christians, ordered that the great Church of the Holy Wisdom no longer be a place of Christian worship to God, but become a Muslim mosque. This explains why the Church of the Holy Wisdom today has 4 slender minarets at her corners, each once used to call Muslim Turks to daily prayer. Muslims were so intrigued by the beauty of this Christian church that many of their mosques the world over are patterned after the Church of the Holy Wisdom. Neither Christians nor Muslims worship here now for today the Hagia Sophia is a museum for visitors and explorers to come from all over the world and wonder in its age, its colored history and its spectacular architecture.

We've wandered and wrestled and whirled and worshiped our way around Turkey, from Istanbul by the Bosphorus, up through the wet, verdant Black Sea Region, and across the Eastern Anatolia (with the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and Mount Ararat). Then down we swooped through Southern Anatolia (can you remember who once lived in this region in his mud beehive?), and over into the Mediterranean coastal

blooming and sweep over to one of the most magnificent buildings ever built!

From our carpet's edge, gaze down there past the children playing in the fountain, past the street vendors selling postcards, to what is sometimes referred to as the eighth Wonder of the World, the Church of the Holy Wisdom. This church, or the **Hagia Sophia** (*hagia* meaning "divine" or "holy" and *sophia* meaning "wisdom"), was a church built more than 1,500 years ago but is today one of the most popular sights to see in all of Turkey. No wonder, considering the 30 million tiny gold tiles decorating its interior, and its immense, flat dome that still leaves architects scratching their heads in wonder.

Hagia Sophia was ordered built by the Christian Emperor of the Holy Roman



The interior of the Hagia Sophia is known for its colorful, light-enhanced beauty. With the light streaming in from the forty windows around its dome, doesn't it create the illusion that the dome actually floats over the church?

plain (with cotton now growing where Paul once lived). Next we sailed up into the Central Anatolia and Cappadocia (what strange place did we visit here?) and over into the Aegean sea region (with Izmir and Ephesus, and wrestling and warm breezes), only to return back to teeming Istanbul with its whirling Dervishes and breathtaking, world-renowned Church of the Holy Wisdom. What a whirlwind trip of Turkey! Are you out of breath? Let's return our kilim to the Grand Bazaar and Ahmet. The memories of Turkey we've netted with our keen eyes and vibrant faith, will always be ours.

Field Notes

Don't you find Turkey an amazing country of the most unusual sights?! Let's record every detail of our unforgettable trip!

Press Record and talk to me...

~ **about oil and camel wrestling:**

In which region of Turkey would we find such an event? Tell me about the experience!



~ **about Children's Day:** What special privilege does the President give to children on this day? What other privileges do the children experience? What is the name of the capital city of Turkey and in which region is it found?

~ **about the Whirling Dervishes:** Where in Turkey would we see the whirling Dervishes? What do they wear? How do they keep from falling? Why do they whirl?

~ **about the Hagia Sophia:** In what city will we find the grand building? What does it look like? Tell me about Emperor Justinian.



Travel Log

Using your globe or atlas, let's finish your map of Turkey.

We've seen things today that simply must be mapped, never to be forgotten!

Map Notes: Let's record the locations of:

- **Ephesus**
- **Izmir**
- **Selcuk**

If you'd like, draw pictures or symbols on your map representing:

- **A Dervish Lodge** (perhaps a whirling circle to represent the spinning dance?)
- **Hagia Sophia** (a great dome?)
- **Camel-wrestling** (with their colorful costumes?)
- **Ephesian library** (maybe a scroll?)
- **Ephesian amphitheatre** (how about a cheering crowd?)
- **Temple of Artemis** (one lone pillar?)

Travel Notes: Geographers write what they've seen in order to share the adventure with others—and so they can revisit the places in their memories!

On the next page of your travel log, record three important sights you want to remember from your tales of Turkey.





~art ~books ~food ~music ~poetry

Bringing It Home

Simple ideas to bring the world to your door

Food

~ The Turks love their tea!

Turkish tea, *çay* (CHAH-yee) is brewed in a **samovar** (a metal urn with a spigot) and served boiling hot. It is a beautiful red-tinted tea that looks lovely served in the traditional tulip-shaped glasses.

Let's brew a pot and imagine we are relaxing on our kilim with our Turkish friends. If you want, spread a rug or tablecloth on the floor and gather pillows and cushions to sit on.



- Bring a kettle of water to a boil and brew your tea. (Use tea bags or loose tea.) The Turks allow their tea to steep for 10 – 15 minutes, so wait patiently!
When you are ready, fill your cup half way with the strong, dark tea and fill the rest of the cup with hot water. You may have your tea **açık** (ah-CHUK) weak, or **koyu** (koh-YOO) dark.
- Serve with sugar and lemon (if desired) – but no milk! Our Turkish friends would not approve!
- Enjoy!

Dessert always goes well with tea. Perhaps you might like to make some Turkish Delight or Noah's Pudding?



Turkish Delight

Known in Turkey as **Rahat lokhoun**, the name of this irresistible sweet comes from an Arabic phrase that translates "soothing to the throat." Do you think you may be like C.S. Lewis's Edmund who "*thought only of trying to shovel down as much Turkish delight as he could, and the more he ate, the more he wanted?*" That is exactly how the first taste-testers experienced Turkish Delight! This is the legend:

A Child's Geography: Explore the Holy Land

More than 300 years ago, a Turkish Sultan living in the Istanbul palace of Topkapi ordered the greatest candy makers in Turkey to create a dessert so mouth-watering that the members of his household would cease squabbling as they were savoring the delectable dessert. Candy maker Hadji Bekir looked around his home in the Anatolian mountain town of Kastamonu and concocted a simple recipe that the Sultan couldn't resist—and neither will you!

*2 cups Sugar
2 Tbl Cornstarch
1 cup Water
1/2 tsp Cream of tartar
1 Tbl flavoring (extract) (such as lemon, orange, rose)*

*Food coloring (appropriate to flavor, such as yellow for lemon)
1/2 cup toasted almonds or pistachios, chopped
Confectioners' sugar*

Dissolve sugar and cornstarch in water and add cream of tartar. Bring to a boil and heat to 220 degrees F. [104 C] (Use a candy thermometer to check the temperature.) Cover the pot during the last 5 minutes of cooking. Add flavor and food coloring, then nuts.

Grease a shallow pan. Pour candy into prepared pan. When cool, cut into squares and roll in sifted powdered sugar. Store in plastic bag.



Noah's Pudding

Also known as Asure, this is one of the best-known desserts in Turkey. Traditionally shared with friends and family, we invite you to serve up bowls of Noah's pudding while recounting unforgettable stories about a man, a mountain in Turkey and a marvelous promise God wrote all over the sky!

*1 cup barley
1 cup canned white kidney beans, washed and drained
1 cup canned chickpeas, washed and drained
1 cup sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract*

*10 cups water
10 dried apricots, soaked in water overnight, cut in pieces
10 dried figs, cut in pieces
1/2 cup raisins*

Garnish:

1/4 cup walnuts, crumbled

Place 4 cups of water and barley in a large pot over high heat. Bring to a boil. Immediately, turn heat down to medium-low and cook for approximately 30 minutes. Add beans, chickpeas, vanilla, apricots, raisins, figs, sugar and 6 cups of hot water. Cook another 45 minutes on medium-low, stirring occasionally. Pour into a large bowl and let cool. Keep refrigerated. When serving, garnish with crumbled walnuts.



Go into all the world...

a walk of prayer



As we've journeyed through Turkey we've caught a glimpse of an amazing landscape, and customs and lifestyles that are different from our own. Yet the boys and girls who live there are not so different from us at all. They were created by a God who loves them dearly—just as He loves you.

Will you and your family join me in praying for the Turkish people?

Lord, give us Your love for the peoples of the world, and help our family to live in a way that shows our love for them.

Father, we remember the **earthquakes that devastated northern Turkey** near Istanbul in 1999, leaving many dead and many more homeless. You, Father, know how the country and families are still suffering the effects of these earthquakes. Lord God, provide for these mothers and fathers and children who still need help and homes.

~We pray too, Lord, for the **Kurds**, thought to be descendants of Biblical Medes (Dan. 5,6), that large people group living throughout the Middle East and comprising a significant portion of the Turkish population. They have no homeland of their own and have faced persecution in many different countries. How we pray for the Kurdish people to know peace. We pray that they will be protected from persecution. Lord, show Christian workers in Turkey how to show Jesus' love to the Kurds.

~We uphold **Turkish Christians** before Your throne. We pray that You will strengthen them to follow the Lord, and You will grant them access to Bibles. Please bring other Christians to Turkey to fellowship and worship with these believers.

~There are hardly any **Christian witnesses** in Turkey. God, please raise up **pastors** who will lead Turkish Christians; provide for their needs and strengthen their faith. Give them Your wisdom to teach the Word of God.

We love you, Lord, and the people who are living in Turkey, today. May the Light of our Savior dawn over all nations today. Draw us all closer to You, Father. In Jesus name, Amen.



We dance with these Turkish folk dancers. *“Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him” Ps. 33:8.*