

Dear Fellow Sojourners of-in-through the Bible,

Salutations and continuing thanks for your patient trek through the wilderness and promised land that is Bible study. As you know, we have been walking for some time through the New Testament, the second part of the Christian Scriptures, which were added to the Jewish Bible (aka the Hebrew Bible) containing the 39 books found in the Christian (Protestant) Old Testament, corresponding to the Jewish Bible, aka Tanakh (= Torah-Prophets-Writings)—please see below for further clarification regarding Bibles and canons.

After our long sojourn in the Gospel according to John with its Jewish and cosmic framework, we returned to the literary world of Luke-Acts, which ends with Saul/Paul in Rome—I hope to hear about your thoughts on the “ending” of Acts. All our journeys have in prepared us in various ways for reading and understanding Paul—or at least trying to understand his letters, and thereby the letter writer.

I mentioned during our sojourn through Acts that the figure of Saul/Paul becomes prominent in Acts, almost eclipsing the original disciples or the early church’s authorities in Jerusalem, to whom Paul certainly shows deference and acknowledges their authority. I also mentioned that we need to prepare to hear-read Paul in proper proportion, e.g., as a primary source of the early church, not as a secondary source (like the Gospels and Acts). He founded some of the earliest church communities in the eastern Mediterranean and left records for us through which to access at least some of the realities of the earliest churches, especially the Gentile (= non-Jewish) converts to the faith community of the early apostles.

We will begin with 1 Thessalonians, the earliest letter of Paul and the earliest text in the New Testament. We have much to read and observe as we get a glimpse of what the earliest churches were like and what they were dealing with or struggling through.

If you can, **without consulting the Bible or any other sources**, make a list of 10 things you know about Paul and his letters, including especially things that have been significant for you or your church.

As always, I look forward to hearing what you bring to class, especially your observations and questions.

Have a wonder-ful, rest-ful evening.