

EMMAUS EQUIPPING COLLEGE

Grasping God's Word - Assignment 6

Carlo Tedesco - 0412 342 941 carlo@ljhfp.com.au

Assignment 6-1

Slavery in the Greco-Roman World in the New Testament letter of Philemon, the apostle Paul writes on behalf of a slave named Onesimus. Part of identifying the historical-cultural context of Philemon includes knowing something about the institution of slavery in the Greco-Roman world. Consult several New Testament histories or Bible dictionaries or encyclopedias and read their articles on slavery. Then write a two-page summary of the practice of slavery in New Testament times.

Slavery was deeply ingrained in the Greco-Roman world and the New Testament context, where it was a fundamental aspect of the economy and social structure, not an aberration. The institution's nature varied, with some slaves experiencing harsh brutality while others found better treatment, though all were legally considered property with no rights. Within the New Testament, instead of abolishing slavery, the teachings focused on transforming the master-slave dynamic, stressing equality in Christ and requiring obedience from slaves, though some passages suggest slaves should seek freedom if offered.

The Practice of Slavery in the Greco-Roman World;

- **Social Acceptance of Slavery as Widespread and Normal:**

Slavery was a normalized feature of the Greco-Roman world especially in the Roman Empire. The institution was deeply embedded in Roman culture and thought, with an estimated one-third of the population enslaved by the 1st century CE, particularly in the Roman Empire. Roman citizens largely viewed slavery as a necessity and a natural part of life, rather than an injustice. The New Testament authors lived in this slave culture and accepted the existence of slavery as a given fact of life.

- **Economic Foundation and Social Necessity:**

Slavery was vital cornerstone of the Roman economy, providing labour in domestic service, agriculture, mines, shipping, construction, and households, which contributed to the wealth of the elite. Slaves also tasked with skilled roles as artisans, educators, and administrators.

- **Legal Status:**

Legally, slaves were considered property with no inherent rights, and their owners held absolute power over their lives and labour - slaves were considered property, or "living tools," with no rights. Their owners could treat them as they pleased, including with physical and sexual violence.

- **Brutal Reality:**

The lives of slaves were often harsh and brutal, characterized by physical and sexual abuse, and owners could treat them as disposable possessions, even kill them without punishment. In addition to physical punishment, the threat of such consequences served as a powerful tool to maintain control and obedience among the enslaved population, discouraging any thoughts of rebellion or escape. To prevent escape, Roman society employed severe punishments, with runaways. Capturing runaway slaves was a serious matter, with public advertisements and severe punishments including branding on the forehead, a permanent mark of their status as a criminal and property or even public execution, to deter revolts. Runaways could also be sentenced to hard labour, such as the dangerous and often fatal work in mines, or even be subjected to the brutal penalties of crucifixion.

- **Potential for Manumission:**

While many remained enslaved for their entire lives, the system also allowed for manumission, where slaves could be freed by their owner. This process could result in the freed slave gaining citizenship, though often with limitations. Even after manumission, freed slaves carried social stigma and often had obligations to their former masters.

The New Testament encourages slaves to seek freedom if the opportunity arises. While some scripture, such as 1 Corinthians 7, suggest slaves should take freedom if offered, the emphasis was often on fulfilling duties in their current status rather than actively seeking liberation.

The texts often commanded slaves to obey their masters with all deference, whether their masters were kind or harsh. Christian slaves are instructed to obey their earthly masters with sincerity and respect, viewing their work as service to God. This advice was also survival strategy in the Roman Empire, where rebellion would lead to harsh punishments.

While instructing Christian slaves to obey their masters as if serving Christ, it also commands masters to treat their slaves justly. In the New Testament, Paul's letter to Philemon is a key text, where Paul urges a Christian slave owner, Philemon, to welcome back his runaway slave, Onesimus, not as a slave but as a "beloved brother" in Christ.

Roman citizens largely viewed slavery as a necessity and a natural part of life, rather than an injustice. The New Testament acknowledges slavery as a prevalent social institution but doesn't call for its immediate abolition, instead, the focus was on transforming the relationship between masters and slaves, focusing on improving conditions within the existing system, promoting fairness, and fostering a community where slaves and free people worshipped together.

A key teaching in the New Testament is that in Christ, there is no longer slave or free, suggesting a spiritual equality that challenged the social hierarchies of the time.

The Example of Philemon and Onesimus

- **Onesimus** A runaway slave who converted to Christianity under Paul's care.
- **Paul's Appeal:** Paul sent Onesimus back to his master, Philemon, but appealed to Philemon to receive him as a beloved brother in Christ, not just as a slave.
- **Symbolic Significance:** This letter is a powerful example of Christian grace and love, subtly transforming the master-slave dynamic within the Christian community.

Underlying Principles

- **Equality in Christ:**

The New Testament teaches that in Christ, there is no distinction between a slave and a free person, establishing a sense of spiritual equality.

- **Critique of Dehumanization:**

While not directly abolishing slavery, the New Testament authors critiqued its dehumanizing aspects, asserting that all people are made in God's image.

- **Divine Judgment:**

Revelation 18 condemns the slave trade as a luxury of "Babylon the Great," which will face divine judgment.

Assignment 6-2

Look up Haggai in an Old Testament survey or introduction and read what the author(s) has to say by way of introduction (e.g., author, date, audience, situation, purpose). Use what you have learned to write a one-to two-page description of the historical setting of this prophetic book.

HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

- **AUTHOR**

Haggai, whose name means “Festive”, was one of the post exilic prophets (relating to the period of Jewish history at the end of the exile in Babylon), and a contemporary of Zechariah.

- **DATE**

Haggai’s ministry is said to have covered a period of slightly less than four months during the second-year reign of King Darius, who ruled Persia from 522BC to 520BC. This places Haggai in history at 520BC.

- **BACKGROUND**

After King Cyrus of Persia defeated and captured Babylon in 539BC, he put an end to some 70 years of Jewish exile under the former Babylonian rule and allowed the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem in 538 BCE and rebuild their temple and their lives. Those who first returned from exile, however, did not have an easy time of it. They met resistance from “the people of the land” who were living in Judah (Ezra 4:1-5). They also experienced economic hardship and agricultural losses (Haggai 1:6; 2:15-17).

By 520 BCE, at the time Haggai had prophesied, a second wave of exiles had returned to Judah under Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the Davidic governor appointed by Persia. The Temple, however, still lay in ruins, destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BCE.

The Book of Haggai spans less than four months in the latter half of 520 BCE, when Haggai urged the leaders and people to rebuild the Temple. His prophecies seem to have been effective. They had started well, building an altar and offering sacrifices, then laying down the foundation for the Lord’s house the following year. Then construction ceased as their enemies mocked the builders’ efforts. As part of his ministry, Haggai prophesies to these Jews, causing them to rally and within five years, the Temple was finished and rededicated in 515BC. Haggai is a contemporary of another prophet, Zechariah, whose prophecies also begin in 520 BCE and continue until 518. Zechariah shares Haggai’s concern for a rebuilt Temple.

Assignment 6-3

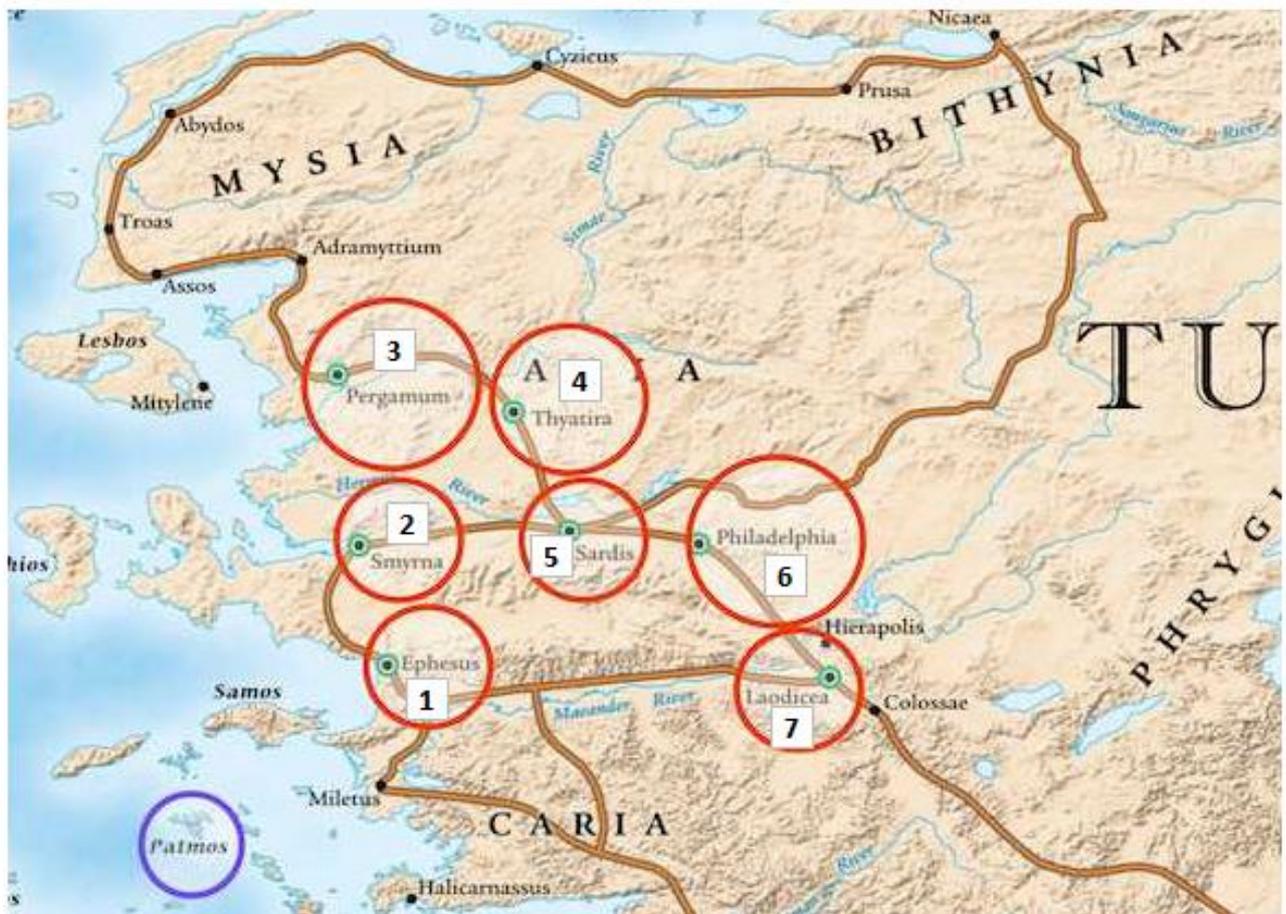
Read Revelation 2–3 and list the seven churches that receive a letter.

The seven churches in Revelation that receive a letter;

1. Ephesus
2. Smyrna
3. Pergamum
4. Thyatira
5. Sardis
6. Philadelphia
7. Laodicea

Next, copy a map of Asia Minor from a Bible atlas and locate the seven churches. On your copy trace the route among the seven churches that a messenger probably followed to deliver the letter.

The route among the seven churches that a messenger probably followed to deliver the letter;



Finally, look up Revelation 3:14–22 in a commentary or background commentary and make a list of every historical-cultural fact about Laodicea that you can find.

Laodicea, at that time, was a wealthy city known for its commercial and financial hub status, which led to spiritual pride and complacency. The city was famous for its banking, textile production, and a luxury eye-salve. The church's material prosperity contributed to a spiritual self-sufficiency, making them spiritually poor, blind, and naked, unlike their perception. This spiritual condition is symbolized by the metaphor of being lukewarm, indicating a lack of spiritual fervour and a spiritual condition that Christ finds repulsive.

Historical Context of Laodicea

- **Wealthy Commercial Centre:**

Laodicea was a prosperous city and a major financial/commercial hub key to the Roman Empire.

- **Turning Down Aid:**

The city was so self-sufficient and wealthy that after a devastating earthquake in 60AD, its proud citizens rejected the Roman Emperor's offer of money to help rebuild.

- **Luxury Industry:**

The city was known for its textile industry, particularly its black wool, and also for producing a famous eye-salve that was likely consumed by people in other cities.

Cultural Significance of the Metaphors

- **Lukewarm Water:**

Laodicea's water source was a hot spring, and its nearest rival city, Colossae, relied on a cold spring. Laodicean water was lukewarm and unpalatable, having been piped in from a distant hot spring.

- **Eye Salve:**

The church's blindness is contrasted with the city's famous eye salve, which they likely had readily available for purchase, but which couldn't help their spiritual blindness.

- **White Garments:**

The reference to white garments contrasts with Laodicea's famed black wool, suggesting the church was clothed in spiritual shame rather than divine purity.

Spiritual Implications for the Church

- **Spiritual Poverty Despite Wealth:**

The church, like the city, perceived itself as rich but was, in fact, spiritually bankrupt.

- **Complacency and Self-Reliance:**

Their material wealth led to spiritual self-sufficiency and a rejection of any spiritual assistance, similar to how they rejected the emperor's aid after the earthquake.

- **"Lukewarm" Faith:**

The church's lukewarm condition, a result of spiritual compromise and indifference, is a spiritual state that Christ finds abhorrent, as it lacks the vitality of being either hot or cold.

Assignment 6-4

Read the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman recorded in John 4:1–39. Then read an article on “Samaria” or “Samaritan” in a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia and make a list of all the ways the article helps you understand the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

I found the following information very helpful with regards to understanding the division and animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans;

“Biblical Samaritans were an ancient ethnoreligious group originating from the mixed population of the northern Kingdom of Israel after the Assyrian conquest in 721BC. They worshipped Yahweh but diverged from mainstream Judaism by only accepting the Samaritan Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) as their sacred text and establishing their primary worship site on Mount Gerizim instead of the Jerusalem Temple. This difference led to a long-standing animosity and mistrust between the Samaritans & the Jews.

Origins and Identity

- **Mixed Ancestry:** After the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, some of the remaining Israelites intermarried with the foreign colonists the Assyrians brought to the land, forming a "half-Jewish, half-Gentile" society.
- **Claimed Israelite Descent:** The Samaritans refer to themselves as Bene Yisrael ("Children of Israel") and believe they are the true descendants of the northern tribes of Israel.
- **Location:** They were indigenous to the region of Samaria, located north of Jerusalem.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

- **Samaritan Pentateuch:** Their religious observance is based on their unique version of the first five books of the Old Testament.
- **Mount Gerizim:** They believed God chose Mount Gerizim as the site for His dwelling and built a shrine there.
- **Schism with Judaism:** Samaritans viewed the Jerusalem Temple and its associated Levitical priesthood as illegitimate and practiced their own distinct worship system.

Relationship with Jews

- **Antagonism:** The relationship between Jews and Samaritans was marked by mutual suspicion and disdain.
- **Opposition to Rebuilding Efforts:** The Samaritans are mentioned in the Bible in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah for opposing the Jews' efforts to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple and city walls during the Persian period.
- **Biblical Depictions:** The complex dynamic between them is evident in scriptural accounts such as "The Woman at the Well" (John 4:1-42) and "The Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37), both highlighting the social and religious divide.”

Assignment 6-5

Using a Bible dictionary/encyclopedia answer the following about the book of Nehemiah:

1. How much time passes between the month of Kislev (or Chislev) in Nehemiah 1:1 and the month of Nisan in Nehemiah 2:1?

There are approximately 3 to 4 months or about 120 days that pass between the month of Kislev in Nehemiah 1:1 and the month of Nisan in Nehemiah 2:1, depending on the specific days in the mentioned months and whether it was a leap year in the Hebrew calendar.

The Hebrew calendar is a lunar calendar, with months that generally alternate between 29 and 30 days. Kislev can have either 29 or 30 days, and Nisan usually has 30 days. In the context of the passages from the Book of Nehemiah, Kislev is mentioned as the month when Nehemiah first heard of the state of Jerusalem in the first verse of the book. Then, it is during Nisan, the month mentioned in the second chapter, when Nehemiah is granted permission by King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it.

Given that the Jewish calendar starts with Nisan as the first month and Kislev usually as the ninth month, there are three full months that separate these two mentions: Tevet, Shevat, and Adar. If we approximate each month to be about 30 days, then the time between Kislev and Nisan would be roughly four months or about 120 days. However, given the variations in the number of days per month and possible intercalary month (Adar II) during leap years in the Jewish calendar, the exact time can vary a bit, but it would be roughly 3 to 4 months between the two dates in a regular year.

2. Where is Susa (Neh. 1:1)?

The ancient city of Susa, also known as Shushan, is located in southwestern Iran, adjacent to the modern city of Shush and about 60 km from the border with Iraq. It is situated in the Khuzestan province of southwestern Iran, near the foothills of the Zagros Mountains.

3. For which empire did Susa serve as one of three royal cities?

The Persian Empire

4. What other biblical character lived in Susa?

Esther

5. Did this character live before Nehemiah or after?

Esther lived before Nehemiah

6. Which empire did King Artaxerxes rule over and when (Neh. 2:1)?

Artaxerxes I was an Achaemenid (of the Achaemenid dynasty) King of Persia who reigned from 465–425BC

7. What was a cupbearer's (Neh. 1:11) status in the royal court?

In Nehemiah's time and other royal courts, a cupbearer was a high-ranking, highly trusted official whose duty was to serve the king's drinks and guard them against poisoning. This position of influence and close

proximity to the king often made the cupbearer a confidant and advisor, holding considerable sway in court decisions.

Key aspects of the cupbearer's status:

- **High Trust and Loyalty:** The primary qualification was complete trustworthiness, as the cupbearer literally held the king's life in his care by testing his drink for poison.
- **Position of Influence:** The constant and confidential relationship with the king granted the cupbearer significant influence and access to the monarch's inner circle.
- **Trusted Confidant:** The cupbearer often became a close confidant and advisor, allowing him to influence decisions and gain favour with the king.
- **Proximity to Power:** The position placed the cupbearer in a strategic location, enabling him to advocate for others and play a vital role in accomplishing important goals, as Nehemiah did for Jerusalem.
- **A Sign of Esteem:** Holding such a position indicated the high regard and confidence the king had in the individual, as Nehemiah's role with the Persian King demonstrates.

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