

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 24, Philemon, Thessalonians Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 24, Philemon, Thessalonians, Philemon, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture explores Paul's letters to Philemon and the Thessalonians, specifically focusing on challenging questions. The discussion around Philemon centers on Paul's approach to slavery in the Greco-Roman world, questioning why he regulated it rather than outright condemning it. Transitioning to the Thessalonians, the lecture examines the reasons behind Paul's two letters to the church. Mathewson discusses the issues Paul addresses in 1 Thessalonians, such as sexual purity and the second coming of Christ, and the overreaction by the Thessalonians that prompted the second letter. The second letter clarifies that the "day of the Lord" had not yet arrived and that specific events must occur first, encouraging a balanced understanding of eschatology.

**2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 24 – 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
ession24.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 24, Philemon, Thessalonians

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from Dr. Mathewson's Lecture 24 on Philemon and Thessalonians:

Briefing Document: Philemon and Thessalonians (Dr. Dave Mathewson, NT Literature, Lecture 24)

I. Philemon: Paul and Slavery

- **Main Question:** Why doesn't Paul explicitly condemn slavery in his writings, particularly in Philemon, but instead focuses on regulating it?
- **Contextualization of Slavery in the Greco-Roman World: Not Racially Motivated:** Unlike the post-Civil War US context, slavery in the first century was not primarily based on race. People became slaves through conquest, debt, or other circumstances. "One did not become a slave because of one's race or anything like that. Usually, you became a slave because you were part of a nation or territory that had been conquered."
- **Varied Conditions:** The experience of slavery ranged from extremely harsh conditions (e.g., mine workers) to relatively better situations, where slaves might have better living conditions than before their enslavement. "slavery ran the gamut between slaves that operated in very cruel conditions, such as those that were conscripted for service in mines...whereas on the other end, you had some slaves that worked for wealthy masters that were treated very well."
- **Ubiquity and Economic Stability:** Slavery was deeply ingrained in Greco-Roman society and its economy. Paul may have believed that directly attacking it would be futile or even detrimental to the nascent Christian movement.
- **Paul's Implicit Approach:** Mathewson suggests that Paul may have believed the *gospel itself* would eventually dismantle slavery among Christians by emphasizing equality in Christ. "I wonder if Paul perhaps thought that the preaching of the gospel itself would have, at least with Christians, would eventually be the undoing and the unraveling of slavery."
- **F.F. Bruce's perspective:** The gospel's emphasis on unity and equality in Christ would create an environment where slavery would "wilt and die."

- Paul's actions in Philemon, urging Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ, implicitly challenge the institution of slavery.
- **Possible Counterfactual:** Mathewson speculates that Paul *may* have spoken more directly against slavery if he had lived in a society with greater freedom of speech.

II. 1 Thessalonians: Addressing Concerns About the Second Coming

- **Background:** Paul established a church in Thessalonica during one of his missionary journeys (Acts 17) but left under hostile circumstances. He later writes 1 Thessalonians to address specific issues he's heard about.
- **Structure:** Chapters 1-3: Praise and thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' progress in the gospel, designed to build rapport.
- Chapters 4-5: Specific instructions regarding:
- **Sexual Purity:** Paul urges the Thessalonians to maintain sexual purity as part of their sanctification, contrasting Christian morals with the looser morals of Greco-Roman society.
- **The Second Coming of Christ:** Paul addresses their questions and concerns about the *not-yet* aspect of eschatology, particularly focusing on those who have died.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (Key Passage):** Paul reassures the Thessalonians that those who have died in Christ will not miss out on the events of the Second Coming. "For the Lord himself, with the cry of command, and with the shout of an archangel, and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever."
- This passage is meant to encourage them, assuring them of their loved ones' participation in Christ's return. "Therefore, encourage one another with these words."
- **Eschatological Interpretations and the "Rapture":** Mathewson notes that this passage (1 Thess. 4:17, "caught up") is often associated with the concept of the "rapture."
- He briefly outlines different views on when the rapture will occur in relation to the "eschatological woes" or tribulation:
- **Pre-Tribulation:** The rapture happens *before* the tribulation.

- **Mid-Tribulation:** The rapture happens *in the middle* of the tribulation.
- **Post-Tribulation:** The rapture happens *after* the tribulation and is the same event as the second coming.
- Mathewson emphasizes that the Church has historically tolerated a diversity of views on this topic and cautions against using it to create division.
- **Contextual Considerations for Interpretation:** Paul states in 1 Thess 5:1 that he has already taught them about these matters, suggesting we only have a partial understanding.
- The phrase "by the word of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15) likely refers to Jesus' teachings, particularly those found in Matthew 24, which contains many parallels. "I personally think when Paul says, what I'm saying is the word of the Lord, he's basically, he is summarizing what Jesus taught in Matthew chapter 24."
- **The Problem Addressed:** The Thessalonians were concerned that those who had died before Christ's return would be at a disadvantage. Paul assures them that they will participate fully in the events of the Second Coming.

III. 2 Thessalonians: Correcting Misconceptions and Addressing Overzealous Expectations

- **The Problem:** The Thessalonians overreacted to Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians, believing that the "day of the Lord" had already arrived. "Apparently, the Thessalonians, after Paul wrote First Thessalonians...they've reacted to the opposite extreme, and they think that they are already in the day of the Lord."
- **Paul's Response:** Paul clarifies that the day of the Lord has *not* yet come because certain events must occur first. "Thessalonians, you are not in the day of the Lord because before the day of the Lord can come, certain things have to happen and they haven't happened yet."
- **2 Thessalonians 2:2-11 (Key Passage):** Paul lists three things that must occur *before* the day of the Lord:
 - **The Rebellion:** An apostasy or turning away from God.
 - **The Man of Lawlessness:** A figure possibly similar to an antichrist.
 - **The Restrainer:** Something or someone holding back evil, which must be removed.

- **Ambiguity and Interpretation:** Mathewson acknowledges that the exact meaning of these three elements is unclear. He points out that the Thessalonians likely had more information based on Paul's prior teaching. "maybe the Thessalonians and Paul know exactly what's being talked about, and we're the ones who are left in the dark about exactly what these are."

IV. Conclusion

When read together, 1 and 2 Thessalonians reveal a complex interplay of teaching, misunderstanding, and correction regarding eschatological expectations in the early church.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 24, Philemon, Thessalonians

Philemon and Thessalonians: A Study Guide

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the central question raised by the book of Philemon regarding Paul's stance on slavery?
2. Describe two ways that slavery in the Greco-Roman world differed from the common perception of slavery in the United States.
3. According to F.F. Bruce, how did Paul hope the gospel would influence slavery?
4. What was the primary reason for Paul writing 1 Thessalonians?
5. Name two issues that Paul addresses in 1 Thessalonians.
6. What is the significance of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, often read at funerals?
7. What are the eschatological woes or birth pangs, and how do they relate to the Jewish understanding of the end of history?
8. What are the pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation rapture views?
9. Why did Paul write 2 Thessalonians?
10. What three things does Paul mention in 2 Thessalonians that must happen before the Day of the Lord?

Quiz Answer Key

1. **What is the central question raised by the book of Philemon regarding Paul's stance on slavery?** The central question is why Paul doesn't explicitly condemn slavery outright and demand Philemon free Onesimus, instead choosing to regulate the practice within a Christian context.
2. **Describe two ways that slavery in the Greco-Roman world differed from the common perception of slavery in the United States.** First, slavery was not racially motivated, but based on conquest or financial circumstances. Second, the conditions of slavery varied widely, from cruel mine work to relatively comfortable domestic service with opportunities for freedom.

3. **According to F.F. Bruce, how did Paul hope the gospel would influence slavery?** F.F. Bruce believed that Paul thought the gospel, with its emphasis on unity and equality in Christ, would create an environment where slavery would eventually "wilt and die" due to the inherent contradiction between Christian principles and the institution of slavery.
4. **What was the primary reason for Paul writing 1 Thessalonians?** Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to address specific issues within the Thessalonian church after hearing news about their progress and certain problems that had arisen, as documented in Acts 17. He wanted to offer guidance and encouragement to the new believers.
5. **Name two issues that Paul addresses in 1 Thessalonians.** Paul addresses the issues of sexual purity, urging them to maintain holiness in their conduct, and the second coming of Christ, particularly concerning the fate of those who had already died.
6. **What is the significance of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, often read at funerals?** This passage provides comfort and hope by describing the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the gathering of believers, both living and deceased, to meet the Lord, assuring believers that death does not mean exclusion from God's future kingdom.
7. **What are the eschatological woes or birth pangs, and how do they relate to the Jewish understanding of the end of history?** Eschatological woes or birth pangs are a period of intense suffering and tribulation that Jewish literature envisioned as preceding the arrival of God's kingdom, analogous to the intensifying pains a woman experiences before giving birth.
8. **What are the pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation rapture views?** The pre-tribulation rapture view holds that believers will be caught up to meet the Lord before the tribulation period. The mid-tribulation view suggests the rapture will occur in the middle of the tribulation. The post-tribulation view believes the rapture and the second coming are the same event, occurring after the tribulation.
9. **Why did Paul write 2 Thessalonians?** Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to correct the misunderstanding that the Day of the Lord had already arrived, which stemmed from an overreaction to his teachings in 1 Thessalonians, and to address idleness among some members of the church.

- 10. What three things does Paul mention in 2 Thessalonians that must happen before the Day of the Lord?** Paul states that the rebellion (or apostasy) must occur, the man of lawlessness must be revealed, and the restrainer must be removed before the Day of the Lord can come.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast Paul's approach to the issue of slavery in Philemon and Colossians with modern perspectives on social justice. How might his approach be understood or critiqued in light of contemporary ethical frameworks?
2. Discuss the significance of eschatology in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. How do Paul's teachings on the second coming of Christ address the specific concerns of the Thessalonian church, and what broader theological implications can be drawn from his letters?
3. Analyze the different interpretations of the "rapture" as presented in the lecture, exploring the pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation views. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each position, and how do they impact the understanding of Christian hope and suffering?
4. Explore the challenges in interpreting 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, focusing on the ambiguity surrounding the "rebellion," the "man of lawlessness," and the "restrainer." How have these terms been understood historically, and what are the implications of different interpretations for contemporary Christian thought?
5. Examine the relationship between 1 and 2 Thessalonians. How does Paul's message evolve between the two letters, and what does this reveal about his pastoral approach and his understanding of the challenges faced by the early church?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Eschatology:** The study of the end times or last things, including beliefs about death, judgment, heaven, hell, and the second coming of Christ.
- **Greco-Roman World:** The lands and culture influenced by both Greek and Roman civilizations, particularly during the time of the Roman Empire.
- **Sanctification:** The process of becoming holy or set apart for God's purposes, growing in conformity to Christ.
- **Second Coming:** The future return of Jesus Christ to earth, as prophesied in the New Testament.
- **Day of the Lord:** A term used in both the Old and New Testaments to refer to a time of God's judgment and salvation, often associated with the end times.
- **Rapture:** A theological concept referring to the catching up of believers to meet the Lord in the air, often associated with 1 Thessalonians 4:17.
- **Tribulation:** A period of great suffering and distress, often associated with the end times and preceding the second coming of Christ.
- **Pre-Tribulation Rapture:** The belief that the rapture of believers will occur before the tribulation period.
- **Mid-Tribulation Rapture:** The belief that the rapture of believers will occur in the middle of the tribulation period.
- **Post-Tribulation Rapture:** The belief that the rapture of believers will occur after the tribulation period, coinciding with the second coming of Christ.
- **Apostasy:** The abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief.
- **Man of Lawlessness:** A figure mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2, often associated with the antichrist, who will rebel against God and promote lawlessness before the Day of the Lord.
- **Restrainer:** A force or entity mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2 that is currently holding back the full manifestation of evil, but will eventually be removed, allowing the man of lawlessness to be revealed.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 24, Philemon, Thessalonians, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Philemon and Thessalonians FAQ

- Why doesn't Paul explicitly condemn slavery in Philemon and other New Testament writings?** Paul's approach to slavery is complex and doesn't involve outright condemnation. Several factors may explain this. First, slavery in the Greco-Roman world differed significantly from post-Civil War slavery in the United States. It wasn't primarily based on race but often resulted from conquest or economic circumstances. Second, conditions for slaves varied greatly; some faced terrible conditions, while others, particularly those working for wealthy masters, were better off than before. Third, slavery was deeply ingrained in the Roman economy, and directly attacking it might have been futile or even harmful to the early church's survival. Paul may have believed that the Gospel's emphasis on equality in Christ would ultimately lead to slavery's demise by creating an environment where it could not thrive.
- What are the main reasons Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians?** Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to address specific issues within the Thessalonian church after his brief visit (as recorded in Acts 17). He commends them for their progress in the Gospel, offering thanksgiving and praise in the first three chapters. However, he also provides instructions on sexual purity (emphasizing holiness and sanctification) and clarifies misunderstandings regarding the second coming of Christ, especially concerning those who had already died.
- What is the significance of Paul's discussion of the resurrection of the dead and the second coming of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4?** Paul addresses the Thessalonians' concern that deceased Christians might miss out on the events surrounding Christ's return. He assures them that the dead in Christ will rise first and participate fully, emphasizing that they will not be at a disadvantage. This passage (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) is meant to offer encouragement and hope. Paul's teaching also touches on eschatology, the study of the end times, though he doesn't provide a detailed timeline.
- What are the different views on the "rapture" as discussed in relation to 1 Thessalonians 4?** The term "rapture" is derived from the Latin translation of "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Different interpretations exist regarding

when this "catching up" to meet the Lord will occur in relation to the "tribulation" (eschatological woes):

- **Pre-tribulation rapture:** The rapture happens before the tribulation.
- **Mid-tribulation rapture:** The rapture occurs in the middle of the tribulation.
- **Post-tribulation rapture:** The rapture and the second coming of Christ are the same event, occurring after the tribulation.
- **Why does Paul write a second letter to the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians)?** Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians because the Thessalonians had overreacted to his teachings in 1 Thessalonians regarding the second coming of Christ. They mistakenly believed they were already in the "day of the Lord," the time when God would return, judge evil, and establish His kingdom.
- **What is the "day of the Lord," and why were the Thessalonians concerned about it?** The "day of the Lord" is a term used to describe the time when God would intervene in history to judge the world, vindicate His people, and establish His kingdom. The Thessalonians were concerned because they believed this period had already begun. They became alarmed that they were in the end times.
- **According to 2 Thessalonians, what events must occur before the "day of the Lord" can come?** Paul states that certain events must precede the day of the Lord. However, these events are somewhat ambiguous:
 - **The rebellion:** An apostasy or turning away from God.
 - **The man of lawlessness:** Potentially an antichrist figure or a general spirit of rebellion.
 - **The restrainer:** Something or someone holding back evil, which must be removed. Interpretations range from God or the Holy Spirit to the Church or the Roman Empire.
- **What is the overall message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians regarding the second coming of Christ?** Together, 1 and 2 Thessalonians teach about the second coming while urging believers to avoid both complacency and excessive anxiety. Paul encourages them to live pure lives, comfort one another with the hope of Christ's return, and remain steadfast in their faith without being deceived into thinking the end has already come. He emphasizes that while the details surrounding the end times are not fully known, believers can be confident in God's ultimate victory and their participation in it.