

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 22, Philippians Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 22, Philippians, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture covers the New Testament books of Philippians and Colossians. Regarding Philippians, the lecture explores the historical context of the city, Paul's reasons for writing the letter, and potential unifying themes, highlighting the Christological hymn in chapter 2 and its significance as an ethical model. **The focus on Colossians includes discussing the city's context, similarities with Ephesians, and the nature of a potential false teaching Paul addresses.** Mathewson proposes this teaching may stem from a form of Judaism, such as apocalyptic or Essene-like traditions. **The lecture emphasizes the supremacy of Christ as a central theme and examines another Christological hymn in chapter 1, portraying Jesus as Lord over creation and the embodiment of wisdom.** Mathewson concludes that Paul's primary goal was to warn against false teaching and affirm the all-sufficiency of Christ.

2. 44 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 22 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



**Mathewson_NTLit_S
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3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 22, Philippians

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Mathewson's lecture on Philippians and Colossians.

Briefing Document: Philippians and Colossians

Overall Summary:

Dr. Mathewson provides an overview of the letters to the Philippians and Colossians, focusing on their historical context, purposes, key themes, and specific passages. He emphasizes understanding these letters within the specific circumstances of the early churches they addressed. He also highlights how theological understanding emerges from writings addressing real problems faced by early Christians.

I. Philippians

A. Historical Context:

- Philippi was a town in Macedonia (northern Greece today), named after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great.
- It was a Roman colony, populated by veterans of the Roman army who were exempt from taxation.
- Paul addresses a church (or churches) in Philippi.

B. Purpose of the Letter:

- **Explanation of Paul's Imprisonment:** Paul writes from prison (likely house arrest) to assure the Philippians that his imprisonment hasn't hindered the gospel's advance. "Paul makes clear that his circumstances in prison have actually turned out for the advance of the gospel in the Roman Empire for Jesus Christ."
- **Thanks for Financial Support:** Paul thanks the Philippians for their financial support, something he didn't accept from the Corinthians. "So, in Philippi, Paul was happy to receive their financial support as a way so that he could devote himself to full-time ministry."
- **Addressing Problems in the Church:** *Disunity:* Paul addresses quarrels and dissension within the church, emphasizing the importance of unity. "You can see one of the biggest things that had Paul so upset is when the church was in danger of being divided...Paul wants to preserve the unity of the church."

- *Judaizers*: Paul confronts Judaizers who argue that faith in Jesus isn't enough and that adherence to Mosaic law is also necessary for salvation. "Paul is once again confronting a situation very similar to the one he did in Galatians, and that is the group of individuals that we call Judaizers who have infiltrated the church."

C. Dominant Theme(s):

- Mathewson argues that Philippians *doesn't* have a single, unifying theme. He suggests it's more of an "informative letter" touching on several topics. "Attempts to isolate the theme of Philippians as unity or joy or suffering or whatever, I think they all fall short, and all of those are themes...Paul is simply kind of addressing a number of issues."
- However, he notes that others have proposed themes like:
 - Joy
 - Suffering
 - Sharing/Participation in the gospel
 - Correct thinking (due to repeated emphasis on "having this mind")
 - Unity

D. Key Passage: Philippians 2:5-11 (Christological Hymn)

- This section is recognized as a Christological hymn (also found in Colossians). Debate exists whether Paul wrote it or is quoting a pre-existing hymn.
- **Structure:** The hymn has a U-shape, starting with Jesus' pre-existence as God, descending to his incarnation and death on the cross, and ascending to his exaltation. "The structure of this hymn actually takes a U-shape, it begins with Jesus Christ referred to as in the form of God...the hymn begins a downturn at the bottom of the U, where he takes on human form...but then the hymn takes an upward turn, so that now...Jesus Christ is exalted." Mathewson believes Jesus' exaltation results in a status *beyond* his pre-incarnate state.
- **High Christology:** The hymn affirms Jesus' pre-existence and deity.
- **Old Testament Connection:** Isaiah 45:23 ("every knee shall bow") which refers to God's uniqueness, is applied to Jesus, indicating his divine status. "That is texts that in the Old Testament referred to God now get applied to Jesus Christ...in

Isaiah chapter 45, it's in the context of the absolute uniqueness of God...How can that text get applied to Jesus Christ if he is not in some sense, God himself?"

- **Ethical Model:** The hymn functions primarily as a model for humility and self-sacrificing love (Philippians 2:1-4). "Primarily, this hymn or poem with this very exalted Christology is primarily functioning as a model for the kind of behavior that Paul wants to see in his readers in chapter 2:1-4."

II. Colossians

A. Historical Context:

- Colossae was a small, insignificant city in southwestern Asia Minor (modern Turkey).
- Paul apparently *did not* visit Colossae or plant the church there himself. "Paul apparently did not visit the city itself. This is one of the few cities that Paul writes a letter to that he himself did not plant the church."
- The letter shares striking similarities with Ephesians in vocabulary and wording, suggesting a close relationship.

B. Purpose of the Letter:

- **Combating False Teaching:** Paul is addressing a false teaching that is threatening to infiltrate the Colossian church. "Most today are convinced that yes, Paul was addressing some kind of deviant teaching." The evidence for this is found primarily in Chapter 2.
- The nature of this teaching is debated, but Mathewson argues it is a form of Judaism, possibly apocalyptic or Essene/Qumran-like, rather than a syncretism of Judaism and pagan beliefs. "I think Paul is not addressing some syncretism or some amalgamation of Jewish and pagan beliefs all mixed up in one, but I think he's just addressing a Judaism of the day, and that is either an apocalyptic type or an Essene or Qumran type of Judaism."
- He emphasizes that the practices mentioned (food restrictions, festivals, Sabbaths, angel worship, visions, asceticism) can all be found within various forms of Judaism.

C. Dominant Theme:

- **Supremacy of Christ:** Paul argues that because of Christ's supremacy and sufficiency, the Colossians don't need the alternative offered by the false teaching. "If I were to provide a main theme...that would be the supremacy of Christ."
- Paul's concern is not only theological but also ethical. He believes the false teaching's practices do nothing to overcome sin, while union with Christ empowers believers to overcome sin.

D. Key Passage: Colossians 1:15-20 (Christological Hymn)

- This is the second Christological hymn discussed.
- **Structure:** The hymn portrays Jesus as Lord over both the first creation (verses 15-17) and the new creation, established through his death and resurrection.
- **Wisdom and Kingship:** Jesus is presented as the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation, terms previously associated with wisdom in Jewish literature. "So, Jesus is portrayed as the wisdom of God, the true revealer of God." "Firstborn" refers to sovereignty and authority, not to Jesus being created.
- **Purpose in Colossians:** The hymn aims to convince the Colossians that they have everything they need in Christ, rendering the false teaching unnecessary. "If they hear this hymn and this poem, they will hopefully understand that they have everything they need in Christ, and they don't need what this mystical Judaism has to offer."

III. Key Takeaways

- Understanding the historical context is crucial for interpreting New Testament letters.
- Theology emerges from specific situations and problems faced by early churches.
- Christological hymns (Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20) are important expressions of early Christian belief about Jesus' identity and role.
- Paul's letters often address specific challenges and false teachings within the early church communities.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 22, Philippians

Philippians & Colossians: A Comprehensive Study Guide

I. Review of Key Concepts

Before diving into the quiz and essay questions, review these key concepts to solidify your understanding of Philippians and Colossians:

Philippians:

- **City of Philippi:** Its status as a Roman colony (tax-exempt, home to veterans) and its location in Macedonia (northern Greece).
- **Paul's Imprisonment (House Arrest):** The context of the letter and Paul's perspective on how his imprisonment impacts the Gospel.
- **Reasons for Writing:** Paul's motivations, including explaining his circumstances, thanking the Philippians for financial support, and addressing disunity and the influence of Judaizers.
- **Themes in Philippians:** Understand the different potential themes (joy, suffering, participation in the gospel, correct thinking, unity) and why no single theme is definitive.
- **Philippians 2:5-11 (Christological Hymn):** Its structure (U-shape), emphasis on Jesus' pre-existence and exaltation, its connection to Isaiah 45, and its function as an ethical model for the readers of Philippians.

Colossians:

- **City of Colossae:** Its insignificance compared to other cities Paul wrote to, its destruction by earthquake, and the fact that Paul had not personally visited it.
- **Relationship to Ephesians:** The overlap in vocabulary and themes and possible explanations for this phenomenon.
- **False Teaching in Colossae:** The evidence for a false teaching, the timing of Paul's address (delayed until chapter 2), and the various elements of the teaching.
- **Possible Sources of False Teaching:** The role of Judaism (apocalyptic or Essene/Qumran type) and the rejection of syncretism with other pagan religions.
- **Theme of Colossians:** The supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

- **Colossians 1:15-20 (Christological Hymn):** Its structure, its depiction of Jesus as Lord over both the first creation and the new creation, its use of wisdom language, and its emphasis on Jesus' sovereignty.
- **Practical Application of Colossians:** Understanding how the emphasis on Christ's supremacy addresses ethical concerns and the power over sin.

II. Quiz: Short Answer Questions

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What was the significance of Philippi being a Roman colony, and how might this have influenced the church there?
2. What are the three main reasons Dr. Mathewson suggests Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians?
3. What is the structure of the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:5-11, and what does this structure emphasize about Jesus' identity and role?
4. How does Paul use the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:5-11 to address the issues facing the Philippian church?
5. What is notable about Colossae as a recipient of one of Paul's letters?
6. What textual evidence suggests that Paul is addressing a false teaching in Colossians? Give two specific examples.
7. Why does Dr. Mathewson argue against the idea that the false teaching in Colossae is a syncretistic blend of Judaism and pagan beliefs?
8. According to Dr. Mathewson, what specific elements of Jewish thought may be behind the false teaching addressed in Colossians?
9. What is the main theme of Colossians, and how does Paul develop this theme in the letter?
10. According to Dr. Mathewson, what is Paul's underlying concern about this 'false teaching' in Colossians?

III. Quiz: Answer Key

1. Being a Roman colony meant Philippi was inhabited by Roman army veterans and was tax-exempt, creating a unique cultural and social environment. This status likely instilled a sense of Roman identity and pride, which might have presented

challenges or opportunities for the early church as it sought to establish its own distinct identity.

2. Paul wrote to explain his circumstances in prison, assuring the Philippians that the gospel was still advancing; to thank them for their financial support; and to address problems of disunity and the influence of Judaizers within the church. These diverse purposes highlight Paul's pastoral concern for the Philippian church.
3. The hymn has a U-shape, starting with Jesus' pre-existence in the form of God, descending to his incarnation and death on a cross, and then ascending to his exaltation. This structure emphasizes Jesus' self-humiliation and subsequent glorification by God.
4. Paul uses the hymn to encourage humility and self-sacrificial love among the Philippians, urging them to emulate Christ's example of selfless service. This emphasizes that unity in Christ requires a shared commitment to prioritizing the needs of others.
5. Colossae was a relatively insignificant city that Paul had never visited. This suggests that the letter was prompted by reports Paul received from others about issues in the church and that Paul was invested in its well-being even without having personally established it.
6. In Colossians 2:4, Paul states he is saying these things so no one will deceive them with fine-sounding arguments. In 2:8, he warns them not to be taken captive through philosophy and empty deceit.
7. Dr. Mathewson argues that there's little evidence to support the idea that Judaism would have syncretized with pagan beliefs to the extent suggested. Jewish religions, even when influenced by Hellenism, typically maintained their purity as the people of God.
8. Dr. Mathewson suggests that the false teaching may have been influenced by apocalyptic Judaism or Essene/Qumran-type Judaism. These forms emphasized mystical visions, worship of angels, strict observance of the Sabbath, ceremonial purity, and ascetic practices.
9. The main theme of Colossians is the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. Paul develops this theme by presenting Jesus as the creator and sustainer of all things, the head of the church, and the one in whom all the fullness of God dwells.

10. Paul is concerned that this 'false teaching' and its associated ascetic practices and mystical experiences do nothing to overcome the power of sin. Paul believes that the Colossians already possess the ability to overcome sin through their union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

IV. Essay Questions

Consider these essay questions to deepen your understanding of the material.

1. Discuss the challenges of identifying a single dominant theme in Philippians. How do the various potential themes contribute to the overall message of the letter?
2. Analyze the structure and theological significance of the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:5-11. How does Paul use this hymn to address specific issues within the Philippian church?
3. Compare and contrast the situation in Philippi with that in Colossae. How do the different contexts influence Paul's approach and emphasis in each letter?
4. Evaluate Dr. Mathewson's argument that the false teaching in Colossae is best understood as a form of Judaism, rather than a syncretistic blend of various religious beliefs. What evidence supports this interpretation, and what are its implications for understanding the letter?
5. Explore the theme of Christ's supremacy in Colossians. How does Paul develop this theme throughout the letter, and how does it function as a response to the false teaching he is addressing?

V. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Christology:** The study of the nature and person of Jesus Christ.
- **Christological Hymn:** A passage of Scripture, often poetic in nature, that emphasizes the divinity and significance of Jesus Christ.
- **Colony (Roman):** A settlement populated by Roman citizens, often veterans, who enjoyed special privileges such as tax exemptions.
- **Essenes:** A Jewish sect during the Second Temple period known for their ascetic practices, communal living, and strict adherence to purity laws.
- **Gnosticism:** A religious movement that emphasized secret knowledge (gnosis) as the key to salvation and often held dualistic views of the material and spiritual realms.
- **Hellenization:** The spread of Greek culture, language, and ideas.
- **House Arrest:** A form of imprisonment where a person is confined to their residence but enjoys more freedom than in a traditional prison.
- **Judaizers:** Jewish Christians who believed that Gentile converts needed to adhere to Mosaic Law, including circumcision, to be saved.
- **Mosaic Law:** The law given to Moses by God, as recorded in the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch).
- **Pre-existence (of Christ):** The belief that Jesus Christ existed in divine form before his incarnation as a human being.
- **Qumran:** An archaeological site near the Dead Sea where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, associated with a Jewish community believed to be the Essenes.
- **Syncretism:** The blending of different religious or cultural beliefs and practices.
- **Synoptic Problem:** The question of the literary relationship between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, given their similarities and differences.
- **Wisdom Literature:** A genre of literature found in the Old Testament (e.g., Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes) that focuses on practical wisdom and moral instruction.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 22, Philippians, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Philippians and Colossians

1. What was the city of Philippi like in the first century, and why was it significant in understanding Paul's letter to the Philippians?

Philippi was a Roman colony in Macedonia (modern-day northern Greece), named after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. It was inhabited by veterans from the Roman army who were exempt from taxation. This context is important because Paul was writing to a church in a city with a strong Roman identity and certain privileges, which may have influenced their perspective and expectations of Paul's ministry.

2. What were the main purposes behind Paul's letter to the Philippians?

Paul wrote the letter for multiple reasons: to explain his circumstances in prison, to thank the Philippians for their financial support, and to address problems within the church, particularly disunity and the influence of Judaizers.

3. Is there one dominant theme in Philippians, and if not, what are some of the proposed themes?

While some scholars propose themes like joy, suffering, or unity, Dr. Mathewson suggests that Philippians doesn't have a single dominant theme. Rather, it addresses several interconnected issues. Other possible themes include participation in the gospel and correct thinking.

4. What is the significance of the Christological hymn found in Philippians 2:6-11, and how does it relate to the rest of the letter?

The hymn describes Jesus' pre-existence, his incarnation and humbling himself even to death on a cross, and his subsequent exaltation. It is presented as a model for the Philippians to emulate, demonstrating the self-sacrificing love and humility that Paul encourages them to practice in their relationships with one another. Paul is addressing disunity within the church and uses the example of Christ to encourage the Philippians to think similarly.

5. What do we know about the city of Colossae and the church there?

Colossae was a relatively small and insignificant city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Paul likely had not visited the church himself; it had been planted by someone else.

6. What is the nature of the "false teaching" that Paul addresses in Colossians?

Paul warns against a philosophy that incorporates human traditions, ascetic practices (e.g., restrictions on food and drink), and the worship of angels. It is likely a form of Judaism with mystical and apocalyptic elements, possibly related to Essene or Qumran-like practices, rather than a syncretism of Jewish and pagan beliefs.

7. What is the main theme of Colossians, and how does Paul develop this theme throughout the letter?

The main theme of Colossians is the supremacy of Christ. Paul argues that believers have everything they need in Christ and should not be led astray by false teachings offering alternative spiritual experiences or practices. Paul presents Christ as Lord over both the first creation and the new creation.

8. How does the Christological hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 support Paul's arguments in the letter?

The hymn emphasizes Jesus' role as the image of God, the creator of all things, and the reconciler of all things through his death and resurrection. By presenting this exalted view of Christ, Paul underscores that believers already possess complete fullness and should not seek fulfillment in alternative teachings or practices.