

INTERPRETATION

Reconstructing the Historical Background

FINDING INTERNAL EVIDENCE

Spend 5-10 minutes reading through Philemon looking for clues that indicate the story behind the writing of this letter. When you find a clue in the text mark "HB" beside it and jot it down in the space below.

Read Colossians 1:3-8 and 4:7-17. What do you learn about Epaphras, Onesimus and Philemon?

Read Acts 28 to learn more about Paul's imprisonment in Rome. What do you learn about Paul's circumstances?

Summarize your findings by answering the following questions.
WHO WROTE THE BOOK? What is his situation?

WHO WAS IT WRITTEN TO? What is his situation?

WHEN AND WHERE WAS IT WRITTEN?

EXPLORING EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

Learn more about the 1st century world by doing a bit of research on prisons and slavery in the 1st century. A Bible dictionary or commentary can be a helpful resource. Online resources can also be helpful (See the list below). For the purposes of the Inductive Bible Study seminar I have done the research for us and summarized it below. Feel free to add to this.

Prison

- In the Roman world imprisonment was legally not a penalty for a crime. Prisons were sort of "holding tanks" used to detain those awaiting trial or execution.
- They varied from being locked in stocks in the darkness of an inner cell to simply house arrest.

Slavery

- It is estimated that 85-90 percent of the inhabitants of Rome were slaves or of slave origin
- It was common for slaves to flee to Rome where they could gain their freedom, become Roman citizens and start a new life.
- While by law they were "human tools" they were granted many rights
- Allowed to accumulate money and were paid wages
- Slaves were farm workers, semiskilled labourers, artisans, architects, physicians, administrators, philosophers, grammarians, writers and teachers.
- Freed persons would often enter into business partnerships with former owners
- A person in slavery could expect to be set free by the time they reached age 30.
- While there were less than desirable conditions for some slaves, particularly farm labourers; they were also an essential part of Roman society.

Sources Used:

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Walls, A.F., "Prison." *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd Edition. Editors I. Howard Marshall, A.R. Millard, J.I. Packer and D.J. Wiseman. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993. (pg 962-963).

RECONSTRUCTING THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Using the information collected in answering the above questions and the information gathered from the external sources regarding slavery and prison, reconstruct the plot of the book. Write a summary of what the book is about and the events and circumstances surrounding it.

ONLINE STUDY RESOURCES

1. The Bible Project – The Bible Project offers free online video resources. You can find short videos that give you a short synopsis of what a book is about and the key points to look for. They also have themed videos covering various topics such as sabbath, heaven, justification, etc. They have also created a great series called “How to Read the Bible” which I highly recommend. www.bibleproject.com
2. The Bible Effect – The Bible Effect is a new online video series that focuses on the specific historical background information needed to understand each book of the Bible. They only have a few videos created at this point but as their video library grows this will be a great resource. www.thebibleeffect.com
3. www.biblestudytools.com – This site offers free commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias and lexicons as well as devotionals, reading plans, etc. Be aware, however, that some of the resources are dated.
4. www.blueletterbible.org – In addition to free commentaries, dictionaries and lexicons, this site offers outlines, timelines, charts, maps and more.