

PAULINE IMMERSION IN TÜRKIYE & GREECE

“IN SEARCH OF PAUL”

September 22 - October 8, 2026

**a first century immersion for thoughtful rostered leaders and laity to
explore Paul’s letters in their religious and socio-political contexts**

The Rev. Dr. Don Carlson, Host



In partnership with TUTKU EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL

IMMERSION: ITINERARY

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

Fly out of a Turkish Airlines hub; direct flight to Istanbul. (See list of cities on Page 4.) Tutku Tours can arrange departures via from other cities at additional cost. You can also remit "land only" and book your own flights.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23—TÜRKIYE

Arrive in Istanbul, meet our guide for Türkiye, Cenk Eronat, and travel to our hotel located along the Golden Horn. Dinner together and introductions in the hotel dining room.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24—TÜRKIYE

We start at Istanbul where we glimpse the "imperial church" of the early 4th century under Constantine. We visit the hippodrome, Hagia Sophia, Hagia Irene, Blue Mosque, and the Topkapi Palace.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25—TÜRKIYE/GREECE

We depart early for the Greek border, meet our guide for Greece, Voula Kalapoda, and then travel to Philippi. We visit the traditional river site where Paul met Lydia and see the magnificent baptistery built there. At the river we discuss Paul's letter to **Philemon** and its patronage subtext. 1st century city life then emerges in the ruins of ancient Philippi. Overnight in Kavala, modern Neapolis.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26—GREECE

We get another glimpse of the Via Egnatia that Paul walked from Neapolis to Philippi, then on to Thessaloniki where we see the Roman forum, the arch and mausoleum of Galerius, and the archeological museum. At Virginia, we stop at the tomb of Phillip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, to appreciate the roots of imperial theology. Overnight at Kalambaka/Meteora.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27—GREECE

Visit Varlaam Monastery, built 1541, high atop the rocks of Meteora; reflecting upon the medieval theological worldview of its art. After a traditional lunch, we later discuss **Philippians** and celebrate the **Eucharist**. Overnight at Kalambaka.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28—GREECE

We stop at a studio where icons are hand crafted and can be purchased, then go Delphi to explore the cult of Apollo. After visiting the archeological museum, we overnight in Delphi; taking a look at **Galatians** after dinner.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29—GREECE

In Athens, we visit the Areopagus where Paul delivered his sermon about "an unknown God" and then climb the acropolis to see the temples of Athena, Nike, Poseidon, and Augustus. There will then be free time to visit the new archeological museum or to have a leisurely meal "à la fresco."

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30—GREECE

We visit the site of ancient Corinth with its excellent ruins and museum. While on the grounds, seated in view of the Temple of Apollo and the ancient meat market (1 Cor. 8), we discuss 1st **Corinthians**. After lunch we head for the port of Athens, say "Goodbye" to Voula Kalapoda, and board our 6:00 PM ferry to Patmos. Good dining aboard and cabins with clean linens and bath. Arrive in Patmos about 2:00 AM, go to our hotel and go back to bed!

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1—GREECE/TÜRKIYE

Still in Greece, we will visit the traditional "Cave of St. John," reflect upon the imperial context of Revelation, and visit the Monastery of St. John. Lunch will be by the seaport and then we take a leisurely 4-hour boat ride to the Turkish port of Kusadasi. At Kusadasi we meet up with Cenk Eronat and go to our hotel.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2—TÜRKIYE

We now enter the area of the Seven Churches of Revelation; visiting five of the sites: Ephesus, Sardis, Smyrna (Izmir), Laodicea, and Pergamon.

The ancient city of Ephesus gives the most impressive glimpse of 1st century urban life. The Library of Celsus, Temple of Artemis (one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world), Temple of Hadrian, Temple of Domitian, and the "terrace houses" are but a few of the restorations. After a locally prepared lunch we will visit a "cottage industry" outlet to see how Turkish carpets are made; with an opportunity to purchase carpets! Overnight at Kusadasi.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3—TÜRKIYE

Leaving Kusadasi, we will see the magnificent Temple of Apollo at Didyma, Asian counterpart to Delphi – complete with oracle. There we will discuss 1st **Thessalonians**. Then on to Aphrodisias with the Temple of Aphrodite, the Sebasteion (the best example of Roman imperial theology), monumental gateway, stadium, and museum—where "the god fearers" are mentioned. Overnight at a relaxing thermal spa hotel at Pamukkale.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4—TÜRKIYE

At Hierapolis we see the tomb of Philip the Apostle (?) and the thermal springs, then journey to Laodicea with its many newly excavated and restored ruins; including a magnificent 4th century church. After a scenic drive, we will arrive at Izmir (ancient Smyrna) and have dinner on the waterfront. Overnight in Izmir.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5—TÜRKIYE

We head for the acropolis of Pergamum with its great theater and temples to Athena, Zeus, and Trajan; then visit the Asklepon, a center of healing where the great physician Galen practiced. Overnight at the picturesque seaport of Assos. **Eucharist** before turning in.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6—TÜRKIYE

We climb the acropolis of Assos that has a temple to Athena dating from 530 BCE, then head to Troas (Acts 20) and walk a road that Paul walked. In the evening we discuss **Romans**. Overnight in Assos.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7—TÜRKIYE

After a visit to Troy, founded 3000-2600 BCE, we cross the Dardanelles and drive through the area where the Battle of Gallipoli was fought in WWI. Arriving back in Istanbul, we visit the Spice Market before going to the hotel to enjoy our farewell dinner.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8—TÜRKIYE

After a leisurely morning and breakfast, we leave for the airport and our flights home.

NOTE: There may be unforeseen minor adjustments to the itinerary.

LEAD — In partnership with
TUTKU EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL
Educational, Biblical, and Classical Tours

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On the cover: The inaugural 2014 group at Ephesus in front of the [Library of Celsus](#) and the adjacent [Gate of Mazeus and Mithridates](#). Cover background is a floor mosaic from the remains of the Octagon Basilica at Philippi, c. 400 CE.

IMMERSION: FOR THE MIND AND SPIRIT

SEARCHING FOR PAUL

People ask, "After 11 trips, haven't you found Paul yet?" The truth is that every trip brings newly found insights about the Paul we thought we knew. And another truth is that the real Paul *is* often lost: clouded by ignorance about Paul's cultural and religious context, and therefore often misconstrued amid sectarian arguments and "culture wars."

Contemporary Biblical scholars often list four "Pauls" —

- The Paul of the autograph letters: Philemon, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans.
- The "Paul" of Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians.
- The "Paul" of the pastorals: 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.
- The "traditional Paul" of Acts.

Lutherans and other churches may also have a "fifth Paul" - the "Reformation Paul" of the 16th century.

But, how did the "real Paul" of the 1st century understand justice, righteousness, salvation, faith, and the gospel as he wrote to diverse urban people living in a culture permeated with religion, patronage, classism, plutocracy, oligarchy, and Roman Imperial Theology? How can his gospel's 1st century context inform our 21st century context? These are but some of the issues we explore together on every trip.

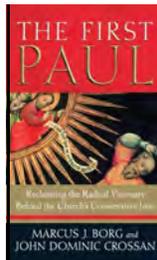
Participants commit to advance preparation so there will be common ground for discussion.

- Read the *essential* books on the reading list, and other articles that will be shared electronically.
- Take part in three pre-trip orientation and discussion Zoom meetings in June, July, and August.

So, come along and seek the life and faith of the early church. Come along and search for Paul!

"If we use 'Christian' of this first generation, we pull them out of their context, domesticating them for ours. In their own eyes, they were history's last generation. It is only in history's eyes that they would become the first generation of the church."

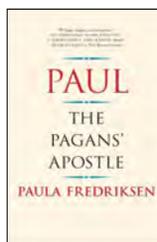
Paula Fredriksen, "When Christians Were Jews"



ESSENTIAL READING for June 2026

[The First Paul](#) (Kindle available)

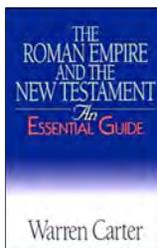
The book explores the widely accepted view that the later "letters of Paul" were created by the early church to dilute his message and make him more traditional to fit Roman norms in regards to slavery, patriarchy, and patronage. In truth, Paul was an apostle whose vision of life "in Christ" is faithful to the message of Jesus.



ESSENTIAL READING for July 2026

[Paul—The Pagans' Apostle](#) (Kindle available)

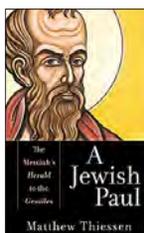
By situating Paul within his charged social context of gods and humans, pagans and Jews, cities, synagogues, and competing Christ-following assemblies we can begin to understand his mission and message. The book offers a dramatically new perspective on one of history's pivotal figures.



ESSENTIAL READING for August 2026

[The Roman Empire and the New Testament](#) (Kindle available)

An understanding of the political, economic, cultural, and religious aspects of Roman rule is critical to understanding New Testament texts. This book will help us to appreciate how knowing the structures and practices in the Roman world can illumine the New Testament message.



OPTIONAL READING

[A Jewish Paul](#) (Kindle Available)

What was Paul's relationship to the Jewish law? How did he understand Jesus' messiahship for ethnic Jews and gentiles? Thiessen argues that Paul remained Jewish but believed that Israel's Messiah would also deliver the nations, and so proclaimed to them the Messiah's life-transforming Spirit.



Friends in Christ,

This picture of me was taken during our study of 1st Corinthians while gathered in the forum of ancient Corinth. That evening we sailed for Patmos; then back into Türkiye. Ephesus and many other sites and discussions awaited us. 2026 will be our 12th journey.

I increasingly appreciate the observation of N.T. Wright, "For too long we've read the scriptures with 19th century eyes and 16th century questions. It's time we get back to reading with 1st century eyes and 21st century questions."

In many ways, our 21st century is not unlike the 1st century. In no other period of my lifetime could a 1st century understanding of Paul be more relevant: his gospel in the context of empire; his vision of the just world Christ's return would usher in; his alternative Christ communities negotiating the imperial meantime. Come along on this historical, cultural, and theological immersion. Full info at: <https://leadconnects.org/in-search-of-paul-2026/>

Grace and peace,
Pastor Don Carlson, DMin



IMMERSION: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



To register, go to <https://leadconnects.org/in-search-of-paul-2026/> Click on the registration button and fill out the LEAD form. At the end of the form, click the TUTKU registration link and complete their registration process. All invoices and payments will be through TUTKU.

PAYMENT DUE DATES — Deposit: \$200 per person by **May 1, 2026**. Balance: \$5390 per person by **July 20, 2026**. Plus \$1400 single room supplement, if applicable.

Türkiye requires your passport's expiration date not be within 6 months of our arrival in Türkiye, September 23, 2025. Renew ASAP if needed. If awaiting a new passport, enter Xs in those boxes when you register. Provide TUTKU (info@tutku.com) with new information when you receive your passport.

Cost: \$5590** (\$4190 Land Only*)

per person, double occupancy room
(For single occupancy room, add \$1400)

This includes:

- Non-stop roundtrip airfare from any Turkish airline hub in the United States/Canada to Istanbul**
- 9 nights at 3-4 star hotels in Türkiye
- 5 nights at 3 star hotels in Greece
- 1 night on overnight ferry from Athens to Patmos
- Daily breakfast and 14 dinners
- Transportation by private bus with A/C
- English-speaking, Bible-oriented, professional tour guides throughout the pilgrimage
- Headsets
- All entry fees to sites and museums
- All tips for hotels and restaurant staff
- All tips to tour guides and drivers
- All service charges and local taxes

****Direct to Istanbul IST from the following cities:** Atlanta ATL, Boston BOS, Chicago ORD, Dallas DFW, Denver DEN, Detroit DTW, Houston IAH, Los Angeles LAX, Miami MIA, Newark EWR, New York JFK, San Francisco SFO, Seattle SEA, Toronto YYZ, Vancouver YVR, and Washington IAD

***Land Only:** Cost is \$4190. You make your own flight plans, often for less than \$1400. You need to arrive in Istanbul IST on September 23, 2026, preferably between noon and 6:00 PM for group transfer to the hotel.

Above prices do not include:

- Lunches and beverages
- Personal discretionary expenses, shopping
- Air supplement for departure from smaller cities if booked by TUTKU

LAND AND AIR CANCELLATION POLICY

Before 60 days of departure: Full Refund
Within 45 days of departure: 75% Refund
Within 30 days of departure: 50% Refund
Within 15 days of departure: 25% Refund
Within 14 days of departure: No Refund

In addition to the above cancellation policy, we charge a 5% processing fee for all refunds, no matter the date of cancellation. This fee is necessary to cover the costs associated with processing refunds, including bank fees and administrative expenses.

We understand that sometimes travel plans change, and we appreciate your understanding of this policy.



2021 Fall Group — Temple of Apollo at Didyma

PLEASE NOTE: Archaeological sites often have uneven footing, ramps, stairs, and are certainly not ADA compliant. A few days may require 5000 footsteps. People of varied ages and physical abilities have participated, but *please* email donmcarlson@gmail.com if you have mobility issues or concerns.

11 YEARS OF IMMERSION PERSPECTIVES



Learning about the cultures and the class structures within Paul's communities was helpful for me in understanding his 1st century ministry and how it is relevant today. The trip exceeded my expectations and I built lasting friendships.

Susan Keene
Member at Messiah Lutheran, Houston, TX



The trip equipped me to counter people who misuse Paul to silence women in the church — and his letters have become alive to me. The readings and discussions helped me understand Paul's context.

The Rev. Mytch Pierre-Noel Dorvilier
ELCA YAGM Coordinator, Darka, Senegal



Searching for Paul introduced to me a Paul I never knew. It was a transforming experience to understand the 1st century and begin to grasp what that means for teaching and preaching Paul's letters today.

The Rev. Solomon Hailu
Sharp Hospice Care, San Diego, CA



I knew Paul and Empire in my head, but to travel the roads he walked brought a new depth and nuance to my understanding. Now I can more competently and confidently connect our tradition of church and culture in my preaching, teaching, and advocacy.

The Rev. Ashley Bathe
St. Stephen's Episcopal, Houston, TX



"In Search of Paul" enabled me to experience the places the context of the communities Paul created. I now have much greater understanding of his letters and would recommend this opportunity to anyone.

The Rev. Rudy Flores
Messiah Lutheran, Aurora, KS



Walking around Washington, I see architecture similar to what I saw while searching for Paul; a continuation of empires. I now have new perspectives on the Book of Acts; challenging how I show up in ministry.

The Rev. Tuhina Rasche
Faith in Public Life, Washington, DC



My ministry is forever changed by this pilgrimage that vividly captures the revolutionary and radical nature of Paul and his Gospel in the 1st century. I will never read Paul's letters in the same way again.

The Rev. Jennifer Michael
St. Timothy Lutheran, Hendersonville, TN



This trip greatly expanded my knowledge of Paul's journeys. I have been able to practice new ways of reading Paul and talking about him and the whole bible. This trip was not just a gift to me, but also a gift to the way I will be a leader in the church.

The Rev. Tim Wrenn
Prince of Peace Lutheran, Dublin, OH



The "Search for Paul" was transformative for me. Understanding the Imperial Cult and his context, I now find Paul far more accessible. The experience changed me as a pastor, scholar, and catechist.

The Rev. Brad Fuerst
Lutheran Campus Ministry, Austin, TX



You will not regret going on this trip of a lifetime! I stepped into the 1st century to hear Paul on his own terms as he addressed his communities living in the Roman Empire. I keep learning from this trip. Once you see, you can't unsee.

Rev. Rebecca Breddin
St. John Lutheran, Madison, SD



This trip has impacted my preaching and teaching. I have a better understanding of Paul's letters and the early church. I also gained friendships that will continue to grow. I pray that many others can experience this life changing tour.

The Rev. Paul Malek
St. Paul Lutheran, Ontario, OR



In searching for Paul I found a connection to the early church through the food, people I met, and the stones that made the scriptures as relevant today as they were at the time they were written. It was an amazing spiritual journey for me.

Deaconess Colleen Teeuwe
Prince of Peace Lutheran, Gillette, WY



To explore the places where Paul visited and the places to which he wrote letters was absolutely amazing. I now appreciate the context of the Roman Empire on Paul's writings.

The Rev. Tonya Eza
Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran, Clay, NY



This trip was the capstone to previous visits to the Holy Land and Rome. Our readings and the journey gave me a new perspective on how "radical" Paul was for his time. This perspective is bringing new life to my ministry. I highly recommend this trip!

The Rev. Nancy Andrews
Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Baton Rouge, LA



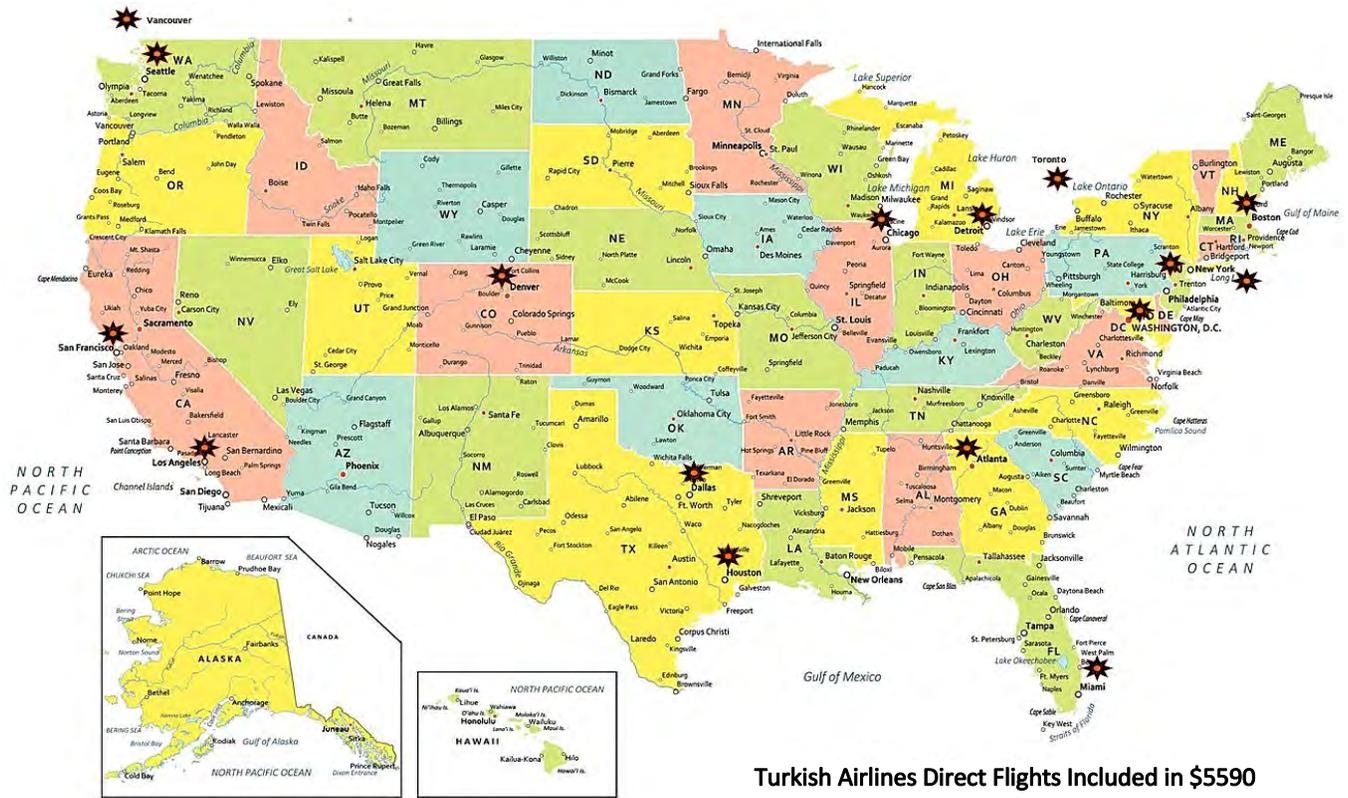
Getting a 1st Century view of the church and Paul's ministry will have an impact on my ministry. I hope the Pauline vision of justice and community will inspire my congregation to reach out to the "God Fearers" in our neighborhood.

The Rev. Pete Lopez
St John Lutheran Church, Angleton, TX



Traveling with LEAD "In Search of Paul" was life changing for me, and experiencing the cities in Greece and Türkiye where Paul shared the Jesus movement was captivating. Many empires fell and turned into ruins, but the powerful Jesus movement lives on!

The Rev. Jenny Sung
Calvary Lutheran, Minneapolis, MN



Turkish Airlines Direct Flights Included in \$5590