

Religion and the Legacies of Slavery

“Enslavement in the Formation of Earliest Christianity”

January 30, 2023

In preparation for our discussion of what it means for us that Christianity was formed in a society where slavery was ubiquitous, you may want to read in advance some of the texts from the Bible that will be discussed (listed below). Various translations of these are available on-line at biblegateway.com. Note that in many translations, the presence of enslaved persons or the discussion of enslavement may be obscured by referring to these as “servant,” “maid,” “steward,” “service,” or with related terms. In addition, enslaved persons performed a wide variety of labors, and so they might be referred to in terms of their specific tasks or roles.

Today, some are encouraging the use of the terms “enslaved,” “enslaver,” and “enslavement” rather than “slave,” “master,” and “slavery” in order to indicate that these roles and institutions are not fixed and natural, as some have claimed, but are categories that point us toward certain discourses and practices that have histories.

Luke 15:11-32

Luke 12:41-48

Matthew 18:23-35

Galatians 3:27-4:31 (and Genesis 16:1-16; 21:8-21)

1 Corinthians 6:15-20; 7:17-24

Philemon

Philippians 2:1-11

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

1 Peter, esp. 2:11-25