

Research, Exchange, and New Perspectives: SBL International Meeting 2026

– Grant Report –

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Scientific work becomes truly valuable to society when we ourselves remain capable of continual renewal. This requires us to question and broaden our own perspectives again and again, which in turn sometimes means stepping outside our comfort zones. What better opportunity could there be for this than travelling to the other side of the world and encountering people, stories, and cultures with which we have previously had little or no contact?

From 5 to 9 July 2026, I participated in the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, one of the oldest and largest scholarly societies in the field of biblical studies. I find it particularly encouraging to see how the Society creates space for questions and methodologies from related disciplines, including ancient history, social history, and classical languages. It is precisely the interaction between these different approaches that makes research questions especially stimulating.

Because the conference was held in Adelaide, Australia, I already expected it to be different from any conference I had previously attended. This proved to be the case. I was surrounded largely by participants who are less frequently present at conferences in the United States, the United Kingdom, or Europe. The distinctive perspectives arising from their different academic and cultural backgrounds were immediately apparent in the questions they asked and the contributions they made to the discussions.

During my stay in Adelaide, I also had the opportunity to visit the South Australian Museum and the Art Gallery of South Australia. I was particularly moved by the opportunity to learn more closely about the histories, cultures, and experiences of Australia's First Nations communities. The objects, artworks, and stories I encountered there taught me a great deal about the past and present of Indigenous communities, as well as about the consequences of colonisation. This experience affected me deeply and became one of the most lasting impressions of my entire journey to Australia.

My paper was entitled "Slavery, Economy, and the Historical Jesus: Rethinking Gospel Silence in the Roman World." The relationship between the historical Jesus and real slavery is currently an especially important topic within the emerging Next Quest for the historical Jesus, and it is an area to which I hope to contribute through my own work.

The paper reconsidered the relationship between slavery and the historical Jesus by locating Jesus within the economic structures of the ancient Mediterranean world, where enslaved labour played a significant role in production, social hierarchy, and everyday life. Drawing on socio-historical approaches and insights from slavery studies, I argued that the relative silence of the Gospels does not necessarily indicate the absence of slavery, but may instead be connected to its social

normalisation and narrative invisibility. Through a case study from the Synoptic Gospels, I also demonstrated how enslaved labour can nevertheless become indirectly visible within the social world presupposed by the Gospel narratives.

Most of the questions following the paper focused on how we can speak about possible encounters between Jesus and enslaved people when there is little direct evidence of such encounters in the Gospel texts. This is indeed a difficult question. I sought to emphasise that in such cases we must first examine the historical evidence available to us: what archaeological, literary, and historical sources outside the New Testament tell us about the first-century world. In these sources, the presence of enslaved people is clearly attested.

The Gospel texts can then be placed against this wider historical background, allowing us to ask whether the social situations, economic processes, and locations known from external sources also appear within the world of the Gospels. The results can sometimes be surprising. Through careful exegesis, it is possible to identify several settings in which encounters between Jesus and enslaved people may be considered historically plausible.

The conference provided me with invaluable experiences. I returned with new professional relationships, new acquaintances, and new perspectives that will continue to shape my research. I am deeply grateful that I was able to travel to Australia and participate in this scholarly community.

I am especially grateful to the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies for its support, which contributed to the costs of my journey. It is important that organisations such as this exist, not only to support scholarly work financially, but also to encourage it by enabling researchers to participate in international academic communities, learn from one another, and develop new collaborations.

