

Kang Na e-mail 5/20/25

Dear Students of the Bible,

Salutations and thank you for your patient trek through the wilderness and promised land that is Bible study. We have been walking for some time through the New Testament, that is the Christian Scriptures of the New Testament/Covenant that were added to the Jewish Bible (aka the Hebrew Bible) containing the 39 books found in the Christian (Protestant) Old Testament and the Jewish Bible, aka Tanakh—please see below for further clarification regarding Bibles and canons.

After a long sojourn in the Gospel according to John, we are in very different territory in the Acts of the Apostle, even though it is the familiar territory of the Gospel according to Luke, the first volume preceding the book of Acts. We should read Acts as a continuation of the salvation story of God found in the Gospel according to Luke, but there are many things and themes that are native to Acts that resonate with and prepare us for reading and understanding Paul.

In Acts, we are given at least one perspective or version regarding the **experiences of the early followers of Jesus after crucifixion and resurrection** of Jesus recorded in the four canonical Gospels. As we did with the Gospels, we should read the entire book of Acts from beginning to end—even better would be to read Luke and Acts together from Luke 1 through Acts 28. Although we will not read the entire book in class, we will consider some of what is at issue in the early church (e.g., Jew-Gentile question):

- Acts 1, esp. 1.8 (the vision and program of Luke-Acts)
 - cf. Mt 28.16–20
- Acts 2; 8.26–40; 10–11; 15.1–35: the spirit moves in mysterious & blasphemous ways
- Acts 9.1–22; 22.4–16; 26.9–18: reports of Paul’s “conversion”
 - cf. Saul: 7.58–8.3
- Acts 15.36–41: sharp disagreement
 - cf. 11.18
 - cf. Acts 15: Jerusalem council (cf. Gal 2)
 - cf. Ezra 10 (who’s in?, who’s out?)
- Acts 17.16–34: apostle among philosophers in Athens
- Acts 21.17–22.29 ff.

- Acts 28.30–31: continuing activity of the Holy Spirit)

Some things to consider and look for include the following:

- Acts is not Paul's biography, but the story of G's mission/salvation (e.g., 1.8 and 28.30)
- Jerusalem to Rome (cf. Peter to Paul—from ch. 13 through ch. 28 which is open ended)
- Luke-Acts's inclusive vision of salvation
 - e.g., ch. 8: Samaritans, Ethiopians
 - 8.26–40: Ethiopian eunuch (see Deut. 23.1 [ouch!]; Isa. 56.3–8)
 - cf. Lk 24.13–35 (Lord's Supper: Jesus disappears; cf. eunuch's baptism: Philip disappears)
- early church's problem: What about the Gentiles?
- unity of church (Luke's hope more than reality?)
- in Syrian Antioch: followers called Christians (11.26)

A helpful review would be of everything thus far regarding the New Testament and the early church would be to see the following (4 one-hour videos; ca. 4 hours total).

PBS series: *From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians*

Part 1: <https://youtu.be/JN8FM1NCOSk> (2 parts; 2ours)

Part 2: <https://youtu.be/GXqFvfCaFwY> (2 parts; 2ours)

Although I don't agree with all the points made by all the scholars, the videos are very informative and helpful—look for my former professor and adviser, Dr. Elaine Pagels, an expert in Gnosticism.

As always, I look forward to hearing what you read—your particular translation(s)—what you see in the text, what you think, what questions you might have.

Have a wonder-ful, rest-ful evening.

PS:

Below and attached are some helpful reminders from previous emails as well as some Bible basics from before (for the next time someone says, “*The Bible says . . .*”):

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalms 118:24

The Lord bless you and keep you;

the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Numbers 6.24–26



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from previous emails (please transpose to apply to Luke-Acts):

What do you think about the lesson(s) John intends? How about John's Jesus?

(How) are they applicable in actual life lived at Ann's Choice or elsewhere?

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We have been immersed in the language and themes of Matthew (e.g., discipleship-learning-teaching, Kingdom of Heaven, obedience, righteousness) and will be moving on soon to Luke and John.

Please continue to read and wrestle with **Matthew 5–7** and, if adventurous, read on and think about **Mt 20.1–16 and 25.31–46**. As with Mark earlier, please consider the following to digest Matthew and his portrait of Jesus and the disciples/discipleship, **especially in the light of our earlier observations lessons from Mark**; please come ready with your observations and questions, which I still consider the best parts of our class, beside prayer and fellowship.

How does Matthew begin? What might that indicate? — cf. Mark

What are Matthew's main points or arguments? — cf. Mark

What is it trying to argue or demonstrate? How does it do that—what words and ideas does it present? — cf. Mark

What might we think about Jesus as we watch and hear what unfolds in Matthew? What portrait of Jesus emerges in Matthew? How about the of the disciples, the so-called Twelve? What do you think of the disciples? And of particularly named disciples? — cf. Mark

What does Jesus do and say? — cf. Mark

Who is the intended audience? — cf. Mark

How does the Gospel end? — cf. Mark

What Mosaic concerns or themes do you see in Matthew? What about Davidic? — cf. Mark

What do you find inspiring in Matthew? Or helpful? Curious? Disappointing? Annoying? Troublesome? — cf. Mark

After all the myriad questions and attempted answers, so what? What could we learn from Matthew for our faith journey? What spiritual—or if permitted to suggest, *theological*—insights could we gain for *our* journey of faith? — cf. Mark

As always, I look forward to **your observations and questions**, and please never hesitate to **suggest any biblical, theological, or life topics** along the way, even if they are only tangentially related. We can be flexible and take detours on our journey through the Bible. Remember that the unofficial title of our Bible study thus far is “Anything and everything you always wanted to ask about the Bible but were to afraid or busy to ask.”

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Helpful things from before:

Please review below the information I sent previously on the canon.

As we trek through the Gospels, we will learn about the new empire in charge of the world, viz., that of the Romans, as we review the empire-culture-world built by the Greeks—especially Alexander the Great—after their victory over the Persians, who in turn had replaced, the Babylonians, who replaced the Assyrians, and before that the Egyptians in the time of the Exodus.

consider the Greeks:

www.pbs.org/empires/thegreeks/htmlver

If you are adventurous, read about the “Synoptic Problem,” which I will cover slowly and repeatedly enough for us to find it helpful in our interpretation of the synoptic Gospels, i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke—*synoptic* is from the Greek word meaning to see *together* or *to be seen together*. I will say more on this in class, but feel free to ask your questions any time.

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Bibles & canons

Jewish Bible (Tanakh)

39 books in 3 sections: **Torah** (teaching), **Neviim** (prophets), **Kethuvim** (writings)

Protestant Bible

66 books (39 Hebrew Bible / Old Testament + 27 New Testament)

same 39 books in the Old Testament as in the Tanakh but in different order

Protestant Apocrypha (not canonical, but considered edifying)

Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom of Solomon, and Baruch

The books of Esther and Daniel include additional chapters which were excluded in Protestant Bibles.

The Latin appendix also includes 3 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh.

Roman Catholic Bible (46 HB/OT + 27 NT)

73 books, including all the books in the Protestant canon + all the books in the Protestant Apocrypha as parts of the OT

+ 2 in appendix to Vulgate (Latin translation of the Bible)

Greek Orthodox Bible (52 HB/OT + 27 NT)

79 books, including all the books in the Roman Catholic Bible and appendix, plus Psalm 151 and 3 Maccabees

also includes 4 Maccabees in an appendix

Ethiopian Orthodox Bible includes 86 books, including all the books in the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Bibles, plus Jubilees, Enoch, Synodicon, Diddascalica Apostolorum, Testament of the Lord, Qalementus, and 4 Baruch.