

# Diakonos

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Winter 2023

Winter lectures began in early December at the University of the Nations campus in Kona, Hawaii. Here, I taught in a Discipleship Bible School program on what they dub “Paul Week,” an intensive 15 hours of lecture on the life and letters of St. Paul. I covered the background of each of the thirteen letters bearing Paul’s name along with

## *Only Physical Description from Antiquity*

*“And he (Onesiphorus) saw Paul coming, a man small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, well-built [i.e., healthy], with eyebrows meeting, rather long-nosed, full of grace. For sometimes he seemed like a man, and sometimes he had the countenance of an angel.”*

*Acts of Paul and Thecla (c. AD 160-180)*



*Here is my temporary pavilion classroom with all my student guests.*

relevant archaeology, the process of letter-writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Greco-Roman world, and the argument contained in each letter.

One of the fun moments is when I share with them the only physical description of Paul from the ancient world, a description given in a 2<sup>nd</sup> century document called the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. It is exceedingly rare to have any physical description of a biblical character, so this one of St. Paul is all the more fascinating.

My class was sizable, and on Friday, in a sort of “job fair” format, university students were able choose classes to visit in order to see whether or not they might want to enroll in the future. I had about a

hundred guests in my class on that Friday, sufficiently large that they had to move the venue from a classroom to a pavilion tent to hold them all.



It may interest you to note that Franklin Graham and Michael W. Smith recently visited the Kona campus, where Franklin addressed the student body and Smith sang and played some of his well-known compositions.

**ABOVE** *The campus in Pennsylvania is located squarely in Mennonite country. Mennonites have a long history linked to German Anabaptists going back to the Reformation Period in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.*

**RIGHT** *Some of my students in the classroom chat with each other between class hours.*

From the warm climes of Hawaii, January saw me in eastern Pennsylvania, yet another U. of N. campus located south of Lancaster.

Here, my subject was “Origins and Worldview,” where I compared the ancient cosmogonies of Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia with the Bible’s story of creation, both the points of contact as well as the striking dissimilarities. When the Israelites came out of Egypt with Moses and entered Canaanite, they not only had to “unlearn” the cosmogony of the Egyptians, they also needed a corrective to the other cosmogonies of the ancient Near East. The Book of Genesis offers that

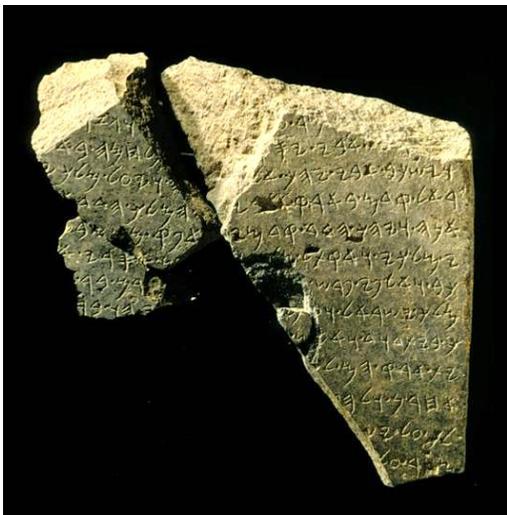




corrective. I had a lovely group of very engaged students, among which was a young man preparing for Anglican Chaplaincy. Most of them were from Pennsylvania, though I had one international student from Brazil.

In February, Pastor Chad Lewis, our son, traveled to England, where he did lectures on Leviticus at the King's Lodge, one of the campuses where I also lecture regularly. Chad is well-loved in England, and he teaches there each year, usually during the winter.

My lectures in February were entirely different, since I spent two weeks in Mexico teaching other teachers. On this trip, I was happy that Peggy could accompany me. There were Bible teachers from 12 nations in attendance from all over Latin America plus on-line groups from Paraguay, Colombia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, the Netherlands, and South Africa who were following the lectures through video. The seminar was a pilot program for Discipleship Bible School teachers, and while a professor from one of the Latin American universities handled the first week, covering teaching techniques, I covered biblical content in the succeeding two weeks—from Adam to David. In my lectures, I covered ancient texts and translations along with Old Testament literary genres. I singled out the most important characters, the major ideas, the central theological concepts, the historical-critical issues, the ancient Near Eastern cultural and historical background, and the moral dilemma



*While some scholars have been skeptical about the historical credibility of David's mini-empire—indeed skeptical of the existence of David himself—the discovery of an inscription at Tel Dan in northern Israel containing the phrase “house of David” has provided external verification, both of David himself and his dynasty. This is now the oldest reference to David outside the Bible and dates to about the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC.*



of religious war in the Old Testament, especially the charge of genocide toward the conflict between the Israelites and the Canaanites. The latter is a particularly sensitive issue in view of more modern incidents of ethnic cleansing. My lectures and all my materials were translated into Spanish and Portuguese.

The campus in Mexico is lovely, sitting on the hillside above the Pacific Ocean. One of my students this year was Sandy, a Wycliffe Bible Translator, who spent the past 30 years serving in Vietnam. Others were veteran Bible teachers as well as younger ones just starting out. One of the teachers, Eze from Costa

Rica, shared with me a wonderful story of a man who had stolen a Bible from a church, hoping to sell it to make a few pesos. However, before trying to make the sale, he started reading it, and he came to the passage in the second book of the Bible that had the commandment, "Do not steal." Feeling guilty, he took the Bible back to the church, only to have it given to him as a gift. Today, he is a Christian!



*In addition to my lectures, I also preached in one of the morning chapel services.*

I continue to work with my language students, and I have two new ones, one in Hebrew and another in Greek.

March will see me in Cape Town, April in Florida, and May in Amsterdam. Once again, our very sincere thanks to each of you, but especially, for our supporters.

God's richest blessings to you all!



*Melanie, one of my Spanish translators, pauses for a photo with me after class.*