

Slavery and the Bible Does the Bible condone slavery?

By Eric Rolon
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There are a lot of misconceptions about slavery and how it relates to the Bible. Many people decry Christianity and the Bible because they have an incomplete understanding of the text and the themes there in. They assume that because historically God's people owned slaves or had servants, that the Bible therefore condones slavery, even in our modern era. In this deep-dive we are gonna be tackling a lot of information and setting the record on this very incendiary topic straight.

The Bible did allow slavery, but did not and does not condone slavery as we've seen in the early centuries in Rome or the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s in Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Slavery exists in the Bible for sure. Abraham specifically owned slaves or "people who were bought with his money." There were slaves and servants in the Bible, and it's important to point out that while all slaves were servants, not all servants were slaves. Also not all masters had slaves either, but instead had servants. So when we see the word servant in the Bible we can't just assume that the word slave is meant. Context matters.

Ancient World Slavery was a very real thing and appears to have been a common practice in many ancient societies such as Egypt, China, Israel, Sumer, Mesopotamia, and all over the Middle East. Historically: slaves were taken as spoils of war, kidnapped into slavery, sold into slavery, or sold themselves voluntarily into slavery or indentured servitude to pay off debts. The treatment of slaves varied from nation to nation, and the slaves had little to no rights as they were viewed as property. They were often treated quite harshly and inhumanly. Because of this, a number of ancient societies had laws in place to regulate slavery. To name a few - the Babylonians had the Code of Hammurabi (1750 BC), the Egyptians had a set of laws, the Romans had a set of laws, and the Jews had a set of laws in the holy scriptures known as the Torah which we know as the first five books of the Bible. The Bible has very specific laws and rules for the treatment of enslaved individuals in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Ephesians, and Colossians. The Bible did allow slavery given that very specific methods were employed, specific conditions were met, and that the slaves were treated according the scripture's laws and rules.

All forms of slavery that we see in historical Africa such as debt slavery, enslavement of war captives, military slavery, man-stealing, and criminal slavery are present in the Bible. However, God's people did not engage in all these forms of slavery, and were in fact subjected to all these forms of slavery themselves throughout the Old Testament. During this presentation I want you to bear the following statement in the back of your mind. God's aim in the biblical institution of slavery and servitude was two-fold: **Punishment & Discipline** and **Rehabilitation & Redemption**. I'll expound on this further as we continue.

From my research there were only allowable 2 methods by which one of God's people to take (not purchase) a person as a slave.

1 – Slaves could be taken as spoils of war according to Deuteronomy 20:10-15.

2 – A person could receive another into servitude as a debt-slave. – Leviticus 25:35-55

This was a practice where individuals could sell themselves into slavery to pay off debts that they could not pay on their own. This was a way for a debtor to insure that they were taken care of financially and physically. They were fed, clothed, employed, provided with protection, and sheltered from the elements.

NOTE – Before we unpack these methods, it's important to point out that outside of taking war-spoil, the nation of Israel never simply captured and sold humans for profit like the Phoenicians, Philistines, Babylonians, and others did.

Spoils of War – People were taken as slaves during times of war. They were viewed as the spoils of war, but not in the POW sense that we see today. If the Israelite army was to fight a hostile nation's army consisting of Men and not *Nephilim* or *Rephaim* (which were the forbidden offspring of man and angel and were to be utterly destroyed - Genesis 6:4), there was a code of conduct that they were to follow. The Israelites were to first offer terms of peace. If the hostile army refused their offer of peace, all the opposing men would be put to death while at the same time all the women and children placed into servitude. By accepting the Israelite terms of peace, the opposing army and civilians would not be put to death. They would be taken as slaves (coming under the protection and provision of Israel), being put to forced labor, and treated as servants.

NOTE – These armies were hostile to God and his people. The offering of servitude over death is most often viewed and should be viewed as an act of mercy. This is illustrated in Deuteronomy 20:10-15 “**10** When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. **11** And if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you. **12** But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. **13** And when the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword, **14** but the women and the little ones, the livestock, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as plunder for yourselves. And you shall enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the Lord your God has given you. **15** Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not cities of the nations here.”

NOTE – The concept of surrender wasn't just on a nation as a whole. A nation whose people stood as a unified front in their resistance of surrender were treated as such. But surrender was down to the individual and family level as well. Even if their nation refused terms of surrender, a person could surrender themselves or their family and expect to receive the treatment laid out in Deuteronomy 20:10-15. A great example of this is in the story of Rahab the harlot. In Joshua 2, Rahab hides the two Israelite spies that were doing recon work in Jericho. In exchange for concealing them from the pursuing men of Jericho and aiding them in their escape from the city, she essentially surrendered to Israel by making a deal with the two spies that once the city was conquered that her and her whole family be spared. The Israelite spies swore to Rahab that no harm would come to her and all who were under her roof during the assault of the city. And in Joshua 7 when the walls of Jericho came a-tumblin' down, Israel remembered Rahab's kindness and made good on their promise. God additionally blessed Rahab with an unfathomable honor as she would then become included in the genealogy of Jesus.

As I mentioned earlier, if slaves were taken as spoil, purchased, or received as debt slaves, the Israelites were given specific instruction on how said slaves were to be treated. It was understood that the slave (who was now property) was under the care and protection of their owner. Adequate food, clothing, housing, and marital rights had to be provided to the slave. Not often but sometimes they were even entrusted with money and or the conducting of business on behalf of their master. According to Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15, slaves/bond servants were to go free after 6 years. Exodus 21:2 “When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing.”

Deuteronomy 15:12-15 takes it a step further and says “**12** If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. **13** And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. **14** You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. **15** You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.”

Now skeptics may say that this freedom and treatment to be granted only applied to “Hebrew” slaves. I believe that according to Genesis 17, a non-Hebrew slave who is baptized (or “circumcised” rather if they were male) into the covenant of Abraham is afforded the same treatment as a Hebrew-born slave. Genesis 17:12-13 “**12** He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, **13** both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.” Even Jesus states in John 8:35 “**The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.**”

For those who still remain skeptical on the issue of treatment differences between native and foreign slaves, Leviticus 19 puts the final nail in the coffin. Leviticus 19:33-34 says “**33** When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. **34** You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” Furthermore Deuteronomy 27:19 goes on to say “‘Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’” God makes it very clear that the same treatment and justice that the Hebrews enjoyed, had to be afforded to the sojourner and the foreigner residing among Israel as well.

Slaves of any God-fearing Hebrew house would have served God as their master would have personally seen to. The blessings and favor God bestowed on the master of the house would have trickled down, covering all who were under his roof. Joshua 24:15 “And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Slaves were viewed as property and could be done with as their master pleased – with some exceptions. A master could discipline his slaves/bond servants, however a master was not allowed to savagely abuse them. Exodus 21:20-21 “**20** When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged. **21** But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.”

Exodus 21:26-27 “**26** When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. **27** If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.”

We’re gonna sidetrack her for a minute or two. You may say “Ok fine, slaves weren’t allowed to be savagely beaten, but because slaves were viewed as property meant that it was perfectly acceptable for them to be raped and made into sex objects.” This was not the case.

A slave girl could be taken as a wife, in which case she was viewed and treated as family. However female slaves were not allowed to be raped or simply used as some carnal plaything. A man could not just sleep with a slave because of an infatuation or even a mutual infatuation between slave and owner either. Instead he had to be willing to commit his life to her and be her husband. There were specific rights afforded to her during a time of waiting that had to be observed before the marital ceremony was to take place. Deuteronomy 21:10-14 **Marrying Female Captives** **10** “When you go out to war against your enemies, and the Lord your God gives them into your hand and you take them captive, **11** and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire to take her to be your wife, **12** and you bring her home to your house, she shall shave her head and pare her nails. **13** And she shall take off the clothes in which she was captured and shall remain in your house and lament her father and her mother a full month. After that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. **14** But if you no longer delight in her, you shall let her go where she wants. But you shall not sell her for money, nor shall you treat her as a slave, since you have humiliated/humbled her.”

Sex is sacred, and the Bible has a fair amount to say about sex and its sacredness in both the Old and New Testaments. Punishments for breaking the Levitical laws in the Old Testament regarding sex and adultery were severe. Deuteronomy 22:22-24 “**22** If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel. **23** If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, **24** then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.”

Betrothal was as legally binding in Biblical days as marriage. The breaking of betrothal pledges was viewed as adultery, as betrothal joined a man and woman in a promise to each other and only each other even though the couple had not yet undergone their marriage ceremony or consummated their union. In the latter of the aforementioned two instances not just the man was put to death, but the betrothed woman also, as the word “meet” and the lack of indication of forced compliance shows that she broke her marital pledge by willfully participating in the sin. Mosaic law held that by not crying for help, the woman consented to the sexual encounter. This

begs the question: What if a man seized a betrothed woman with intent to sexually accost her against her will and threatened her with violence or death into keeping quiet? Hard though it may seem, God was very black and white on this issue and demanded that a show of resistance be made against the attacker. In the eyes of God, going along with a sin no matter the cost of opposing it (even unto death) was sinful in and of itself. Logically, her life was forfeit if she went along with the sin that God assures us would be found out (Deuteronomy 32:23, Matthew 10:26, Luke 12:2-3). So though she might have endured a barrage of blows from her incensed would-be rapist while help was on the way, it would still have been a better option to cry out for help to her accountable neighbors who would be expected by law to intervene immediately and violently on her behalf. Please don't misunderstand me, I'm not denigrating the woman in this hypothetical situation as I can only imagine the paralyzing fear that would grip someone in her position. Again God was very black and white on this issue. However, as I'm fond of saying, the creator may be a hard man, but He ain't blind. A similar situation to this hypothetical one played out in 2 Samuel 13 when Prince Amnon raped his half-sister, Tamar, as she pleaded with him not to commit such an evil act. It happened in the city and tragically her cries for help were not heard. Tamar was understandably not put to death for her humiliation, and her stolen virginity was avenged by her full-brother, Absalom, who was so disgusted and enraged when he found out what happened that he killed Amnon in retribution.

There was also punishment for a man engaging in consensual sex with a betrothed slave girl, though not as stiff as the death penalty. Leviticus 19:20-22 “**20** If a man lies sexually with a woman who is a slave, assigned to another man and not yet ransomed or given her freedom, a distinction shall be made. They shall not be put to death, because she was not free; **21** but he shall bring his compensation to the Lord, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. **22** And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the Lord for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed.”

The atonement to be payed was one of blood in what the Bible refers to as the “guilt offering”. The spotless animal that was slain was offered up to the Lord as a sort of literal scapegoat in order to cleanse one of their sins (Leviticus 4). The practice of sacrificing a pure unblemished animal for one's sin was done away with at the crucifixion of the son of God, Jesus Christ, atop a hill called Golgotha – *The Place of the Skull*. Jesus served as our once-and-for-all sacrificial lamb, dying for all sin - past, present, and future.

Under the Mosaic covenant, crimes were punished with expedience. God charged Israel with rooting out wickedness from among His people and expected it to be done with haste, as God was not above punishing all of Israel for the iniquity of one person (See the story of Achan in Joshua 7). Being that Israel had no prisons in its early days, it was the duty of the Israelites to administer justice and hold each other accountable to God's commands. This went for all of Israel and any sojourner who dwelt among them. If you were a Gentile (one not of Jewish heritage and culture) and wanted to reside among the Jews then you had to abide by their laws. The entire body of the Mosaic law was inscribed very plainly on large plastered stones that were set up on Mount Ebal for all to see – the native and the sojourner (Deuteronomy 27:1-8). Moreover according to Deuteronomy 31:9-13, every seven years the entire law (The Torah) was

to be read to all of Israel when they were assembled for the Feast of Booths to keep the words of God fresh in their minds.

On the subject of the rape of a betrothed woman and punishments for committing such an act, Deuteronomy 22:25-27 goes on to say “**25** But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. **26** But you shall do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death. For this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor, **27** because he met her in the open country, and though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her.”

This scenario is a similar situation to the aforementioned event in 2 Samuel 13, as the betrothed woman was seized against her will and her cries for help were not and would not have been heard. And while there is no undoing the horrific act of someone being raped, you can be sure that once word got out about the iniquitous deed and who perpetrated it, that that wretched piece of human garbage would have been captured and killed expeditiously by the people. God himself demanded she be avenged. Capital punishment for rape wasn't just practiced in ancient Israel. In the past, in a number of countries, rape was often punished with death. There are in fact at least 9 countries that are still beholden to the practice today: China, Afghanistan, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Bangladesh, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and North Korea (This was the case during the writing of this paper in 2020). In some of these countries, special circumstances apply to different cases. In the United States we used to punish rape with the death penalty but no longer do as a result of a Supreme Court ruling in 1977. The ruling was given in the case of *Coker v. Georgia*, that deemed such a punishment to be in violation of the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. Today in the USA we punish rape with prison sentences, though I think the vile act of forcibly raping someone still rightly deserves the death penalty or castration in addition to imprisonment at the very least.

There were stiff punishments under Mosaic law not just for the crime of raping a betrothed virgin, but for raping a non-betrothed virgin as well. Deuteronomy 22:28-29 goes on to say “**28** If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, **29** then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her all his days.”

In this instance the man was not put to death as we might imagine he would be. The man was first charged a fine of fifty shekels of silver payable to the girl's father. According to *Enduring Word*, “Some Jewish commentators note that the fifty shekels of silver were to be paid in addition to the dowry.” The man was then obligated by law to marry the woman (presumably if she would have him), and was barred from being able to divorce her all the days of his life. The logic here was that because the man forcefully deflowered the virgin girl against her will, bringing incredible shame to her and her family, and ruining her life, that his punishment was that he now had to care for, protect, and adequately provide for her for the rest of his life in retribution for his sin. He was no doubt forced to face his shame daily as he lived with the guilt of what he did. I also personally believe that if the man refused to pay the bride price and take the woman to wife, that he would have been killed, most likely by being stoned to death. Tamar

in 2 Samuel 13 actually begged Amnon to marry her after he defiled her so that she would not have to live with the shame of being deflowered and unwed, which was also punishable by death. Amnon refused Tamar's pleas to not send her away in shame and got what was coming to him at the end of a sword. Multiple swords actually.

Now back to taking a female captive as a wife. You may say that "Notable though the laws in Deuteronomy 22 are, they only concern Jewish born people and not non-Jewish people taken as war captives or non-Jewish slaves who had been purchased." As I've stated before, the Bible is very specific and intentional with its wording. Anything written in the Bible was written for a specific reason, and anything not written in the Bible was not written for a specific reason. As Chuck Missler was fond of saying, "Every detail is there by design." I believe given that Deuteronomy 21:10-14 points out, that the man in a marriage with a former female captive was permitted to divorce her (which was not a right afforded to a rapist), that the union was consented to by both parties and or was viewed and treated as an arranged marriage that was the conclusion to a one-month betrothal. Arranged marriages in which betrothed partners were chosen for each other with or without their consent by their families or a matchmaker were a very common and historic practice in Israel. We have to remember that this was a different time that people were living in back then and every culture changes through the centuries. Arranged marriages were commonplace in many nations throughout history such as Israel, India, England, and Asia just to name a few. They were viewed not just as the joining of a man and a woman, but the joining of two families. They most often involved a dowry or some monetary arrangement, and were arranged for elevations in status, economic reasons, political reasons, and others. Six cultures that still enforce arranged marriages today are India, Korea, Japan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and China (This was the case during the writing of this paper in 2020). Though the practice of arranged/forced marriages might leave some of us clutching our pearls, we have to remember that different cultures don't or didn't have the same rights and laws that we do today. Again it was a different time ancient Israel was living in back in biblical days.

Selling One's Self into Debt Slavery & Selling A Person into Continued Slavery – As for a person selling themselves into slavery or being sold as a slave to a new owner, certain rules and restrictions applied. Man-Stealing, which God-fearing Israelites did not engage in, was the common practice in historical Africa. This is the taking at random or premeditatedly (and usually by force) of a free person, and enslaving them with intent to keep them or sell them for profit.

NOTE – Man-Stealing does not apply to "Spoils of War" or "Debt Slavery" (the practice of selling oneself into slavery to pay off a debt). Man-Stealing is also strictly condemned in the Bible under penalty of death. Exodus 21:16 "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death." Deuteronomy 24:7 "If a man is found stealing one of his brothers of the people of Israel, and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die. So you shall purge the evil from your midst." This went for the Hebrew and the sojourner living among them. 1 Timothy 1:8-10 Lists "slave-traders" (understood to be of the man-stealing nature) in the same category of "ungodly and sinful" people as murderers, adulterers, perverts, liars, perjurers, and those who kill their fathers or mothers. Of course there were those in Biblical days who did not adhere to God's commands and engaged in illegal acts of slavery, and they were punished accordingly.

Rules for Purchasing and Selling Slaves

Owned slaves were frequently bought or sold from one Hebrew master to another. Any God-fearing Hebrew in the Bible purchasing or selling a slave, could only do so by 3 methods which had their own conditions that had to be met.

1 – The slave being bought or sold had to have been obtained as a spoil of war (willingly accepting terms of surrender resulting in servitude in place of death, or refusing terms of surrender resulting in the death of all the men in opposition, and all women and children being put to forced labor as a result) Deuteronomy 20:10-15.

2 – A slave had to have sold themselves willfully into slavery either to a Hebrew, a surrounding nation, or a sojourner among Israel– Leviticus 25:39-43. The selling of a slave in this instance would have been allowed, as they would have forfeited their rights as a free man or woman.

3 – Slaves could be purchased from or sold to the approved surrounding nations or sojourners among Israel. Purchased slaves could also be bequeathed to their master's offspring as an inheritance. - Leviticus 25:44-46.

NOTE – Slave treatment laws still applied in all these instances as well.

It was not uncommon that a person who sold themselves into slavery was far better off under the care of a master than they were on their own. In fact, a slave/bond servant could choose to remain a slave for life if they wanted. Deuteronomy 15:16-18 “**16** But if he says to you, ‘I will not go out from you,’ because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, **17** then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. And to your female slave you shall do the same. **18** It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you, for at half the cost of a hired worker he has served you six years. So the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do.”

According to biblical historian Chuck Missler – After having your master pierce your ear with an awl, “From that point on you probably wore an earring of pride because you were a slave. You volunteered to spend the rest of your days serving that family. You were proud of that. This was a privilege that you asked for and they granted. This is what we call a bondslave. Why is this so important? Because both John and Paul speak of themselves as bondslaves of Jesus Christ (John 15:12-17, 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, Romans 6:15-23). Meaning they're dedicated for the rest of their days to serve him.”

The Greek word for Bondslave or Bondservant is Doulos – “One who is subservient to, and entirely at the disposal of, his master; a slave.” Paul passionately implores us in Romans 6 to no longer be slaves to sin but instead slaves to righteousness leading to more righteousness.

It's important to note that a master didn't have to accept a person who was selling them self into debt slavery. It was considered an incredible kindness for a master to do so, as he assumed all the person's debt upon accepting them into servitude as a slave/bond servant. It was up to the master to then pay off the entire debt in exchange for 6 years of service. The alternative to selling oneself into debt slavery or bond servanthood to a Hebrew brother or not being received into bond servanthood was a grim one - especially when someone was indebted to a

Gentile during the occupation of Jerusalem by the Romans at the time of the events in the New Testament and after.

As I pointed out earlier, ancient Israel didn't have prisons. Crimes and debts were to be sorted out quickly and efficiently. Fortunately for a Hebrew who became indebted to a fellow Hebrew or a Gentile under Mosaic law, debts and the inability to pay said debts (despite a desire to do so by a debtor) weren't viewed by Israel as a criminal offence to be punished. Incredible provision was made to restore an indebted Hebrew person to prosperity by the Hebrew brother or sister they were indebted to or their kinsman redeemer. This applied to Hebrew debtors in Israel. Leviticus 25 has a lot to say on this topic.

NOTE - Gentile/Sojourner debtors had provisions made for them as well that we covered already in Deuteronomy 15 and Genesis 17. We also covered how God commanded Israel to treat the sojourner as a "native among" them in Leviticus 19, and that a curse would be upon anyone who perverted the justice due to a sojourner according to Deuteronomy 27.

Leviticus 25:35-46 **Kindness for Poor Brothers 35** "If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you (or "is indebted to you" - NET Bible), you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. **36** Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. **37** You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. **38** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God. **39** "If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: **40** he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. **41** Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. **42** For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. **43** You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God. **44** As for your male and female slaves whom you may have: you may buy male and female slaves from among the nations that are around you. **45** You may also buy from among the strangers who sojourn with you and their clans that are with you, who have been born in your land, and they may be your property. **46** You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever. You may make slaves of them, but over your brothers the people of Israel you shall not rule, one over another ruthlessly."

We see right away in this instance that the Hebrew who had become indebted to a Hebrew brother and not sold to him, was to be taken in by their debtee/creditor and would assume the role of a live-in hired worker – not a slave. The debtor would then work for their creditor until the year of jubilee or until they were able to pay back the debt in full, sans any interest or profit. Hebrew creditors also could not sell Hebrew debtors who had been acquired in this manner into slavery. The year of jubilee occurred July 10th every 50th year and yielded a similar outcome to slaves and indentured servants as Israel's law of releasing a slave after 6 years of service. However the year of jubilee was an even grander affair.

The Year of Jubilee in Israel – Leviticus 25:8-22

1 – All debts were forgiven.

2 – All slaves and debtors went free (even if slaves hadn't served their full 6 years). This didn't

apply to lifetime slaves who'd had their ear pierced in covenant by their master.

3 – All property that had been sold was returned back to its original owner at no cost.

4 – No crops were planted or harvested in their fields. Israel ate what was harvested two years prior and what the land produced naturally during the year of jubilee, and the land was given rest.

Leviticus 25:47-55 goes on to speak of **Redeeming a Poor Man 47** “If a stranger or sojourner with you becomes rich, and your brother beside him becomes poor and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner with you or to a member of the stranger's clan, **48** then after he is sold he may be redeemed. One of his brothers may redeem him, **49** or his uncle or his cousin may redeem him, or a close relative from his clan may redeem him (a kinsman redeemer). Or if he grows rich he may redeem himself. **50** He shall calculate with his buyer from the year when he sold himself to him until the year of jubilee, and the price of his sale shall vary with the number of years. The time he was with his owner shall be rated as the time of a hired worker. **51** If there are still many years left, he shall pay proportionately for his redemption some of his sale price. **52** If there remain but a few years until the year of jubilee, he shall calculate and pay for his redemption in proportion to his years of service. **53** He shall treat him as a worker hired year by year. He shall not rule ruthlessly over him in your sight. **54** And if he is not redeemed by these means, then he and his children with him shall be released in the year of jubilee. **55** For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

After a person who was indebted to a Gentile or sojourner was redeemed by a kinsman, then they were free to return to their former life. If the debtor was running a business while working for his creditor or received an inheritance that yielded sufficient money to pay off his debt, then they could redeem them self by paying to their creditor an amount in proportion to the years of service that they still had left till the year of jubilee sans interest. In this instance up till the point of redemption and freedom, a debtor was to be treated as a hired worker and was not allowed to be treated cruelly by their creditor – just like in Leviticus 25:35-46.

The laws in Leviticus 25 were a dream in comparison to how unpaid debts were handled in Roman society and during their occupation of Israel. Under the Roman constitution known as THE LAWS OF THE TWELVE TABLES, we get a clear picture of just how much harsher debtors with an inability to pay their creditors were treated.

TABLE III. Concerning property which is lent. (And debts)

Law IV.

Where anyone, having acknowledged a debt, has a judgment rendered against him requiring payment, thirty days shall be given to him in which to pay the money and satisfy the judgment.

Law V.

After the term of thirty days granted by the law to debtors who have had judgment rendered against them has expired, and in the meantime, they have not satisfied the judgment, their creditors shall be permitted to forcibly seize them and bring them again into court.

Law VI.

When a defendant, after thirty days have elapsed, is brought into court a second time by the plaintiff, and does not satisfy the judgment; or, in the meantime, another party, or his surety does not pay it out of his own money, the creditor, or the plaintiff, after the debtor has been delivered up to him, can take the latter with him and bind him or place him in fetters; provided his chains are not of more than fifteen pounds weight; he can, however, place him in others which are lighter, if he desires to do so.

Law VII.

If, after a debtor has been delivered up to his creditor, or has been placed in chains, he desires to obtain food and has the means, he shall be permitted to support himself out of his own property. But if he has nothing on which to live, his creditor, who holds him in chains, shall give him a pound of grain every day, or he can give him more than a pound, if he wishes to do so.

Law VIII.

In the meantime, the party who has been delivered up to his creditor can make terms with him. If he does not, he shall be kept in chains for sixty days; and for three consecutive market-days he shall be brought before the Prætor in the place of assembly in the Forum, and the amount of the judgment against him shall be publicly proclaimed.

Law IX.

After he has been kept in chains for sixty days, and the sum for which he is liable has been three times publicly proclaimed in the Forum, he shall be condemned to be reduced to slavery by him to whom he was delivered up; or, if the latter prefers, he can be sold beyond the Tiber.

Law X.

Where a party is delivered up to several persons, on account of a debt, after he has been exposed in the Forum on three market days, they shall be permitted to divide their debtor (their debtor's property and holdings) into different parts, if they desire to do so; and if anyone of them should, by the division, obtain more or less than he is entitled to, he shall not be responsible.

Imprisonment and inevitable slavery awaited the debtor who could not pay his creditor. We're going to shift for a bit and examine just what the implications of Roman imprisonment and slavery entailed.

Roman Imprisonment – According to Roman policies, imprisonment was not viewed as a means of reform or punishment. Prison was designed to be a temporary holding place for those who were awaiting judgement for their crimes. According to *Introducing the New Testament 2nd ed.* - "Prisoners were held before trial; once a verdict was rendered, they might be executed, beaten, or sent into exile, but they would not normally be sentenced to more time in prison." As previously mentioned, a debtor could be kept in prison up to sixty days while their creditor awaited payment. After that, they could then be enslaved by their creditor or sold into slavery elsewhere at the creditor's behest. Roman prisons were brutal and we have to remember that the Jews who were still allowed to observe many of their various laws and customs mind you, were compelled to take in their Hebrew debtors as hired workers and not let them be sent to prison. This was not the case (as previously touched on) for a Jew who was indebted to a Roman citizen

or other Gentile during the Roman occupation, as Romans and other Gentiles were under no obligation to show kindness to their debtors like the Hebrews were. Roman prison conditions were so wretched that it's no wonder why a person would choose debt slavery over incarceration. Carcer Tullianum (now known as Mamertine Prison) located between the base of Capitoline hill and the Forum in Rome is the most well-known Roman prison. The prison entrance was a small room with a hole in the floor marking the entrance to the dungeon which was a room that was 6 1/2 ft. high, 30 ft. long, and 22 ft. wide. Prisoners who had been condemned to die either by strangulation or starvation were thrown through the small hole down into the dungeon. The Roman historian and politician, Gaius Sallustius Crispus, usually anglicized as Sallust, described Carcer Tullianum: saying "Its appearance is disgusting and vile by reason of the filth, the darkness and the stench."

Prisoners, accused and condemned men and women alike, were kept clustered together in the small dark and often over crowded dungeons of the various Roman prisons and debtors prisons. Prisoners were typically kept in chains even when they slept. Their feet might be shackled, or their hands manacled and sometimes attached to another chain around their neck. In addition their chains could also be fastened to a post to restrict movement further. Wooden stocks were often used to restrict a prisoner's movement by securing their hands, neck, and or feet. Paul and Silas were kept in stocks when they were thrown into prison in [Acts 16](#). Ventilation in the dungeon was poor, and could result in heatstroke and death in summer months or freezing and death in winter months. The filth and human waste that was present in the dungeon would lead to horrible illness. The clothes a prisoner came in wearing also served as their bedroll, as is evident even in Peter's angelic rescue from prison in [Acts 12:6-19](#). Starvation was ever present in Roman prisons. Prisoners could be fed, but were not entitled to a daily ration of food unless they were a Roman citizen, as the conditions of a person's imprisonment were closely linked to their status. Roman citizenship could have been a deciding factor as to whether or not a debt-prisoner received a daily pound of grain from their creditor according to the aforementioned Table III, Law VII of the ancient Roman constitution. According to *Olive Tree Blog* - When the Apostle Paul was imprisoned, his Roman citizenship ensured that he was entitled to a daily ration of food. However Paul was dependent on his friends and fellow believers to supply him with his meals. In certain cases Roman prisoners of high or important status could be confined to house-arrest. This would allow them to continue to conduct business and receive visitors as normal, however they would be under constant watch by a soldier of the Praetorian Guard that they were chained to. Sometime after Paul's initial imprisonment and confinement to the dungeons, he was removed from the prison and confined to house-arrest for two years while he continued to share the gospel with all who would listen ([Acts 28:17-31](#)). Paul, who had been imprisoned by Roman authorities in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome, even wrote his letter to the Philippians while incarcerated in a Roman prison. Non-Roman citizens, even those of high standing in the community, were not entitled to house arrest, and were often subjected to harsher treatments than Roman citizens. Tradition holds that both the apostles Paul and Peter were incarcerated for a time in Mamertine prison. And though there is insufficient proof and no ancient writings to support this notion, it is possible that this legend is based in fact. Beyond the fact that Peter was held in a Roman prison, there is no archeological evidence that ol' Pedro was ever in Mamertine. The incredibly merciful Hebrew act of assuming a person's debt and receiving them into finite debt-slavery/indentured servitude, rather than letting them languish

in a Roman prison was not the inhuman and reprehensible act that ignorant people want to make it out to be. It was in fact an immense kindness born of God himself.

Slavery in Rome – In the ancient world, let alone the city of Rome and Rome’s various provinces, slavery was not just vital to the economy but even to the social fabric of society. According to UNRV’s *History of Ancient Rome* – “The slave population was at least equal to that of freedmen (non citizens), and has been estimated at anywhere from 25 to 40% of the population of the city as a whole. One such estimate suggests that the slave population in Rome circa 1 AD, may have been as much as 300,000 to 350,000 of the 900,000 total inhabitants.” There was no ethnic or territorial preference for the taking of slaves, as Rome’s taking of slaves in the ancient world was simply based upon need or want. There is also no evidence that the Romans had any preference or exceptions for slavery beyond an observance of whether or not a person was a Roman citizen. Rome, like many other nations including Israel (as previously mentioned), took a great number of slaves from nations they conquered as war spoil. The handling of slaves of course was different nation to nation. There were a number of laws regulating slavery in Rome that changed over time and the treatment of slaves varied greatly depending on a bevy of factors. Some slaves were held in incredibly high esteem by their masters and treated as family - even to the degree that so long as they did their job, they could come and go as they pleased. Slaves could also be treated quite harshly and inhumanly. Slaves in ancient Rome had no rights, but did have some legal standing, as they could act as witnesses in trials. Slaves could also be granted their freedom by their owner as gratitude for their faithful and trustworthy service, or they could purchase their freedom with their miniscule earnings that they might have saved over a lifetime of service. Slaves could be bought by a ludus owner, trained as gladiators, and made to fight to the bloody death in the Colosseum. Runaway slaves were frequently executed in the Colosseum as well. Israel, on the other hand, actually provided protection for runaway slaves. Deuteronomy 23:15-16 “**15** You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. **16** He shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him. You shall not wrong him.”

During the time of the Roman Republic that was installed in 509 BC and lasted until 27 BC, a master could do literally anything they wanted to their slaves. According to UNRV’s *Slavery and the Law* – Slave “owners in the Republic had the right to kill or mutilate slaves at a whim, but later imperial laws took this right away, though in practice this law could be largely ignored.” The life of a slave in Rome could be a good and comfortable one. It could also be a brutal and nightmarish one. The Roman people weren’t commanded to hold each other accountable to their laws and codes of behavior like the Israelites were commanded by God. And it’s not hard to imagine in the violent, over-sexed, and indulgent culture of ancient Rome, that blind eyes were turned more often than not amongst informed citizens in exchange for bribes, position, prestige, and keeping their own skeletons locked securely in the closet. In my research I have come across no other ancient culture that made such incredible concessions and provision for slaves than Israel. Israel truly was a cut above all the rest.

Slavery In America – Here in America the institution of slavery was employed for no short amount of time. And in time our United States Congress in the midst of a bloody divide between the Union and the Confederacy, justly abolished slavery in our great nation. The doing away of

slavery in America was fervently championed by President Abraham Lincoln who issued his Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, which in time resulted in the installation of the 13th Amendment that officially abolished slavery in the United States. The 13th Amendment was passed by Congress on January 31, 1865 toward the end of the Civil War and was ratified on December 6, 1865. Slavery in the United States which was introduced initially in Virginia not by the Founding Fathers but nearly two centuries before the founders by Dutch traders in 1619 while America was still under British rule, had finally been outlawed after 240 years.

It's important to note historically, that almost every ancient culture at one point in time was either enslaved or had slaves, not just the few mentioned in this paper. It's true under the establishment of slavery and laws imposed upon America by British Kings and Parliaments, that a number of the founders owned slaves. In fact, 41 of the signers of The Declaration of Independence owned slaves despite efforts to free them while under British law that disallowed them the right to do so. Many of the founders, religious and otherwise, freed their slaves once America unshackled itself from Great Britain in 1776 in the midst of the Revolutionary War. You might be surprised to know that in the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, the longest grievance in it was penned by Thomas Jefferson, pointing out that they had been trying to free their slaves in the states, but King George III refused to let them. What was included in the Declaration had to be agreed upon unanimously by all 56 signers, and in the final draft, Jefferson's grievance was omitted.

According to *WallBuilders.com* – “Congress banned the exportation of slaves from any state in 1794, and in 1808 banned the importation of slaves. The individual states had passed similar legislation prior to 1808 as well. However, several Southern states continued to actively import and export slaves after their state ban went into effect.”

We all know that change is a process, sometimes resulting in bloodshed (e.g. The Civil War 1861-1865), and does not happen overnight. Sadly the Founders and their fellow patriots had been born into a country where the practice of slavery had been in play for so long that few Americans even doubted or questioned the correctness and morality of it. And years later in the Lincoln-Douglas abolition debates, there was no clear consensus that the Constitution prohibited slavery. This left the decision up to the individual states. President Lincoln despised slavery, but he was sworn to uphold the Constitution which permitted it. This led to him famously saying "If I could save the union without freeing any slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that." He was willing to do whatever it took to save the union and hold the United States together. Regrettably, the Confederate states still rebelled against the Union. With the Civil War well under way, Abraham Lincoln's bravery is commendable as he didn't let the prospect of bloody catastrophe keep him from ardently campaigning to end slavery once and for all.

It's well known that not all the founders were Christian men and of course they didn't always see eye to eye. However, many of those not beholden to the faith saw the benefits in siding with their God-fearing compatriots to build this nation on Judeo-Christian values and a code of morality they trusted to guide their decisions. The convictions that our religious forefathers acted on and the example they set in trying to continually correct contentious issues,

long overlooked mistakes and faux pas, and improve life in the West, is what drove those who came after them to abolish slavery in the USA - thereby changing the course of history for the better forever and shaping America into the bastion of freedom that it is today. Even in the face of opposition from their own countrymen, the actions that the religious men and women took in outlawing such a practice was naturally a byproduct of the faith they fervently held so dear. Their integrity wasn't born of deism, humanism, or post modernism. It was born of the moral code that God had written on their hearts to put to ground that which was iniquitous and wrong, and embrace wholeheartedly the absolute truth that we are all made spiritually equal with the same unalienable rights and are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. There are tragically 40 million people around the World in slavery today. More than ever before, but thankfully, by the grace of God, slavery represents the smallest percentage of the world's population than at any other time in history.

Charles Carroll, a founding father and signer of the Declaration of Independence, in a letter to John McHenry on November 4, 1800, penned these words: "Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime & pure, [and] which denounces against the wicked eternal misery, and [which] insured to the good eternal happiness, are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments." – (*One Nation Under God*)

What Charles Carroll is pointing out is that when people start attacking Christianity and the Bible, they are also attacking Christianity's biblical manifestations here in the United States. Some such manifestations under fire are the abolition of slavery, equality for men and women, the installation of the judicial system, and an individual's right to due process. In maligning Christianity, people are attacking our nation and the very thing that made the United States of America great in the first place. They're regrettably assailing the God-given moral fiber many of our founding fathers clung to that made our government so prosperous and endure as long as it has.

Another influential figure in our nation's history, Jedidiah Morse, in an election sermon he gave in Charlestown, Massachusetts on April 25, 1799, said: "To the kindly influence of Christianity we owe that degree of civil freedom, and political and social happiness which mankind now enjoys. In proportion as the genuine effects of Christianity are diminished in any nation, either through unbelief, or the corruption of its doctrines, or the neglect of its institutions; in the same proportion will the people of that nation recede from the blessings of genuine freedom, and approximate the miseries of complete despotism. All efforts to destroy the foundations of our holy religion, ultimately tend to the subversion also of our political freedom and happiness. Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all the blessings which flow from them, must fall with them."

The hard truth of the matter is that without Christianity and the Bible, slavery would have never been abolished. And not just abolished here in the USA, but in many nations the world over. The God of the Bible was the same in the Old and New Testaments as he is today ([Malachi 3:6](#)), and at each new covenant he forged with his people even into today, he has always been pushing his creation to a higher level of integrity, rights, and justice. Whether Americans realize it or not, here in the West when people rail against God, Christianity, and the Bible's supposed shortcomings with regards to slavery, the beliefs and convictions that those people stand on to do

so are actually deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian values that our great nation was built on by godly integrity filled men and women centuries ago. To remove those values is to undo all the great achievements the USA has made and ensure our spiritual, moral, social, economic, and political downfall.

Back to the heart of the matter – As I posited at the top of this paper: God’s aim in the biblical institution of slavery and servitude was two-fold: Punishment & Discipline and Rehabilitation & Redemption.

- 1- **Punishment & Discipline** – For hostile nations, it was initially a punishment or the price to be paid, if you will, for opposing God and his chosen people. The punishment quickly became a vocation with immense benefits for all involved – the master got the equivalent of a hired worker for the next six years, and the slave assumed the role of disciplined servant who would want for nothing.
- 2- **Rehabilitation & Redemption** – God never intended slavery to be permanent for anyone (unless they wanted to remain with their master). The goal and practice for a God-fearing master with slaves (debt-slaves, indentured servants, purchased slaves, and war-spoil) in his care, was to get from them the years of hard work that were owed to him, while showing kindness and the love of God to those in his house. This kindness was shown not just by meeting the physical needs of those under his roof, but instructing them in the ways of God that their spiritual needs might be met as well. This would all be done in the years leading up to the release of slaves either after their six years of service or in the year of jubilee. Redemption was the end goal as the freed person, now family, was given a fresh start and loaded up with all they would need to be successful on their own – livestock, wine, produce, most likely some money, a place in the community, and most importantly a relationship with the living God.

In the final analysis, yes, the Bible did allow slavery. But to reiterate, it was far different from and does not condone the racially charged and motivated slavery that Europe, Africa, and the Americas saw in the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s or the slavery based upon need or want that Rome enjoyed in the early centuries. We here in the West rightly view slavery as a terrible and reprehensible act to inflict on someone. The key in understanding Biblical slavery is knowing the conditions that had to be met in acquiring and treating a slave, that the enslavement of an individual was treated as bond-servitude, was not to be permanent (unless the slave wanted to remain with their master forever), and that when a slave was to leave their master at the appointed time, they would be leaving far better off than when they came into their master’s employ. Slave owners in the Bible were to treat their slaves/bond servants as family, and then (according to Deuteronomy 15:12-15) free them while at the same time giving them all they needed to forge new and prosperous lives for themselves and their posterity.

In summation I leave you with a quote regarding slavery from gotquestions.org: “The Bible often approaches issues from the inside out. If a person experiences the love, mercy, and grace of God by receiving His salvation, God will reform his soul, changing the way he thinks and acts. A person who has experienced God’s gift of salvation and freedom from the slavery of sin, as God reforms his soul, will realize that enslaving another human being is wrong. He will see, with Paul, that a slave can be “a brother in the Lord” (Philemon 1:16) A person who has

truly experienced God's grace will in turn be gracious towards others. That would be the Bible's prescription for ending slavery."

We haven't always been what we've wanted to be, but thank God we're not what we used to be – especially here in the good ole' US of A. God bless you and have a great day!

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