

nothing to help others. **15** Paul closes by encouraging acceptance of one another in the faith (Rm 14:1,2). Because of our common obedience to the gospel, we have a common fellowship that extends to all disciples throughout the world (Jd 3). Our discipleship is manifested by our acceptance of all disciples.

Paul's Letter To Philemon

Author

From a Roman prison, the apostle Paul wrote this letter to a longtime friend named Philemon (See "Author" in the introduction to Rm).

Date

This short letter, with the letters of Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians, was written by Paul during his first Roman imprisonment somewhere around A.D. 61 to 63 (Compare vss 1,9,23; Ep 3:1; Ph 1:13; Cl 4:18). Some believe that the letter could have been written during Paul's Caesarean imprisonment in A.D. 58-60 before he left for Rome. Others have affirmed that it may have been written during an imprisonment in Ephesus around A.D. 55,56 (See 1 Co 15:32; 2 Co 11:23). However, because Paul mentions many of the same people he mentions in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, it is probable that this letter was written during the Roman imprisonment.

Many of the same people that are mentioned in the Colossian letter are mentioned in this letter, indicating that Philemon was closely associated with the church in Colosse and those with whom Paul worked. Key individuals that are mentioned in both letters are Archippus (vs 2; Cl 4:17), Onesimus (vs 10; Cl 4:9), Epaphras (vs 23; Cl 1:7; 4:12), Mark (vs 24; Cl 4:10), Aristarchus (vs 24; Cl 4:10), Demas (vs 24; Cl 4:14) and Luke (vs 24; Cl 4:14). This letter was probably delivered to Philemon by Tychicus and Onesimus who also delivered letters to the Ephesians and Colossians (See vss 10,12; Ep 6:21; Cl 4:3,7-9).

Purpose

Philemon lived in the vicinity of the churches of Colosse and Laodicea (Cl 4:15). From what Paul states in verses 1 and 19, it appears that he was a longtime friend of Paul to whom he was indebted for help in the past. Philemon was possibly converted by Paul. An assembly of disciples met in the house of Philemon (vs 2). He was the master of Onesimus who was his slave. Onesimus had run away to Rome where he was converted by Paul.

Paul addressed this letter to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus who was instructed by Paul to return to Philemon. Paul thus writes to encourage Philemon to receive Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. It was Roman law that runaway slaves either be branded or beaten to death in the presence of other slaves. It is doubtful that Philemon would have inflicted such punishment upon Onesimus. However, in order to reassure Onesimus and to instruct Philemon, Paul wants to make sure that no punishment is inflicted upon Onesimus when he returns. Paul also wants Philemon to prepare a place for him to stay because he is confident that he is about to be released from prison.

When reading this letter, we must keep in mind that slavery was a part of the socioeconomic structure of the Roman Empire. Some students believe that as many as a third to a half of the population of the Empire was composed of slaves. In such a society, many slaves and masters were converted to Christianity. The Christian masters thus found themselves in a situation where they had Christian slaves but would not sell these brothers to unbelievers. Therefore, the Christian slaves remained in the care of their Christian masters. We do not know what type of arrangement was made in such situations, though from this letter Paul does send Onesimus back to Philemon. He expects Philemon to deal with Onesimus after the principles of Christian conduct. In order to deal with the socioeconomic situation, inspired instructions were given to Christian masters and slaves that they maintain their relationships according to Christian principles until the abolition of slavery as a result of Christian principles being engrafted into society as a whole (See comments Ep 6:5-9; Cl 3:22 - 4:1). We would also assume that Christian slaves gained their freedom from their Christian masters since Christian slaves became more than slaves when they were converted. This seems to be the indication from what Paul says in verse 16. Paul possibly hoped that Philemon would free Onesimus and send him back to Rome to minister to him while he was in prison. Paul did not need a personal slave. He needed company. He was in a situation where he needed company as he stood trial for his life. The sincerity and zeal of Onesimus would have brought him much comfort.

1 ¶ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy *our* brother, to Philemon our dearly beloved and fellow worker,

2 and to our sister Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in your house.

3 ¶ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 ¶ I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,

5 hearing of your love and faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all saints,

6 so that the sharing of your faith may become effective through the acknowledgement of every good thing that is in us in Christ.

7 For we have great joy and comfort in your love because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

8 ¶ Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to order you *to do* what is proper,

9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus,

INTRODUCTION

1 Prisoner of Christ: As in the other prison letters, Paul introduces himself to Philemon concerning that which Philemon already knows. Paul was in prison in Rome because he was preaching the gospel (vs 9; Ep 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tm 1:8). He was there because of the false accusations that had been laid against him in Judea. He had thus appealed to Caesar's court. At the time he writes, he is about to stand before this court (At 23:11; 25:11; 26:32). When Paul addresses Philemon in this letter, he refers to himself as a prisoner. He does not refer to himself as an apostle because Philemon does not question his apostleship. He is simply Paul, a good friend of Philemon. **Timothy:** Timothy was known by the churches in Asia Minor, and evidently well-known by Philemon. Timothy was with Paul during Paul's ministry in Phrygia. At the time of the writing of this letter, he was present with Paul. **Philemon:** The few things we know about this brother is that he was a Christian who lived in Colosse, a city of Phrygia. He was a slave owner, and possibly a man of substantial means. Paul probably converted Philemon (See vs 19), which conversion possibly took place in Ephesus (See At 19:19,20). **2 Apphia:** This could possibly be the wife of Philemon. **Archippus:** This may have been the son of Philemon (Cl 4:17). He was a fellow evangelist with Paul. **Church in your house:** In the absence of church buildings, the early church met in the homes of the members (See Rm 16:5; 1 Co 16:19). When the emphasis of brethren is on relationships, where they meet is not important. The focus of the assemblies of the church must be on praising God and establishing relationships with fellow disciples. The location where such is accomplished is not important, though the informal atmosphere in a home is better than a public building. Christians should seek to be with one another as much as possible in order to grow in love and unity (Hb 10:24,25). **3 Grace ... peace:** This is Paul's signature when introducing a letter. The one who had experienced so much grace in his life by being delivered from his past sin of persecuting the church, wants to remind the church the reason for its existence (1 Co 15:10). Without grace there would be no church because there would have been no event of the cross. The church exists because of the cross. Without the cross, the church would not exist (See Ep 1:2). The church is the result of people's response to the grace of God that was manifested on the cross for our sins of the world (Ep 2:1-10; Ti 2:11).

PHILEMON'S LOVE AND FAITH

4 Making mention of you: As with many others, Philemon found a special place in the personal prayers of the apostle who continually prayed for the saints (See Ep 1:16; 1 Th 1:2; 2 Th 1:3). **5 Hearing of your love and faith:** The reputation of brethren should be about their love for the church (See comments Jn 13:34,35; 2 Jn 1-6; 3 Jn 6). Both Onesimus and Epaphras had reported to Paul that Philemon was a faithful and loving person, both toward Jesus and toward his brethren (Ep 1:15; Cl 1:4; 4:12; 1 Th 3:6). **6** Paul writes to deal with the problem of Onesimus. Therefore, he compliments Philemon concerning his reputation and the sharing of his faith. He reminds Philemon of his good Christian behavior, knowing that he will continue such in reference to the delicate subject of Onesimus' flight to Rome. What Paul wants Philemon to do is to see God's forgiveness in his life in order to show forgiveness to Onesimus (See Mt 6:12,13; 18:21-35; Cl 3:12,13; compare Js 2:13). **7 The saints have been refreshed by you:** Philemon was not a nominal disciple. Paul's commendation of his Christian behavior reveals that this brother had a great impact on all those with whom he came into contact. He was a disciple who had impact on the lives of others outside his region.

PLEA FOR ONESIMUS

8 As a Christ-sent apostle, Paul could have commanded Philemon to carry out the following requests that he makes. But apostles did not function in this matter with the church (See comments At 6:1-6). They revealed the truth, but left obedience to the truth to the free-will choice of those who heard. Paul here knows the character of Philemon, and thus, there is no need for a command. **9 For love's sake:** By appealing to Philemon's love, Paul knows that greater results will occur (1 Jn 4:11). Therefore, based on Philemon's love, Paul is urging him to take the right actions concerning the situation of Onesimus. **Paul, the aged:** What Paul says here is for the purpose of moving Philemon to accept his wishes because he is an "old man in prison." Knowing the great friendship between Paul and Philemon, we could possibly assume that Paul had a smile on his face as he wrote these words to his long-time friend Philemon with whom he had shared many experiences. Paul was probably in his sixties when he wrote this letter. **10 My son Onesimus:** Paul had converted Onesimus. For this reason, he refers to him as his son (See 1 Pt 1:22,23). The Greek name

whom I have begotten in my chains,
11 who formerly was to you unprofitable, but now profitable to you and to me.
12 ¶ I am sending him back to you in person, that is, my own heart,
13 whom I desired to retain with me, so that on your behalf he might have ministered to me in the chains of the gospel.
14 But without your consent I did not want to do anything so that your goodness would not be, as it were, by compulsion, but willingly.
15 ¶ For perhaps he departed for a season so that you should receive him forever,
16 not now as a bondservant, but more than a bondservant, a beloved brother, especially

to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.
17 ¶ If you count me a partner, receive him as *you would* me.
18 If he has wronged you or owes *you* anything, put that on my account.
19 I, Paul, am writing *it* with my own hand, I will repay *it*. I do not want to mention to you how you owe me even your own self as well.
20 Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in the Lord.
21 ¶ Having confidence in your obedience, I wrote to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.
22 But at the same time prepare *for* me also

Onesimus means "profitable." Onesimus was a slave of Philemon (vs 16), and now, he is profitable to Philemon for the work of the ministry. Onesimus had evidently met Paul when Paul had formerly stayed with Philemon. For this reason, when Onesimus ran away he went to Rome. Sometime after he arrived in Rome, he was converted as Paul talked of his needed returned to Philemon. **11 Formerly ... unprofitable:** This could refer to Onesimus' being unprofitable to Philemon as a runaway slave. It could also refer to Onesimus' being unprofitable to Philemon in reference to spiritual matters. Whatever the case, Onesimus was now profitable to Philemon in spiritual matters. He was not only profitable to Philemon, but also to Paul for the work of the ministry. **12 Sending him back:** Paul could have kept Onesimus with him. But he respects civil law in sending him back to Philemon. What was right according to law was that he return to Philemon. In fear of being captured and falling under Roman law that would demand punishment, it is assumed that Paul sent Onesimus back in the company of Tychicus who bore also the letter to the Colossians (See Cl 4:7-9). **13** Paul desired that Onesimus remain with him in order that he be Philemon's minister to him while in prison. However, he freely returned Onesimus to Philemon in order that Philemon have the right to exercise his choice in this matter. Thus Paul's action honored both Roman law and the right of Philemon to make his decision concerning what must be done. **14 Not ... by compulsion:** If Philemon's actions in this matter would have been by obedience to a command of Paul, then it would not have been a choice on his part to make a decision to do good to Paul. Good leaders give the people options by which they can use their choice to act. Dictators steal away the freedom of people to work out of love. **15 For perhaps:** Paul could not say that it was in the providence of God that Onesimus ran away in order to be converted (See Gn 45:5-8). What did happen was a wrong choice on the part of Onesimus that turned into good by his obedience to the gospel. God can use our wrong choices to bring about good, but He does not move us to make wrong choices. **16 In the flesh and in the Lord:** Onesimus' conversion did not free him from his civil duties as a slave. He remained a slave to Philemon.

However, now that he had obeyed the gospel, he was also a brother in Christ. Onesimus was now more than a physical slave to Philemon. Philemon should now consider him above a mere slave. In these words Paul is giving his indirect teaching that slavery would be abolished from the Christian community as Christian masters considered their Christian slaves to be more than slaves. **17** Paul indirectly obligates Philemon to receive Onesimus. Paul and Philemon had previously labored together in evangelism (vs 1). Paul is now asking Philemon to accept Onesimus as a fellow laborer as Philemon had accepted him. **18** In order to emphasize his request to Philemon, Paul states that he will stand surety for any financial loss that Philemon may have incurred as a result of Onesimus' departure. **19 You owe me:** This is Paul's gentle reminder that Philemon was indebted to Paul for his possible conversion of Philemon. Paul had made great sacrifices in order to preach the gospel free of charge to those as Philemon who obeyed in order to receive the free gift of God's grace. Paul plays on the conscience of Philemon in order that he deal justly with Onesimus according to all that Paul had done to him. **20** If Philemon did according to what Paul requested, then Paul would be spiritually refreshed. He would be reassured that his labors on behalf of Philemon would have produced Christian behavior.

PAUL'S RELEASE

21 You will do even more: It is possible that Paul is confident that not only will Philemon set Onesimus free, but that Philemon will also send Onesimus to minister to Paul (vss 13,14). Whatever happens, Paul is sure that Philemon will obey his conscience in this matter. **22 Prepare a guest room for me:** All those who had heard of Paul's imprisonment were praying for him. He trusted that these prayers were about to be answered in his release (Ph 1:25; 2:24). The pronouns "you" and "your" are plural in the text, and thus, Paul is requesting that the entire church in Philemon's house pray for his release. Paul does not explain how God would answer these prayers. He simply has confidence that God can work in a way that will bring about his release. If this letter were written during Paul's first Roman imprison-

a guest room, for I trust that through your prayers I will be restored to you.
23 ¶ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

24 *as well as* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.
25 ¶ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit.

ment of A.D. 61-63, then it is possible that after his release he revisited the area of Asia Minor (See comments At 28:31). Paul here shows great confidence that God will answer the prayers of the saints, and thus, requests that Philemon prepare a place for him to stay. **23,24** Epaphras was possibly an evangelist who worked in the area of Colosse and had journeyed to Rome on behalf of the church (Cl 1:7; 4:10-13). Paul refers to him as a fellow prisoner. Reference could possibly be in the spiritual sense that he was a prisoner in the service of the Lord (See Cl 4:10). However, it was not uncommon for

evangelists in these times, and especially the decades to come, to be imprisoned for their preaching of the gospel. Paul also mentions the following fellow evangelists who were with him: **Mark** (At 12:12,25; 15:27-39; Cl 4:10; see "Author" in the introduction to At), **Aristarchus** (At 19:29; 27:2; Cl 4:10), **Demas** (Cl 4:14; 2 Tm 4:10), and **Luke** (2 Tm 4:11; see "Author" in introduction to Lk). **25 Grace:** See Gl 6:18; Ph 4:23; 2 Tm 4:22. In this closing of his letter to Philemon, Paul calls on the favor of Jesus upon the entire being of Philemon. It is Paul's prayer that Jesus show special favor on the godly man.

The Letter To The Hebrews

Author

Because the Spirit-inspired author does not identify himself, it is difficult to determine who actually wrote this letter. Most Bible students tend to agree that Paul wrote the book. However, Barnabas, Luke, Apollos, Silas and others have also been suggested as possible authors. There are several reasons why it is affirmed that Paul wrote Hebrews. (1) The literary style and contents of the book reflect both the style of writing and subjects that Paul usually deals with in his writings. (2) The early church writers as Eusebius and Origen affirm that Paul wrote Hebrews. (3) The author was a close friend of Timothy (See comments 13:23). (4) The closing comments of chapter 13 are similar to comments that Paul uses in those letters where he identifies himself as the writer. Though these points give evidence to Paul as the author of the letter, there is no clear evidence that he was actually the author. Therefore, it is best to leave our speculations as just that and affirm that it was the desire of the Holy Spirit not to inform us concerning the human hand that wrote this letter.

Date

The oldest New Testament manuscripts entitle this letter "Hebrews." The readers are of Jewish heritage because of the great emphasis in the letter on the Old Testament law. The recipients were formerly Jewish in religion who had been converted to Christ. Therefore, the date for writing would have been somewhere in the latter 60s since the recipients had been disciples for some time.

There is a great emphasis in the book on the subject of the temple and the Old Testament law (9:6-10; 12:27; 13:10). In view of the fact that Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in A.D. 70, we could suppose that the letter was written sometime before A.D. 70 (See comments Mt 24).

Those to whom the letter was directed had been Christians for some time (See 2:1-4; 5:12). By the time the letter was written, they had endured the initial persecution that was led by those still in the bondage of Judaism (10:32-34; see comments of Gl). Therefore, if the book were written by Paul, it would possibly have been written anywhere from the middle of the 50s to A.D. 64 or 65 (See comments 13:23). If it were written by someone else, it could have been written in the 60s, but prior to A.D. 68. Because the recipients were under great pressure to return to Judaism, we would conclude that the letter was written during the time when national Israel was seeking to throw off Roman occupation of Palestine. The tension of these efforts occurred in the 60s, and thus we would assign the date of writing to the 60s.

Theme

The writer affirms the superiority of the new covenant over the old because of the better priesthood of Jesus. For this reason our salvation is by faith in Christ as opposed to trusting in the sacrifices of the Old Testament law (See ch 11).