

## ***Philippians – Philemon Session One***



*Ruins of Philippi (showing part of the basilica building)  
– Marco Ansaloni/Science Photo Library, 2009*

### ***Introduction to Philippians; Course Outline; Philippi; The Disputed Epistles; The Acts of the Apostles***

#### ***Philippians – Philemon Course Outline***

Session 1: Philippians 1:1 – 11	<i>Introduction to Philippians</i>
Session 2: Philippians 1:12 – 2:11	<i>Imprisonment</i>
Session 3: Philippians 2:12 – 3:11	<i>The Mystery of Christ</i>
Session 4: Philippians 3:12 – 4:23	<i>Running the Race</i>
Session 5: Philemon 1 – 24	<i>The Request</i>

#### ***Philippi***

First-century Philippi was located in the northeastern corner of the Roman province of Macedonia (in present day Greece). With perhaps ten to fifteen thousand inhabitants, it was not a large city. But it was strategically located on the Via Egnatia, the main road linking Rome with the East. In addition, the important seaport of Neapolis was only ten

miles away. This “gateway between Europe and Asia” became a vital crossroads for travel and trade, both by land and by sea. Inscriptional evidence indicates that among its merchants were traders in purple dye, like Lydia, mentioned in Acts 16.

Philippi took its name from Alexander the Great’s father, Philip II of Macedon, who fortified an earlier Greek city (356 B.C.) on this site. Two centuries later, Philippi came under Roman rule (168 – 67 B.C.). The city was the location of a famous battle in 42 B.C., in which Octavian (later emperor Augustus) defeated the assassins of Julius Caesar. The victorious generals founded Philippi as a Roman colony (Acts 16:12) and rewarded veteran soldiers with free grants of land there. Later in 31 B.C., Augustus refounded the colony under his personal patronage and boosted the population with an influx of Italian colonists.

The status of a Roman colony gave the people of Philippi many privileges. They enjoyed, for example, considerable property and legal rights and exemption from taxes. Citizens of the colony were citizens of Rome. In most ways, a Roman colony like Philippi was considered an extension of Rome itself.

When Paul arrived in Philippi, he would have found a city with a sizable Roman population, a Roman civil administration, and a largely Roman public identity and appearance. One evidence of this is that most public inscriptions were written in Latin, not Greek. While not all of the inhabitants were Roman citizens, all were expected to show loyalty to Rome and its emperor. Philippi’s colonial status and identity provide a backdrop for Paul’s “political” language in passages like 1:27 and 3:20. Paul urges Christians in Philippi to find their identity in a higher “citizenship” than that of Rome.

– Dean Flemming (*Philippians: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, Beacon Hill Press, 2009)

### ***The Disputed Pauline Epistles***

*More is known about Paul than probably any other biblical writer – either Old or New Testament. The New Testament was written in Greek less than two thousand years ago. The Old Testament was mostly written in ancient Hebrew, some of it closer to three thousand years ago. The Acts of the Apostles tells much of the story of Paul’s life and his ministry among the Gentiles. Thirteen of the books in our modern New Testaments are attributed to Paul. We have more historical information about Paul’s life than we do the life of Jesus. Paul’s writing has consequently been scrutinized more closely than that of most other New Testament writers.*

*There is nearly universal consensus in modern New Testament scholarship on a core group of authentic Pauline epistles whose authorship is rarely contested: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Scholarly opinion is sharply divided on whether or not Colossians and 2 Thessalonians*

*are genuine letters of Paul. The remaining four contested epistles – Ephesians, as well as the three known as the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus) – have been labeled pseudepigraphical works by most critical scholars.*

*Some have suggested that the Pastoral Letters were written early in the second century, in part to offset the more ‘liberal’ stance on slavery and women reflected in Paul’s original writing. We will see in Philemon, a Paul concerned about how Philemon might receive the return of his runaway slave Onesimus:*

Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother – especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord (15 – 16).

*Contrast the tone of this passage with the tone of the letter to Titus:*

Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back, not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior (2:9)

*Nothing in this passage from Titus that suggests any responsibility toward the slave on the part of the owner. Nothing to suggest it was written by the same Paul that wrote the letter to Philemon.*

*There is evidence of later insertion of entire passages into “authentic” Pauline letters as well. For example, the last half of verse 33 through verse 36 of Chapter 14 of 2 Corinthians is in parenthesis in the New Revised Standard Version because many scholars think it was a later insertion – not a part of Paul’s original letter to the church at Corinth. (This is the passage suggesting women should be silent in the churches.)*

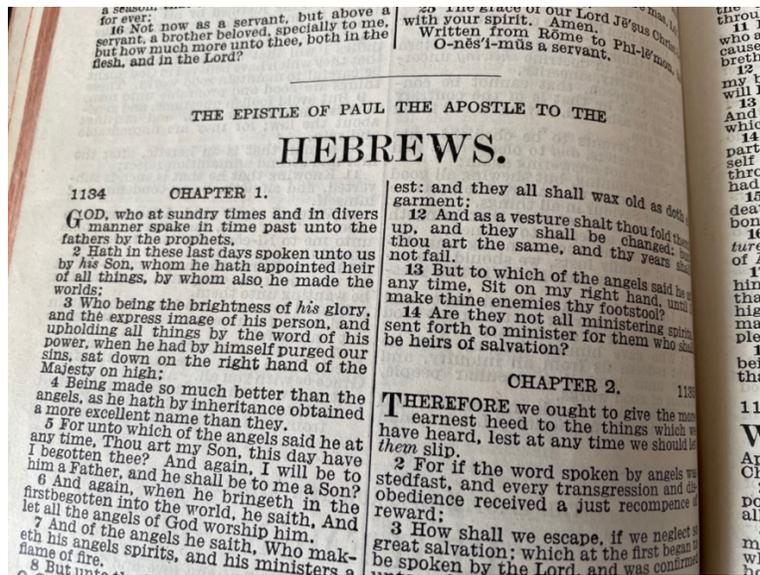
*There are numerous reasons why some scholars think some of the letters attributed to Paul in our bibles were not, in fact, written by Paul. There are many counter arguments as well. Murphy-O’Connor argues for the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians, for example:*

Whereas the authenticity of 1 Thessalonians is accepted without question, that of 2 Thessalonians is still a matter of debate. For a significant number of scholars it was written, not by Paul, but by one of his followers towards the end of the first century. They invoke differences of style and vocabulary, but in a highly selective way which prejudices the conclusion. When used objectively, however, such evidence proves that 2 Thessalonians is more at home in the Pauline corpus than 1 Thessalonians or 1 Corinthians. The cold impersonal tone of 2 Thessalonians is often contrasted with the warmth of 1 Thessalonians. In reality, however, there is a much greater difference in tone between *Letter A\** and *Letter B\** than there is between the latter and 2 Thessalonians.

– Jerome Murphy-O’Connor OP (*Paul: A Critical Life*)

*It is not likely that the disputes over which letters are or are not authentic will be resolved in the immediate future. I own a Bible printed about a hundred years ago that shows Hebrews to be an epistle written by Paul. Perhaps there are some who would still argue that the letter to the Hebrews had a Pauline origin, but I suspect not many. Scholarship consensus on Paul's writing changes over time – but not rapidly.*

*\*Some scholars suggest that 1 Thessalonians is composed of two separate letters from Paul (**Letter A:** 2:13 – 4:2; **Letter B:** 1:1 – 2:12, and 4:3 – 5:28). The idea is not novel with 1 Thessalonians. It has been suggested that 2 Corinthians is, in fact, composed of five different letters. It has also been argued that Philippians is made up of two or three different letters.*



*Bible from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century showing Hebrews as an Epistle written by Paul.*

## *Acts of the Apostles*

*In the preface to his book, Paul: A Critical Life, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor describes how he changed his mind on the historical accuracy of Paul's letters compared to the Acts of the Apostles. Prior to 1950, Acts was considered the primary source with respect to chronology of events in the travels of Paul. Murphy-O'Connor cites a work by J. Knox written in 1950 that, began to change the way Biblical scholars thought about the issue. Murphy-O'Connor first published works about Paul in 1964, but he identified a work by J.C. Lentz written in 1993 (43 years after Knox's work), that finally convinced him that Knox was correct in his assessment. In Murphy-O'Connor's biography of Paul, published 25 years ago, he scrupulously describes how Luke frequently misled his*

readers about the sequence of events related to Paul's travels. There are still some scholars who follow Acts' chronology, but they are becoming fewer in number:

I try to be as 'critical' as possible in the sense of 'exercising careful judgement', above all with respect to the use of material from the Acts of the Apostles. The tradition of lives of Paul has been to accept the framework provided by Luke, and into it to integrate material from the letters. The appropriateness of this approach, which subordinated the testimony of the individual concerned to that of a tendentious theologian, was questioned by J. Knox, who in consequence, laid down the methodological principle, '**a fact only suggested in the letters has a status which even the most unequivocal statement of Acts, if not otherwise supported, cannot confer. We may, with proper caution, use Acts to supplement the autobiographical data of the letters, but never to correct them**' (*Chapters in a Life of Paul*, Abingdon, New York, 1950). Recent lives of Paul all pay lip-service to the principle, but in practice they not only allow Luke to exercise decisive control over the presentation of Paul's career, but fail to recognize the problems of extracting historical data from the Acts of the Apostles. The sporadic criticisms of Luke's portrayal of Paul, which are scattered through many commentaries on Acts, has been recently competently synthesized by J.C. Lentz, Jr., in his *Luke's Portrait of Paul* (1993).

I may have gone to the other extreme in the way I use the letters as the principal source of Paul's biography, but the publication of three of my colleagues have made it impossible to continue to read the Acts of the Apostles with the naïvety that characterized some of my earlier work.

– Jerome Murphy-O'Connor OP (from the preface to *Paul: A Critical Life*, dated September 1, 1995)

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***Philippians Philemon***, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, by Carolyn Osiek, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2000

***Philippians, A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition***, New Beacon Bible Commentary, By Dean Flemming, Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2009

***Paul: A Critical Life***, by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, OP  
Oxford University Press, New York, 1996

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**Session Two:** Philippians 1:12 – 2:11

*Imprisonment*