

## Slavery in the Bible and Slavery Today

Mako A. Nagasawa

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### Introduction: Modern Day Slavery

Slavery: Something we thought was in our long distant past is now a bigger issue today than it has ever been before. I hear about increasing levels of sex slavery and organized prostitution in Boston. In my neighborhood, Dorchester, women are driven around by pimps, customers come to the car, the woman cannot even leave the car so that the pimp can make a quick getaway if needs be. Some of these women are forced into prostitution; they may come through Rhode Island, because until 2009, RI had a law that made prostitution legal indoors, though not outdoors. That created a loophole where women and children were smuggled into Rhode Island in secret brothels and dispersed all across New England and the nation. Perhaps a bit of that continues. The U.S. State Department estimates that of this number, approximately 17,500 are trafficked into the U.S. *each year*. UNICEF estimates that 1.2 million people are trafficked *every year* across international borders throughout the world. So whether we are talking about child sex slaves in Cambodia or bonded labor in Pakistan or war captives in Mauritania or forced prostitution in our own backyard, the issue of slavery is huge.

How can we engage the issue of modern day slavery? I think that depends on what tradition you stand in. As a Christian, I have donated money to International Justice Mission, which rescues women and children from sex slavery, and to Love146, which provides aftercare to women and children who were sex slaves. But this raises questions related to my – and your – moral foundation. For those of us raised in the West or places influenced by the West, we think that the value of every single human being is self-evident, but unfortunately it is not self-evident. It is not even certain. I'm going to return to ask that question more broadly for those of you who are atheists, Muslims, and Hindus at the end of this time. But first I have to ask questions about my own moral foundation as a Christian.

1. First, what does the Bible say about slavery, really? The Old Testament appeared to allow Israel to take slaves from the people around them, laying the groundwork for a God-inspired race-based system of slavery. Atheist Sam Harris said that the God of Abraham expects us to own slaves.<sup>1</sup> Why was this God so mistaken on such a major issue? The New Testament says, “Slaves, obey your masters,” apparently making resistance to slavery evil, at least if you’re a slave. So if the Bible uniformly or uncritically accepts slavery, then we have a problem: Christians cannot be on the side of abolition. American slavery and the American Civil War are notorious for having Christians on both sides quoting the Bible. Maybe we can be on the side of mitigating bad conditions, but is it possible to fully be on the side of abolition?
2. Second, if the Bible is at best ambiguous or neutral on the issue of slavery, then since the U.S. abolished slavery, did Americans do better than the Bible? This is an important question because all of church history, Christians have believed that humanity cannot do better than the New Testament. We have always recognized that the Old Testament reflects an intermediate step in God’s dealing with Israel, but the New Testament reflects the full disclosure of God and God’s heart for us, so that you can’t do better than New Testament ethics. But if you can do better than the New Testament on the issue of slavery, what does that say about the New Testament? Perhaps we do need to look for a higher standard of morality from (say) science, as Sam Harris says.
3. Third, perhaps I as an evangelical who holds to the authority of the Bible need to reconsider the so-called “liberal Protestant churches” in the U.S. that trace their beginnings back to the slavery-abolition debate. The liberal Protestants held that you had to move past New Testament ethics because the stuff on slavery seems regressive, then because it didn’t seem to square with science, and so on. Essentially, they started to read the Bible completely metaphorically. So perhaps if the Bible is wrong, then my foundation is faulty, and I need to give up other things?

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<sup>1</sup> Harris said this on *The Daily Show* on October 4, 2010, and at a lecture at Tufts University, October 14, 2010

I'm going to engage all those questions. As a preliminary starting point, when I started to research the slavery-abolition debate in the 1800's, I actually went farther back to see how other Christians confronted slavery. Here are some things I discovered:

### 1<sup>st</sup> century

- Clement of Rome (30 – 100 AD) observes, “We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that they might ransom others. Many, too, have surrendered themselves to slavery, that with the price which they received for themselves, they might provide food for others.”<sup>2</sup>
- Polycarp (69 – 155 AD) and Ignatius (~50 – 117 AD), second generation Christian leaders, free their slaves.<sup>3</sup>
- According to Western church tradition, Onesimus, a former runaway slave (who Paul returned to Philemon, asking that Philemon set him free) becomes bishop of Ephesus after Timothy, from 80 AD. According to Eastern Orthodox church tradition, however, this same Onesimus became the third bishop of Byzantium, from 54 – 68 AD. Although one of these traditions is surely confused, it is significant for this purpose that the stigma of slavery was overcome in the claiming of Onesimus as a very significant church leader.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> century

- Sometime during the reign of Trajan (98 – 117 AD), a Roman prefect named Hermas received baptism at an Easter festival with his wife and children and twelve hundred and fifty slaves. On that occasion, he gave all his slaves their freedom and generous gifts besides.<sup>4</sup>
- 95 – 135 AD: Ovidius, appointed bishop of Braga (in modern day Portugal) under Pope Clement I in 95 AD, emancipates five thousand slaves. He is martyred for his faith in 135 AD.
- 140 AD (or 142 or 146): Pius I, believed to be a former slave,<sup>5</sup> becomes Bishop of Rome.
- 147 AD: Justin Martyr condemns the abandonment of infants because the child might die and, most importantly, might fall into the wrong hands: “But as for us, we have been taught that to expose newly-born children is the part of wicked men; and this we have been taught lest we should do any one an injury, and lest we should sin against God, first, because we see that almost all so exposed (not only the girls, but also the males) are brought up to prostitution.”<sup>6</sup>

### 3<sup>rd</sup> century

- 217 AD: Callistus, a former slave, becomes Bishop of Rome (from 217 – 222 AD).
- Several epitaphs in the catacombs mention the fact of manumission of other slaves, exact dates unknown.<sup>7</sup>
- Sometime during the reign of Diocletian (284 – 305 AD), a wealthy prefect named Chromatius embraced faith in Christ and emancipated fourteen hundred slaves after they are baptized with himself, because their common status as children of God put an end to their servitude to a man.<sup>8</sup>
- Christians in Asia Minor “decried the lawfulness of it, denounced slaveholding as a sin, a violation of the law of nature and religion. They gave fugitive slaves asylum, and openly offered them protection” (following the commandments in the Old and New Testaments).

<sup>2</sup> *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, ch.55.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Rogers, *Slavery Illegality in All Ages and Nations*, 1855.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Schaff, “Christian Life in Contrast with Pagan Corruption: The Church and Slavery,” *History of the Christian Church*, volume 2.

<sup>5</sup> So believed because the *Muratorian Canon* and the *Liberian Catalogue* identifies Pius as the brother of Hermas, the author of *The Shepherd of Hermas*, who identified himself as a former slave.

<sup>6</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 27. The *First Apology* is thought to have been written between 147 – 161 AD.

<sup>7</sup> Schaff.

<sup>8</sup> Schaff.

- Cyprian (208 – 258 AD), bishop of Carthage condemned a local slaveholder in uncompromising terms, condemning slavery as incompatible with Christianity: “You, man of a day, expect from your slave obedience. Is he less a man than you? By birth he is your equal. He is endowed with the same organs, with the same reasoning soul, called to the same hopes, subject to the same laws of life in this and in the world to come. You subject him to your dominion. If he, as a man, disregard or forget your claim, what miseries you heap upon him. Impious master, pitiless despot! You spare neither blows nor whips, nor privations; you chastise him with hunger and thirst, you load him with chains, you incarcerate him within black walls; miserable man! While you thus maintain your despotism over a man, you are not willing to recognize the Master and Lord of all men.”

#### 4<sup>th</sup> century AD

- Early 300’s AD: Cantius, Cantianus, and Cantiannilla, members of an old Roman family, set all seventy-three of their slaves at liberty at baptism.
- 379 AD: Gregory of Nyssa, in a sermon during Lent, unequivocally and indignantly condemns slavery as an institution. He condemns mastery over another person as the grossest possible arrogance. In fact, “since God’s greatest gift to us is the perfect liberty vouchsafed us by Christ’s saving action in time, and since God’s gifts are entirely irrevocable, it lies not even in *God’s* power to enslave men and women.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, he says that God has given dominion over the creation to each person, so to possess a slave’s material possessions is contrary to creation.
- 386 AD: John Chrysostom (presbyter at Antioch from 386 – 398 AD, and then archbishop of Constantinople from 398 – 407 AD), preaches, “In Christ Jesus there is no slave. Therefore it is not necessary to have a slave. Buy them, and after you have taught them some skill by which they can maintain themselves, set them free.” He reminds his audience that slave husbands have marital rights to their wives and slave parents have parental rights to their children.<sup>10</sup> He also says that “he who has immoral relations with the wife of a slave is as culpable as he who has the like relations with the wife of the prince: both are adulterers, for it is not the condition of the parties that makes the crime.”<sup>11</sup> He regularly spoke with great eloquence of a society without slaves, and only free workers.<sup>12</sup>
- 390 – 400 AD: The *Apostolic Constitutions*, a handy summary of Christian teaching up until that point, directs Christians, “As for such sums of money as are collected from them in the aforesaid manner, designate them to be used for the redemption of the saints and the deliverance of slaves and captives.”<sup>13</sup>
- 395 AD: Augustine (bishop of Hippo 395 – 430 AD) noted that the Christian community regularly used its funds to redeem as many kidnapped victims as possible, and had recently purchased and freed 120 slaves whom the Galatians were boarding onto their ships.<sup>14</sup>

#### 5<sup>th</sup> century AD

- Early 400’s AD: Melania (the Elder), a very wealthy Roman Christian, emancipates eight thousand slaves.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes*. David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p.178 – 179. Thus, Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p.225 is historically incorrect when he says that “it was not until the start of the seventh century that we find the first forcefully articulated theological statement that manumission in general was an act of piety” through the pen of Gregory the Great. Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century and Cyprian in the third provide literary evidence that such statements were being produced much earlier than the seventh century. In addition, the pattern of owners at their baptism freeing slaves existed from the first century, strongly suggesting that there was oral (preached) tradition in the early Christian community of the importance of manumission in general, and the importance of conferring freedom upon the slaves because of the symbolic death of the owner in Christian baptism. Patterson’s treatment of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians on p.227 shows his lack of experience as a biblical exegete.

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Ephesians*, 6:9; also *Epistle addressed to the Ephesians*, Homily 22:2.

<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, *In I Thessalonians*, Homily 5:2; *In II Thessalonians*, Homily 3:2.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Allard, *Les esclaves chrétiens* (French Edition, 1974), p.416 – 423.

<sup>13</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 4, Section 2, Paragraph 9.

<sup>14</sup> Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> *Vita Saint Melaniae*, 34 says that the number is too great to count but Palladius, in *Hist. Lausiaca*, 119, counts 8,000.

- Early 400's AD: Acacius, bishop of Amida, in modern day eastern Turkey/western Mesopotamia from 400 – 425 AD, sees seven thousand Persian prisoners being held by Romans in Amida. Apparently moved with compassion, he assembles his fellow clergy and says, "Our God, my brethren, needs neither dishes nor cups; for He neither eats nor drinks, nor is in want of anything. Since then, by the liberality of its faithful members the Church possesses many vessels both of gold and silver, it behooves us to sell them, that by the money thus raised, we may be able to redeem the prisoners and also supply them with food."<sup>16</sup> Acacius purchases them from slavery, supports them for a while, and sends them furnished with supplies back to Persia. This is reported to have impressed Sassanid Emperor Bahram V so deeply that he requested to see Acacius personally. "When the war [between Byzantium and Persia] ended in 422, it may have been this generous gesture of Acacius that speeded the negotiations for peace and brought an end to persecution in Persia. The peace treaty contained the remarkable stipulation that freedom of religion was to be granted on both sides of the border, for Zoroastrians in the Byzantine Empire and for Christians in Persia."<sup>17</sup> This incident was surely unusual in its magnitude, but probably not in its character.
- Early 400's AD: Isidore of Pelusium (died 449 AD) writes to a slaveholder saying "I did not think that the man who loves Christ, and knows the grace which makes us all free, would still hold slaves."
- Late 400's AD: Remigius (437 – 533 AD) writes to Clovis, king of France from 481 – 511 AD, the first king of the Franks to unite all the Frankish tribes, "Let the gate of your palace be open to all, that every one may have recourse to you for justice. Employ your great revenues in redeeming slaves."

#### Christian Faith and Public Policy

- 315 AD: Two years after issuing the Edict of Milan, legalizing Christianity, Constantine imposes the death penalty on those who kidnap and enslave children. This act of Constantine testifies to the likelihood of a vigorous critique within the Christian community of kidnapping and forced enslavement, rooted in both the Old and New Testaments (Ex.21:16; Dt.24:7; 1 Tim.1:10).
- 321, 334 AD: Constantine made it illegal for slaveholders to separate slave families and eased the conditions of manumission so that a slaveholder could simply go to a church service and declare their emancipation before the bishop. This again testifies to the strong concern to defend the humanity of slaves within the Christian community, which Constantine now extended beyond Christians to the entire Roman Empire. Christians then took Easter as an occasion to regularly emancipate slaves.
- 529 – 534 AD: Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian, a Christian, issues the *Corpus Juris Civilis* ("Body of Civil Law") also known as the *Institutes of Justinian*. These laws were a complete revision of past Roman law and formed the basis of Latin jurisprudence and Byzantine law. In it, Justinian says, "Slavery is an institution of the law of nations, against nature, subjecting one man to the dominion of another."<sup>18</sup> It should be illegal but is tolerated because of the generals' practice of taking captives in war, or because they are born to slave parents, or when a man over 20 years of age consents to voluntary enslavement so he can share in the money resulting from his own sale. Justinian rules that if a pregnant woman was free at any moment between conception and delivery, her child is free by birth. He prohibits "unrestrained violence toward slaves," except when the court granted permission for a specific reason, usually a penalty for criminal activity.<sup>19</sup> He made into law the traditional, already widely practiced manumission of concubines and their children at the death of the master, if he did not specify her status in his will.<sup>20</sup>
- 595 AD: A council at Rome under Gregory the Great permits a slave to become a monk without any consent from his master. Previously, the Western church permitted a slave to be raised into the priesthood only with the formal consent of his master. At the same time, councils held in Orleans in 511,

<sup>16</sup> Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, Book VII, Chapter 21

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Hugh Moffet, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Volume 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), p.160

<sup>18</sup> Justinian, *The Institutes*, Book 1, part 3, #2.

<sup>19</sup> Justinian, *The Institutes*, Book 1, part 8, #2.

<sup>20</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.231.

538, 549, while imposing penalties upon the bishop who elevated a slave into priestly office without the master's consent, nevertheless declared such an ordination to be valid. The council in Rome in 595 appears to have carried Paul's prerogative in Philemon to an expressed conclusion.

- 649 AD: Clovis II, king of the Franks, frees and marries his British slave Bathilda. Bathilda was a British Christian who had been kidnapped and brought across the Channel. The two had met when Clovis was but a teenager. Together, they start to dismantle slavery. In 650 AD, the Council of Châlon-sur-Saône, in Burgundy in modern day France, forbids the sale of Frankish slaves outside the Frankish kingdom. "When Clovis died in 657, Bathilda ruled as regent until her eldest son came of age. Bathilda used her position to mount a campaign to halt the slave trade and to redeem those in slavery. Upon her death, the church acknowledged Bathilda as a saint."<sup>21</sup> Hence, Bathilda abolished slavery among the Franks.
- 1000 AD: Stephen I of Hungary, the first Hungarian Christian king, who reigned from 1000 – 1038 AD and is generally considered to be the founder of the Kingdom of Hungary, declares in his laws that any slave who lives, stays in, or enters the Kingdom of Hungary would be free immediately.
- 1102 AD: The London Church Council forbids slavery and the slave trade, which abolishes both throughout England. This decree emancipates 10% of England's population.<sup>22</sup>
- 1117 AD: Iceland abolishes slavery.
- 1315 AD: French king Louis X condemns slavery and unreasonable vassalage, insisting his kingdom will be a dominion of free men: "As all men are by nature free born, and as this kingdom is called the Kingdom of Franks [freemen], it shall be so in reality. It is therefore decreed that enfranchisements shall be granted throughout the whole kingdom upon just and reasonable conditions." This effectively made any slave setting foot on French soil free.
- 1335 AD: Sweden (which included Finland at this time) makes slavery illegal.

I could go on and on. Christians in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East have a very impressive record on emancipation. I could not find data on the Nestorian Syrian Christians in Asia or the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia or the Christian Nubian kingdom. But in the regions where we already know the most about Christianity – Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East – we have an amazing record, especially if you factor in the fact that the Christians were a minority in the Roman Empire for 400 years. They brought about a grassroots, bottoms up reconciliation movement centered on Jesus, which regularly emancipated slaves. When Christians came to power, starting with Constantine, they immediately limited and eventually abolished slavery. This is incredible. The process was not without its hiccups, and some rationalizations also appeared at times. Nevertheless, the fact is that Christian theology and people ended slavery in France, Hungary, England, Iceland, Sweden, and the Netherlands by about 1300 AD. Slavery persisted in all other countries of the world.<sup>23</sup> Freedom from forced labor servitude was, in fact, the "peculiar institution." If you are interested in more of my findings, you can find them on my website: <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/race-slavery-belief-systems>. So how did these Christians understand the Bible? Let's look first at the Old Testament.

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<sup>21</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (Random House: New York, 2005), p.29 - 30

<sup>22</sup> England's *Domesday Book of 1086*, the oldest public record in England, indicates that 10 percent of the population was enslaved at that time.

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad A. Dandamaev and Vladimir G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) prove that Zoroastrian Persia and the Persian Empire under Cyrus did, in fact, practice slavery despite what was written on the Cyrus Cylinder about abolishing it. See esp. p.153 – 170.

## Part 1: Slavery and the Old Testament

### Historical Context:

- Ancient societies were primarily honor-based, not freedom-based. Freedom was important, but families, relations, alliances, and corporate identity were more important. People everywhere did willingly become “slaves” of more powerful, prestigious people. Nevertheless, we should expect to find some rights of slaves and limitations on masters.
- The Mosaic Law must be compared with law codes from that time period, e.g. the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, etc.

### Entering and Exiting Slavery: Hebrews

Sources of slaves	Of Hebrews	Entrance	Exit
War captivity	No	Hebrew tribes were forbidden to fight against and enslave one another.	NA
Kidnapping, piracy	No	“He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death.” (Ex.21:16; Dt.24:7)	NA
Purchase from slave trade	No	“For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt; they are not to be sold in a slave sale.” (Lev.25:42) <sup>24</sup>	NA
Perpetual involuntary servitude (including birth to slave parents)	No	“If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave’s service. He shall be with you as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee [ <i>every fifty years</i> ]. <i>He shall then go out from you</i> , he and his sons with him, and shall go back to his family, that he may return to the property of his forefathers.” (Lev.25:39 – 41)... “ <i>in the seventh year you shall set him free</i> ” (Dt.15:12)	NA
Sale by parents	No	The legislation in Exodus 21:7 – 11 refers to a preliminary form of wedding betrothal for young girls, not a sale by parents of the girl into slavery. The daughter being “sold” into betrothal became a free woman within the new family, not a servant with servant duties, and not a chattel slave that could be resold (Ex.21:8). Any breach of marriage contract by the betrothed man/family earns the girl her freedom and the man receives no compensation (Ex.21:10 – 11). Jewish rabbis view it as pertaining to poor families who could not afford a dowry for their daughter. <sup>25</sup>	NA

<sup>24</sup> Two later incidents in Old Testament history further substantiate this. First, Ahab was condemned when he tried to enslave captives from Judah (2 Chr.28:8 – 15). Second, Ezekiel condemned the sea-going trading nation of Tyre for their slave trade (Ezk.27:13), among other things (Ezk.26 – 28).

<sup>25</sup> “In the ancient world, a father, driven by poverty, might sell his daughter into a well-to-do family in order to ensure her future security. The sale presupposes marriage to the master or his son. Documents recording legal arrangements of this kind have survived from Nuzi. The Torah stipulates that the girl must be treated as a free woman; should the designated husband take an additional wife, he is still obligated to support her. A breach of faith gains her her freedom, and the master receives no compensation for the purchase price.” (Nahum M. Sarna, *Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary Series: Exodus*, 1991, note on Exodus 21). See also Ken Campbell (editor), *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.55 – 57.



<p>Indentured servitude: misfortune</p>	<p>Very limited</p>	<p>Misfortune was a possible reason an Israelite would indenture himself as a servant to someone else. However, the indentured servant was very protected by Mosaic Law: “If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave’s service. He shall be with you as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. He shall then go out from you, he and his sons with him, and shall go back to his family, that he may return to the property of his forefathers.” (Lev.25:39 – 41)</p> <p>In addition, Israel’s family-land system led to strong support (Lev.25). Loaning money without interest was mandatory upon being asked: “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks” (Dt.15:7 – 8). Every seven years, Israel cancelled debts: “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts” (Dt.15:1). The poor were to be cared for, left fields for them to glean, not oppressed, honored, and protected (Dt.24:10 – 22) minimizing the need to borrow money.</p> <p>Furthermore, provision was made for Hebrews to not return to indentured servitude: “When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you. 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.”</p>	<p>Every seventh year of his service: “in the seventh year you shall set him free” (Dt.15:12) or the jubilee year (Lev.25:39 – 41)<sup>26</sup>, whichever happened first. Or redemption by family or self: “One of his brothers may redeem him, or his uncle, or his uncle’s son, may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or if he prospers, he may redeem himself” (Lev.25:48 – 49). Or bodily harm: “If a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye. And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.” (Ex.21:27 – 28). Or escape: “You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall live with you in your midst, in the place which he shall choose in one of your towns where it pleases him; you shall not mistreat him” (Dt.23:15 – 16). Note also there was no police force in Old Testament Israel so running away was easy.</p>
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<sup>26</sup> Some have suggested that Israel never actually practiced the jubilee year of Leviticus 25 based on the explanation given in 2 Chronicles 36:20 – 21, that Israel did not give the land its sabbath-rest for 490 years, but it seems likely to me that only the sabbath of the land was overlooked. In Jeremiah 34, Jeremiah records an incident where King Zedekiah of Judah “proclaimed release” to Hebrew bonded servants (“slaves”) in Jerusalem categorically (Jer.34:8 – 10). Since this was not simply a renewal of the pledge to set these servants free after they had each served six years, but rather a one-time announcement of freedom to all in bondage, this was an enactment of the jubilee on a limited scale. The Israelites did this, although unfortunately they then took those same servants back again, presumably using debt-bondage (Jer.34:11), and Jeremiah rebuked them for it (Jer.34:12 – 16). Both Jeremiah and his audience showed an awareness of the jubilee law. In Nehemiah 5, Nehemiah and the leaders stop lending at interest, and then restore the people back to their lands and vice versa. The only explanation for that understanding is the family-based arrangement of land specified in Leviticus 25 and the jubilee release of bonded servants also described only there. Although these two incidents do not happen on the Day of Atonement as far as we know, the only expectation for this move is found in Leviticus 25. In both cases, there seems to be an assumption that this had been commanded by God. It was the common expectation for Israel to do this, and they were recognizing that they had not observed it recently. In addition, in the book of Ruth, Boaz’s action of becoming the kinsman-redeemer is predicated on the responsibility in Leviticus 25 that a kinsman-redeemer would restore a relative to the land. In that case, Boaz married Ruth as an act of responsibility towards Ruth’s deceased Israelite husband, and simultaneously restored Naomi to her ancestral lands. Thus, Ruth, Jeremiah, and Nehemiah attest that Leviticus 25 was known, was understood and had been, in fact, practiced in Israel. It seems reasonable to say that Israel was aware of the law not simply because it was on the books, but because they had practiced at least parts of it on other occasions besides these.

		(Dt.15:13 – 15)	
Indentured servitude: debt	Very limited	The likelihood of debt leading to indentured servitude was very low. “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts” (Dt.15:1). Lending money without interest was mandatory upon being asked (Dt.15:7 – 8). Lending money with interest was strictly forbidden, which protected the poor from exploitation (Ex.22:26 – 27, Lev.25:35 – 38, Dt.23:19); it was viewed as profiting from someone else’s misfortune. Elsewhere in the Ancient Near East exorbitant interest rates on loans were the chief cause of people being sold into slavery. <sup>27</sup>	Every seventh year (Dt.15:12). Or redemption by family or self (Lev.25:48 – 49). Or bodily harm (Ex.21:27 – 28). Or escape (Dt.23:15 – 16).
Indentured servitude: criminal punishment	Very limited	“If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it...He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft” (Ex.22:1 – 3). Note there were no prison systems in Old Testament Israel.	When restitution is paid. Or every seventh year (Dt.15:12). Or bodily harm (Ex.21:27 – 28). Or escape (Dt.23:15 – 16).
Voluntary servitude	Possible, but limited	“But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.” (Ex.21:5 – 6).	The Jewish Encyclopedia online says that even the voluntary slave went free in the jubilee year (the 50 <sup>th</sup> year) or upon the death of the master. Israel’s vision of each family owning its own piece of land overruled the idea that the slave served “permanently.”
Political vassalage	No	Israel had no stable political institution until King David’s dynasty, and the kingship was very limited in its war-power and diplomacy: “Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself...nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself” (Dt.17:14 – 20). There was no forced military service or even a standing army (Dt.20:1 – 9)	NA

#### Observations

1. In the Ten Commandments, God commanded Israel not to steal (Ex.20:15) and not to covet what was not theirs (Ex.20:17). As an application of the Commandments, stealing a person – i.e. enslaving them against their will – was one of the first prohibitions listed: “He who kidnaps (steals) a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death” (Ex.21:16). Whereas stealing property required the perpetrator to recompense between two to five times the original amount (Ex.22:1 – 9), stealing a person was punishable by death. “Slavery is the highest possible violation of the eighth commandment. To take from a man his earnings, is theft. But to take the earner is compound, superlative, perpetual theft. It is to be a thief by profession. It is a trade, a life of robbery, that vaults through all the gradations of the climax at a leap—the dread, terrific, giant robbery, that towers among other robberies, a solitary horror, monarch of the realm...Who ever made human beings slaves, or held them as slaves without coveting them?”<sup>28</sup>
2. Slavery in the Old Testament between Hebrews was a contract of labor, not ceding ownership of one’s body. Indentured servants under the Law of Moses held kinship rights, marriage rights, personal legal rights relating to physical protection and protection from breach of contract and right to testify in court, freedom of movement, and access to liberty by paying their debt (either through service, or with money). This meant that they could

<sup>27</sup> T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, editors, “Slavery”, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003)

<sup>28</sup> Theodore Dwight Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery*, 1837, p.9.



accumulate savings, wealth, and property of their own, something which was not permitted in other slave systems because of the idea in those systems that the master owns everything the slave produces, saves, or has. There was absolutely no sex slavery; God's vision for marriage was retained in all cases and limited indentured servitude. Unlike the other Ancient Near Eastern societies, the Law of Moses did not permit family members to sell each other into indentured service to recover family debts. The head of the household sold *himself* into indentured service, and while his family certainly joined him as members of the master's household, they did not become the property of the master, nor were they contracted to serve. A Hebrew indentured servant retained parental rights over his children, and presumably marital rights to be joined to his wife, so that when he went free in the jubilee year, he would take his family (Lev.25:39 – 42). The time table for granting freedom to indentured servants was accelerated *within the Pentateuch* from every fiftieth year to every seventh year (Dt.15:12).

3. The service of a “slave” or indentured servant was domestic, rural, and very limited. Hebrew indentured servants, like all other Hebrews, were bound to the worship and festival calendar of the Mosaic Law, such that they were released from labor nearly one half of the entire fifty year time period between two jubilee years.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, there were no large plantations in Israel as with the great Roman *latifundia* estates or the American South, no quarry mines as with the Athenian slaves in Laurium, and certainly no global competition as with the American South's trade in sugar and cotton, but only farmland enough to sustain the household. Furthermore, the high value placed on work by Israel (e.g. rabbis in the 1<sup>st</sup> century all learned a trade), meant that master and servant would have worked together in the fields. Since there were no segregated quarters for indentured servants, masters provided for them at the same level of lifestyle they had. “Such servitude was in fact not slavery at all, in the proper sense of the term.”<sup>30</sup> What we call “slavery” or indentured service reflects the fact that ancient Israel's primary political and economic institution was the *household*; they did not have apartments or homeless shelters (to house), banks (to lend), corporations (to employ), police (to enforce laws), prisons (to incarcerate), or halfway houses (to rehabilitate); *households* served all those functions.
4. “A slave could also be freed by running away...This provision is strikingly different from the laws of slavery in the surrounding nations and is explained as due to Israel's own history of slavery. It would have the effect of turning slavery into a voluntary institution.”<sup>31</sup> The fact that Israel had no domestic police force meant that running away was easy.<sup>32</sup>
5. Clearly, the Mosaic Law intends to strongly mitigate the fundamental causes behind indenturing one's self, while protecting those who must, and maximally helping those who leave indentured servitude from returning to it again. Orphans, widows, and aliens were honored and protected from abuse, oppression, injustice, and humiliation. Generosity was commanded. Giving interest-free loans was mandatory. This is significant because interest-laden loans were the chief cause of people being sold into slavery in many places in the Ancient Near East<sup>33</sup> and contributed significantly to slavery in classical Greek and Roman society. Newly freed people were given economic provision and relational support so they would not fall into poverty again.
6. The meaning of the word “slave” – like many other words, including “buy” and “possession” – has changed dramatically over time.<sup>34</sup> As I stated before, ancient societies valued freedom, but they valued kinship and honor much more than we do today. So to be called a “slave” of someone else, or to have your services and abilities “bought” by someone else, was very often positive language to use.

<sup>29</sup> Theodore Dwight Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery*, 1837, p.22 – 23. This does not count marriages and other family-specific festivals.

<sup>30</sup> Goldwin Smith, *Does the Bible Sanction American Slavery?*, p.40

<sup>31</sup> Raymond Westbrook, editor, *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, 2003, volume 2, page 1006

<sup>32</sup> This is also confirmed by Israel's practice of placing six cities of refuge in the land to protect a person who commits accidental manslaughter from vigilante revenge; the person who committed the accident had to flee to one of the six cities (Num.35:9 – 34; Josh.20:1 – 9). The clear implication behind building cities of refuge is that running away was an entirely feasible course of action and had a very high chance of success. Thus, running away from enslavement must have also been fairly easy.

<sup>33</sup> T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, editors, “Slavery”, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003)

<sup>34</sup> Theodore Dwight Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery*, 1837, p.15 – 21 does excellent work interpreting the word “buy” where Israel was instructed to buy their servants, and the phrase “bought with money” when it occurred. In Hebrew, the word “buy” takes its meaning from the nature of the subject to which it is applied. Hence, Eve bought (begot) a man from the Lord (Gen.4:1), God bought (gained, wrestled free) Israel (Ps.78:54), a person who hears reproof buys (gets, develops) wisdom (Pr.15:32; 16:16), a relative can buy

### *Entering and Exiting Slavery: Non-Hebrews*

A preliminary comment must be made about the overall vision of life under the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law protected the family-land vision informing Israelite ethics: Just as God gave Adam and Eve a garden land to pass on to their descendants, so God gave each and every Israelite family a garden land to pass on to their descendants. This was consistent with Israel's understanding that they were a restoration of God's true humanity, living in God's garden as God had originally intended for all humanity. Those who did not recognize the God of Israel and the Law of Moses were not permitted to participate in the family-land blessing ordained by this God.

Israel did place moral and ceremonial expectations on the foreigners – that is, the uncircumcised, or the non-Hebrew – living among them. Foreigners were instructed not to engage in the sexual practices of the Canaanites (Lev.18:26 – 30, referring to Lev.18 as a whole). Nor could they sacrifice their children as the Canaanites did; anyone, Hebrew or non-Hebrew, committing that act was punishable by death (Lev.19:1 – 5). Blasphemy of the name of God was punishable by death, whether a Hebrew or foreigner (Lev.24:16). Israelites were forbidden from inviting a foreigner – specifically, an uncircumcised person – to eat the Passover feast (Ex.12:43), although foreigners in the land were required to rid their homes of leaven (yeast) for seven days as part of Passover (Ex.12:19) and take a Sabbath rest during the Day of Atonement (Lev.16:29 – 30) as well as an entire Sabbath year rest every seventh year (Lev.25:6). Foreigners were invited to offer sacrifices but not required (Lev.17:8; Num.15:14 – 16). Israelites could not bind foreigners to the kosher laws (Dt.14:21), nor elect a foreigner as a king (Dt.17:15). But each Hebrew family was to include the foreigner in their tithe-meal before the Lord (Dt.14:29) and give the remainder to the stranger, Levite, orphan, and widow (Dt.26:12).

Economically, foreigners could become quite wealthy, even to the point of receiving destitute Hebrews as indentured servants (Lev.25:47), though they had to permit a Hebrew family member to redeem the indentured servant for a fair price, and had to release Hebrew servants in the jubilee year (Lev.25:54). Israelites could lend to wealthy foreigners with interest (Dt.15:3; 23:20), but if foreigners became poor and needy, the Israelites were to care for them without distinction: “You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you...You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing. When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing” (Dt.24:14 – 22; Lev.23:22).

Legally, foreigners in the land were protected under the Mosaic Law. “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex.22:24; 23:9). “When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God. You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin; I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt. You shall thus observe all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them; I am the LORD” (Lev.19:33 – 37). Judicial rulings were not to favor Israelites but treat Hebrews and non-Hebrews fairly: “You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among

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(redeem) a kinsmen from slavery into freedom (Neh.5:8). Even in English, we speak of “buying” politicians, a person's loyalty, etc. without referring to chattel slavery per se. Furthermore, the phrase “I have today bought you and your land” with money appears in Genesis 47:23, but Joseph was not enslaving people but instituting a 20% tax on crops in return for present assistance (Gen.47:24 – 26).

the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them. But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people” (Num.15:29 – 30). “Then I charged your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God’s” (Dt.1:16 – 17). Equal care and compassion for the foreigner was rooted in the character of God: “For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Dt.10:17 – 19). Foreigners could benefit from the cities of refuge (Num.35:15). Judicially, the Mosaic Law saw each human life being equal, whether Hebrew or a foreigner. This equality was unique in the Ancient Near East. For example, a contrast between the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, a law code contemporary to the Law of Moses, shows this:

<i>Value of Wealth, then Value of Person</i>	<i>Value of Person</i>
Code of Hammurabi: <sup>197</sup> If a man has broken another man’s limb, his own shall be broken. <sup>198</sup> If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of <i>a poor man</i> , he shall pay one maneh of silver. <sup>199</sup> If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of <i>the servant</i> of another man, he shall pay one-half of a mina. <sup>200</sup> If a man has made the tooth of another to fall out, one of his own teeth shall be knocked out. <sup>201</sup> If the tooth be that of <i>a poor man</i> , he shall pay one-third of a maneh of silver.	Leviticus 24 <sup>17</sup> If a man takes the life of <i>any human being</i> , he shall surely be put to death. <sup>18</sup> The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life. <sup>19</sup> If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: <sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. <sup>21</sup> Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. <sup>22</sup> There shall be <i>one standard</i> for you; it shall be <i>for the stranger as well as the native</i> , for I am the LORD your God.

Rather than punish criminals based on the social standing of the victim, the Mosaic Law uses one standard that equalizes the value of life, whether Hebrew or non-Hebrew. In the Babylonian Code, the poor and slaves could be treated as sub-human. They were protected by the law, but only as “sub-humans” valued far less than a “full human.” Non-Hebrews were protected as Hebrews. This principle was probably observed with respect to other crimes that could be committed against non-Hebrews, such as bodily harm of slaves resulting in their freedom (Ex.21:27 – 28). From here, we can evaluate the position of non-Hebrew slaves:

Sources of slaves	Of Non-Hebrews	Entrance	Exit
War captivity	Very limited/ No	The Canaanites were not to be enslaved. Israel’s land was limited, therefore there were no wars of expansion (Gen.15:18; Dt.11:24). And after Israel settled in the land, there was no forced military service or standing army (Dt.20:1 – 9). Therefore, any later battles were <i>defensive</i> , and thus: “When you go out to battle against your enemies, and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take them away captive...” (Dt.21:10). This stood in contrast with the prevailing military practice in most places in the world of killing all of one’s enemies. This is the only reference in the Pentateuch which describes Israel’s actual <i>means</i> of acquiring non-Hebrew slaves. Therefore, war captivity would be the only forcible source of slaves for this reference: “As for your male and female slaves whom you may have – you may acquire male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are around you. Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners who live as aliens among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession. You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as permanent	Bodily harm (Ex.21:27 – 28). Or escape (Dt.23:15 – 16), which in the case of war captivity might have been fairly common. Or, most significantly, full conversion to Judaism, which made the slave eligible for freedom on the seventh year (Dt.15:12).

		slaves” (Lev.25:44 – 46). The only other source would be self-indenture for economic, social, or spiritual reasons. The question remains whether Israelites would really have done this if the war captive was still fundamentally hostile; welcoming that person into one’s own household was not the safest decision!	
Kidnapping, piracy	No	“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex.22:24; 23:9).	NA
Purchase from slave trade	No	“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex.22:24; 23:9). Some commentators believe that Israelites were permitted to purchase foreign slaves from slave traders based on Lev.25:44, whereas I and others believe that verse referred only to self-indenture as a personal contract. The Israelite prohibition on theft (Ex.20:15) and ban on kidnapping and forced abduction (Ex.21:16, Dt.24:7) would have made them question the legitimacy of slave trading. Their memory of Joseph being bitterly sold into slavery and bought as a slave in Egypt, as a “stranger,” served as a model for why slaves ought not to be bought from foreign slave traders. Later in Old Testament history, Ezekiel condemned the sea-going trading nation of Tyre for their slave trade (Ezk.27:13), not just of Hebrews but of people categorically.	NA
Perpetual involuntary servitude (including birth to slave parents)	No		NA
Sale by parents	No	Since Israelites did not sell their own children, and viewed parental rights over children as sacred, it seems unlikely that they would have purchased the children of foreigners. The Mosaic Law instructed Israelites to economically care for the alien (Dt.24:14 – 22) presumably in order to prevent foreign parents from having to sell their children. See below.	NA
Indentured servitude: misfortune	Limited	Self-indenture was possible, but there were many mitigating factors: “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Dt.11:18 – 19). “You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you...You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow’s garment in pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing. When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the	Bodily harm (Ex.21:26 – 27). Or escape (Dt.23:15 – 16). Or conversion to Judaism, which meant freedom on the seventh year (Dt.15:12).

		boughts again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.” (Dt.24:14 – 22).	
Indentured servitude: debt	Limited	Self-indenture was possible, but there were many mitigating factors. See above.	Bodily harm (Ex.21:26 – 27). Or escape (Dt.23:15 – 16). Or conversion to Judaism, which meant freedom on the seventh year (Dt.15:12).
Penal servitude	Very limited	“If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it...He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.” (Ex.22:1 – 3)	Bodily harm (Ex.21:26 – 27). Or escape (Dt.23:15 – 16). Or conversion to Judaism, which meant freedom on the seventh year (Dt.15:12).
Voluntary servitude	Possible, past the jubilee	War captives, and possibly self-indentured foreigners, could have contracts of labor-service that extended past the jubilee: “As for your male and female slaves whom you may have – you may acquire male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are around you. Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners who live as aliens among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession. You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as permanent slaves” (Lev.25:44 – 46).	Bodily harm (Ex.21:26 – 27). Or escape (Dt.23:15 – 16). Or conversion to Judaism, which meant freedom on the seventh year (Dt.15:12).
Political vassalage	No	There were exceptions to this, but they were deviations from the Mosaic Law and not prescriptive. The Hivites, even though they were Canaanites, became political vassals of Israel because they lied about their identity and tricked Joshua into signing a treaty with them (Josh.9:3); they remained a distinct community unto themselves and were not divided to serve Hebrew households. King Solomon later levied forced labor from the remaining Canaanites to build the Temple, his palace, and other cities (1 Ki.9:15 – 24), but this was critiqued by the biblical author.	NA

#### Observations

1. Slavery of non-Hebrews was not actually an ethnic or racial issue. Israel was not an exclusive ethnic or racial community; it was a covenantal, religious community into which the foreigner was invited. The foreign free person and foreign slave alike were invited to convert into Judaism and become a part of the family-land system.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> By contrast, “The history of political ideas begins in fact with the assumption that kinship in blood is the sole possible ground of community in political functions.” (Henry Summer Maine, *Ancient Law* (reprinted by Melbourne: Book Jungle, 2006, p.129) For example, Plato, Aristotle, and the Athenians believed that slavery in Greece was due to superior races ruling over inferior races. “The humane Athenians, in the time of Pericles, Phidias, and Sophocles, revised the list of citizens, and having discovered that five thousand persons not of pure Athenian blood had crept into the register, not only expelled them, but sold them all as slaves. The Roman had one word for foreigner and enemy, not was his language belied by his conduct toward his neighbors. The Hebrew is repeatedly and most emphatically enjoined by his law to be kind to the stranger, and never to oppress

2. The means of acquiring non-Hebrew slaves were limited to war captivity from a defensive war, or a voluntary contract of labor with the non-Hebrew person who joins that Hebrew household. Free foreigners were protected from oppression, trickery, and forced enslavement by the Mosaic Law (Ex.22:24; 23:9; Dt.11:18 – 19; 24:14 – 22). Any Israelite stealing (kidnapping) another person – including a non-Hebrew – was liable to death (Ex.21:16). This means that the commandment against stealing was still applied with regards to non-Hebrew slaves.
3. Slavery of the non-Hebrew in the Old Testament was a contract of labor, not ceding ownership of one's body. Despite the language of non-Hebrew slaves being a "possession," they were clearly not treated as property, or chattel slaves. "Possession" spoke of the use of their labor.<sup>36</sup> Slaves were on the same level as their masters in all civil and religious rights. There was absolutely no sex slavery or concubinage; God's vision for marriage was retained in all cases of non-Hebrew servitude. Where marriages occurred between Hebrews and non-Hebrews under the Mosaic Law, it was considered a full marriage. Since Hebrew servants had certain legal rights, and the Mosaic Law enjoined an equality of all persons before the law, non-Hebrew servants would have had the same rights: kinship rights, marriage rights, personal legal rights relating to physical protection and protection from breach of contract and right to testify in court, freedom of movement, and access to liberty by paying their debt (either through service, or with money). This meant that they could accumulate savings, wealth, and property of their own, something which was not permitted in other slave systems because of the idea in those systems that the master owns everything the slave produces, saves, or has.
4. The conditions for freeing non-Hebrew slaves were the same as for Hebrews slaves: if a slave suffered any permanent bodily injury (Ex.21:27 – 28) or ran away (Dt.23:15 – 16), that slave would be freed.<sup>37</sup> Once again, the runaway principle is noteworthy: "A slave could also be freed by running away...This provision is strikingly different from the laws of slavery in the surrounding nations and is explained as due to Israel's own history of slavery. It would have the effect of turning slavery into a voluntary institution."<sup>38</sup> The fact that Israel had no domestic police force meant that running away was easy.<sup>39</sup> Hence, even war captives could have simply fled from their captors if they wanted to do so. Weld points out, "It was not merely, 'Thou shalt not deliver him to his master,' but 'he (the servant) shall dwell with thee, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates where it liketh him best.' Every Israelite was commanded to respect his free choice, and to put him in no condition against his will. What was this but a proclamation, that all who chose to live in the land and obey the laws, were left to their own free will, to dispose of their services at such a rate, to such persons, and in such places as they pleased?"<sup>40</sup> In this sense, dwelling in the land with the Israelites was entirely a voluntary option. This is because recognition of Israel's God, participating in Israel's expressions of faith and devotion to this God, and following Israel's laws were entirely a matter of free choice.
5. Hebrews made non-Hebrew slaves part of their households. Hebrews were commanded to circumcise non-Hebrew slaves, by Mosaic command (Ex.12:43 – 44) as well as by the example of Abraham (Gen.17:23 – 27), and include them in Sabbath rest, public worship (Dt.5:14 – 15), and the annual high holy days, in particular the Passover festival (Dt.16:10 – 17), where the whole community celebrated God delivering Israel from slavery in

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him, and this on the ground, so humbling to national pride, that he had been himself an oppressed and despised dweller in a strange land." (Goldwin Smith, *Does the Bible Sanction American Slavery?*, p.44)

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 34

<sup>37</sup> Philip Schaff, *Slavery and the Bible*, 1861, p.14 – 15 believes that the runaway slave law of Dt.23:15 – 16 applied only to Hebrew slaves, and not non-Hebrew slaves, on the basis that Dt.22:1 – 4 required an Israelite to return lost animals or objects to his fellow Israelite. However, the slave who intentionally fled his or her master is differentiated from the animal which wandered away, or the object which was misplaced, precisely by *the humanity of the slave*. This is a vital reason for not viewing Dt.22:1 – 4 as the larger category into which Dt.23:15 – 16 must fit. Besides, there is no clear reason for differentiating between Hebrew and non-Hebrew servants for in both cases, something of material value (i.e. labor) is lost. Dt.23:15 – 16 refers to *any* runaway slave – Hebrew or not – for the law makes no such distinction.

<sup>38</sup> Raymond Westbrook, editor, *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law* volume 2 (Brill Academic Publishers, 2003) p.1006.

<sup>39</sup> This is also confirmed by Israel's practice of placing six cities of refuge in the land to protect a person who commits accidental manslaughter from vigilante revenge; the person who committed the accident had to flee to one of the six cities (Num.35:9 – 34; Josh.20:1 – 9). The clear implication behind building cities of refuge is that running away was an entirely feasible course of action and had a very high chance of success. Thus, running away from enslavement must have also been fairly easy.

<sup>40</sup> Weld, p.27.



Egypt. Hence the voluntary nature of self-indenture must have involved knowing consent to these Hebrew religious practices. The free foreigner, by contrast, was not to eat of the Passover feast (Ex.12:48). But the non-Hebrew slave did. This was highly unusual in the ancient world, since in other societies most slave peoples were quartered separately from the ruling class, slave classes were seen as polluting holy areas, etc. The only remaining threshold to fully convert to Judaism was profession of faith in the God of Israel, and perhaps baptism. A full convert to Judaism was, by legal right, eligible to be freed on the seventh year of their service (Dt.15:12) or on the jubilee year (Lev.25:39 – 41).<sup>41</sup> They were probably eligible for inheritance, as suggested by the fact that Israel's ancestor, the patriarch Abraham, was going to give his entire inheritance to Eliezer of Damascus, a man born "in my house," that is, born to one of his servants (Gen.15:3), and also by the fact that one of the only two faithful servants of Moses, Caleb, was not biologically related to Abraham – he was ethnically a Kenizzite, of the Canaanite tribes! (Num.32:12; Gen.15:19) – but helped lead Israel into the promised land and shared in the national inheritance of land by virtue of being adopted into the tribe of Judah (Num.34:19); I assume that full membership in Judaism meant sharing in the family-land inheritance system. Foreigners seemed to become a full part of Israel if they married an Israelite: all of the twelve sons of Jacob married Canaanite or Egyptian women (Gen.38ff.); Moses married a Midianite/Cushite woman (Ex.2:21; Num.12:1); an ordinary Israelite woman is noted to have married an Egyptian man (Lev.24:10). Otherwise, while they remained non-Hebrew, and chose not to run away, they would be "a permanent possession" as contracted labor to the next generation within the Hebrew household (Lev.25:46).

6. The continuance of non-Hebrew slaves in a Hebrew household was also entirely voluntary. Even though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob appeared to have servants, when Jacob and his family went to Egypt at Joseph's invitation, Jacob took his flocks and herds but no servants (Gen.45:10; 47:1, 6). "His servants doubtless served under their own contracts, and when Jacob went into Egypt, they chose to stay in their own country. The government might sell thieves, if they had no property, until their services had made good the injury, and paid the legal fine (Ex.22:3). But masters seem to have had no power to sell their servants – the reason is obvious. To give the master a right to sell his servant, would annihilate the servant's right of choice in his own disposal; but, says the objector, to give the master a right to buy a servant, equally annihilates the servant's choice. Answer: It is one thing to have a right to buy a man, and a very different thing to have a right to buy him of *another* man."<sup>42</sup> The person's *free choice* to sell her/his labor was the crucial distinction. Free choice meant that they could leave the service. At any time under the Law of Moses, if the non-Hebrew servant refused to attend the Feast of Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles, what force constrained him to do so? What armed guard marched with them to keep them enslaved? Especially when no standing army or police force existed in Israel and such servants could bear their own arms (Gen.14:14)? The punishment for not being circumcised or otherwise continuing in Judaism was to "be cut off from" the people, that is, to be excommunicated and released (Gen.17:14; Ex.12:15; 30:33, 38; 31:14; Lev.7:20; 17:4, 8 – 10; 18:29; 19:8; 20:5, 17 – 18; 22:3; 23:29; etc.), which is what the person was already doing.
7. Thus, the Hebrew household appears to have been the institution for naturalization (politically) and mentoring-discipleship (spiritually and morally). There was no bureaucratic state in ancient Israel for its first 450 years (Acts 13:19) to provide schooling, acculturation, and a citizenship test as is done in the U.S. today; neither did the later Davidic dynasty play the role of naturalizing new citizens/converts to Judaism. Household "slavery" appears to be the process for naturalizing foreigners within family kinship and to full membership in Judaism. Speaking anachronistically, the Hebrew household served as the basic unit of both state (naturalization) and church (mentoring-discipleship), since "state" and "church" were merged in ancient Israel.
8. Very importantly, in two very important instances, we know historically when Jews were not living in their ancestral lands, they abolished slavery: the Therapeutae Jews in Alexandria, Egypt,<sup>43</sup> and the Qumran-Essene Jews in the Dead Sea region.<sup>44</sup> This suggests that Jews recognized that Jewish law

<sup>41</sup> Philip Schaff, 1861, p.14 – 15 arrives at this conclusion as well. Theodore Dwight Weld, 1837, p.24 – 31 comes close to this conclusion by noting that this was entirely voluntary and the means of becoming a Hebrew proselyte via adoption into a household.

<sup>42</sup> Theodore Dwight Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery*, p.29.

<sup>43</sup> Philo of Alexandria, *On the Contemplative Life*, ch.9, writes, "They do not have slaves to wait upon them as they consider that the ownership of servants is entirely against nature. For nature has borne all men to be free, but the wrongful and covetous acts of some who pursued that source of evil, inequality, have imposed their yoke and invested the stronger with power over the weaker."

envisioned a relationship between land and indentured service, and certainly indicates that Jews understood God’s vision from the creation to be the governing principle in other cases, such as the Diaspora condition when Jews were under foreign rule, and/or not in the “Promised Land.”

Summary of Slavery in the Old Testament:

<i>Source of Slaves</i>	<i>Ancient</i>	<i>Of Hebrews</i>	<i>Of non-Hebrews</i>
War captivity	Common	No	Very limited
Kidnapping, piracy	Common	No	No
Purchase from slave trade	Common	No	No
Perpetual involuntary servitude	Common	No	No
Sale by parents	Common	No	No
Indentured servitude: misfortune	Common	Very limited	Limited
Indentured servitude: debt	Common	Very limited	Limited
Penal servitude	Common	Very limited	Very limited
Voluntary servitude	Common	Possible, but limited	Possible, past jubilee
Political vassalage	Common	No	No

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<sup>44</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p.14 says, “The Essenes rejected slavery in principle as incompatible with the equality of all men before their Creator.” Chadwick is probably drawing on first century Jewish historian Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.1.5, “This is demonstrated by that institution of theirs, which will not suffer any thing to hinder them from having all things in common; so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who hath nothing at all. There are about four thousand men that live in this way, and neither marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants; as thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust.”

## Part 2: Slavery and the New Testament

### Historical Context:

- Greece: The combination of democracy, mass slavery, and racism traces back to Athens. Athenian philosophers Plato and Aristotle opposed enslavement of fellow Greeks, but favored mass enslavement of “barbarians” while the Athenians worked on theoretical science, political philosophy, and art. They were the first civilization to use mass slavery – under the justification that the Athenians and the “barbarians” were descended from different ancestors, and hence slaves were inferior by nature. Plato assigned “barbarian” slaves a vital role in his republic doing all of the production. Aristotle said, “From the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.” Plato and Aristotle owned five and fourteen slaves, respectively, as enumerated in their wills.<sup>45</sup>
- Roman Empire: At the time of Christ, in the Roman heartland, there were an estimated 2 – 3 million slaves, about one third the population of the Empire.
  - Slaves came from military conquests, birth to slave parents, rescue from infanticide, international trade, piracy and kidnapping, debt servitude, penal servitude, and voluntary servitude.<sup>46</sup> Many slaves would have been children or elderly, without the means to live in freedom. From a practical standpoint alone, given the function of slavery in all its forms and its magnitude, it would have been impossible for the Christian community to carry out a categorical command to emancipate slaves.
  - Manumission was widespread, frequent, and expected by a majority of slaves: “A freedman was a slave who had been manumitted, that is, freed. Manumission was widely practiced in ancient Rome, and it is an aspect of Roman society which sets it apart from other slave-owning societies. For example, very few slaves in the American antebellum South were ever manumitted by their owners. In Rome, however, slaves were not only freed but were also given Roman citizenship and thus assimilated into Roman society and culture. Yet, although manumission was a common practice, not every slave could hope to be manumitted. Wealthy slave-owners could much better absorb the cost of manumission (loss of property) than could moderate-income slave-owners. And slaves working in a private household, whose job had been to attend to a master’s personal comfort and who were therefore known well by the master, were the most likely to receive freedom. Slaves whose work brought profit to an owner – that is, slaves working on a farm or ranch in a mine or factory, as a prostitute or gladiator – were least likely to be manumitted.”<sup>47</sup>
  - People sometimes chose to become slaves to wealthy masters for the sake of advancement, hopes for sharing in an inheritance or in social prestige, etc. Living conditions could be quite good, sometimes better than the economic situation of free poor people. Emperors used slaves for imperial secretarial and administrative roles. In the cities, slaves performed roles in the immediate household: nurses, tutors, teachers, dishwashers, housecleaners, litter-bearers, cooks, secretaries, gardeners, tailors, hairdressers, butlers. Their incentives to perform were more positive, ranging from advancement to ownership of property to manumission, rather than being negative, like fear of punishment and abuse. Slaves could in fact own other slaves. There were some means of exit of which slaves availed themselves; thus slavery during this period was sometimes used as a form of employment or indentured servitude. Slave concubines were usually freed either after they bore the master a child or at the master’s death.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.27.

<sup>46</sup> See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.105 – 131 on the enslavement of previously “free” persons, especially p.111 – 112 for war captives, p.116 for kidnapping and raids by pirates, p.122 – 123 for Romans accepting tribute and tax payment in slaves in the eastern provinces, p.125 for debt enslavement, p.126 for slavery being a punishment for crimes, p.129 – 130 on abandoned children. On enslavement by birth in classical Roman times, see Patterson, p.139 – 141.

<sup>47</sup> Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also Andrea Giardina (ed), *The Romans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.159; and Lesley Adkins and Roy Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome* (FactsOnFile, 1994), p.342.

<sup>48</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.230.

- In rural areas, however, slaves worked on large estates in agriculture or as miners. The three Roman Servile Wars, where slaves revolted under the late Roman Republic (135 – 132 BC in Sicily, 104 – 100 BC in Sicily, and 73 – 71 BC in mainland Italy, famously, under Spartacus), show that Roman slavery had been certainly quite harsh and oppressive before the New Testament period, due to changes in land ownership during the Second Punic War against Hannibal (218 – 202 BC). After the Third Servile War, the Roman people “out of sheer fear seem to have begun to treat their slaves less harshly than before.”<sup>49</sup> Also because of the period of peace after Julius Caesar’s Gallic Wars from 52 BC, fewer war captives were enslaved, so wealthy Roman agriculturalists began to use fewer slaves and more paid free labor in sharecropping arrangements.<sup>50</sup> While there were legal and cultural limitations placed on masters’ ability to abuse their slaves – for example, during the reign of Claudius (41 – 54 AD), laws were enacted that made the killing of an old or infirm slave an act of murder<sup>51</sup> – “of themselves, slaves had no real rights before the law, and no proper means of appeal against their masters. Moreover, their word was of no account. A slave was so entirely devoid of any personal dignity that, when called to testify before a duly appointed court, torture might be applied as a matter of course.”<sup>52</sup>
- Harboring a fugitive slave was punishable by death. “The *senatus consultum* also appears to have prescribed a penalty for failure to hand over a fugitive to his master or to the magistrates within 20 days, if found on one’s property.”<sup>53</sup> “At the same time that the privilege of asylum was conferred on the temple, a suit for compensation and penalty was instituted against any private individual who should either help or harbour a runaway. Flight of slaves was an issue to be regulated...The prosecution of persons either for persuading a slave to run away, concealing his whereabouts, or seizing, selling or purchasing him was known to Roman law from the second century BC...It became a *crimen capitale* no longer punished necessarily by a monetary penalty but also by banishment to the mines or crucifixion...”<sup>54</sup> The fact that Philemon did not post a warrant for his runaway slave Onesimus, then welcomed him back and freed him at Paul’s request, attests to Christians cultivating a forgiving character.
- Roman law did not recognize marriage among slaves. The Christian community did. Priscilla was a common Roman aristocratic name. Aquila was a common slave name. It is likely that this couple formed an inter-class marriage.
- Slavery declined again in the latter days of the Roman Empire (nearing 476 AD) as a direct result of military weakness. Agriculture and industry were manned by free, paid laborers. This development probably made slaves more valuable as labor, contributing an economic disincentive to free slaves.<sup>55</sup> It is significant that Christians continued to free slaves during this time period, and advocate manumission.

#### Jesus, Israel, and the Old Testament

- *Humanity in Creation and New Creation:* Jesus deepened and radicalized some of the ethics of the Mosaic Law to reflect what humanity was called to *from the creation*, prior to the fall. He viewed the Mosaic Law as a temporary, practical code for Israel during its period of “hardness of heart” before him (Mt.19:1 – 12). Jesus therefore called for a renewed human ethics, including marriage but also attitudes towards money (Mt.19:13 – 30) and power (Mt.20:1 – 28; 23:1 – 12), which would have certainly impacted the Christian treatment of slavery, since slavery was not intended from the creation but was a product of human sinfulness. Jesus inaugurated remarkable shifts along the following lines:
- *Warfare, violence, and land acquisition:* The fact that Christian mission did not advance through warfare or violence, and was measured in terms of persons exercising choice without coercion, not in terms of lands or territories, completely removed enslavement by war captivity as a Christian

<sup>49</sup> Davis, *Readings in Ancient History*, p.90.

<sup>50</sup> Frank E. Smitha, *From a Republic to Emperor Augustus: Spartacus and Declining Slavery*, 2006. <http://www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch18.htm>. Retrieved 2006-09-23.

<sup>51</sup> Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*, 25.2

<sup>52</sup> David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p.168. See also S. Scott Bartchy, “Slavery” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Vol.4, Q-Z), edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p.539 – 46.

<sup>53</sup> S.R. Llewelyn, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (volume 8). Ancient History Documentary Centre, Macquarie University:1997, p.26ff.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.35.

<sup>55</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.27.

possibility. In addition, Christians for the first three hundred years interpreted Jesus as being against war (though not against a domestic police force),<sup>56</sup> thus completely condemning war captivity as a source of slaves. Christians nevertheless cared for enslaved war captives since, as a minority in the Roman Empire, they viewed war as a perpetual condition.

- *Wealth, family, and land:* Jesus neither owned slaves nor even his own ancestral Jewish land and other forms of wealth. He taught all his disciples to do likewise, being radically generous with all wealth (thus including slaves once Christian faith extended into the Gentile world) especially for the sake of the poor and the Christian evangelistic mission worldwide (e.g. Lk.3:7 – 14; 6:20 – 49; 8:1 – 21; 9:51 – 62; 10:25 – 37; 12:13 – 34; 14:12 – 35; 16:1 – 13; 18:15 – 19:10; 21:1 – 4; 24:46 – 47). The impact of this ethic of radical generosity was enormous, for it contributed to Christians freeing slaves, and also caring for poor laborers (Jas.5:1 – 6). In fact, Christians sold themselves into slavery in order to free other slaves and provide food for the poor: “We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that they might ransom others. Many, too, have surrendered themselves to slavery, that with the price which they received for themselves, they might provide food for others.”<sup>57</sup> Christians continued to loan money without interest, and most likely would have declined to enslave a person indebted to them, since they constantly prayed, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Mt.6:12; Lk.11:4).
- *Prohibition against forced enslavement and slave trading:* The Mosaic Law held a kidnapper and slave trader to the death penalty (Ex.21:16; Dt.24:7), and the New Testament continued to see this as a heinous moral crime (1 Tim.1:10). In addition, the New Testament authors commanded that “no man transgress and defraud his brother” (1 Th.4:6) and taught that “thieves” – broadly understood to include kidnappers, slave traders, extortionists, and oppressors – would not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor.6:10). Revelation 18:13 condemns slave trading. Thus, the New Testament authors continued to critically evaluate the various sources of slavery. From the first to the fifth centuries, we have documentation that Christians purchased and freed captive slaves (see table below).
- *All ethnicities and races:* In addition, Jesus offered his “new humanity” to all humanity, Jew and Gentile, equalizing all ethnicities (e.g. Lk.4:14 – 30; Gal.3:28; Col.3:11) and cultures (1 Cor.9:19 – 22), humanizing each person, and calling each to share in his new humanity ontologically by his Spirit so as to manifest the same character he demonstrated in his earthly ministry. There is absolutely no basis for a racial system of slavery in any form.
- *Marriage and sexuality:* Jesus’ teaching on marriage and sexuality shaped the way Christians handled slavery, like the Mosaic Law shaped the way Jews handled slavery. Jesus’ renewal of God’s original ideal for marriage from creation as a sacred bond between husband and wife that no one must put asunder (e.g. Mt.19:1 – 12), his condemnation of lust (Mt.5:27 – 32), and the frequent New Testament prohibitions of fornication and adultery (1 Cor.6:10; Eph.5:3 – 5; Col.3:5 – 7; 1 Th.4:1 – 8) forced Christians to place limits on any form of slavery as it intersected with the Christian vision of marriage and sexuality. Masters could not use slaves for sexual purposes like prostitution or fornication or concubinage. Christian masters could not separate married slaves because whom God joined together, no man could separate (a consideration that was obviously violated by slavery in the Americas), even though Roman law did not recognize slave marriages. And masters could only marry their slaves after freeing them. Christian marriage and sexuality contributed to seeing both male and female slaves clearly as human beings who had rights and responsibilities before God.
- *The human body:* Exemplifying the Christian tradition, Paul taught – especially in 1 Corinthians (composed between 53 – 57 AD) – that the individual human body belongs solely to God. Paul’s basic thought about the human body, which reverberates throughout his first letter to the Corinthians is found in 6:19 – 20: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” The human body will be resurrected in glory like Jesus’ resurrected

<sup>56</sup> For the first three centuries, pacifism was nearly a consensus view of the early church. The idolatry involved in being a soldier who swore allegiance to Caesar, was, no doubt, an aspect of the pacifist position. Origen wrote that “...we no longer take sword against a nation, nor do we learn any more to make war, having become sons of peace for the sake of Jesus, who is our commander.” Tertullian wrote: “Christ in disarming Peter ungirt every soldier.” There were soldiers in the early church, but they were enlisted when they converted to Christian faith. These soldiers were required to be non-participants in war. If they were an officer conducting warfare, they were required to resign (Dale W. Brown, “Pacifism” in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, p. 645).

<sup>57</sup> *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, ch.55

body (1 Cor.15:12 – 57). This would certainly have raised numerous questions about human relationships where the use of one's body is involved. Due to this concern that Christians be available to the Spirit of Jesus in the present, Paul *loosened* social relations and commitments between people, including marriage and slavery “to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord” (1 Cor.7:35, see 7:29).

- Paul, perhaps to the surprise of the modern reader, discusses marriage and slavery in the same breath. He places limits on Christian marriage and the narcissism that could develop between spouses: “<sup>29</sup>But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on *those who have wives should be as though they had none*; <sup>30</sup>and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; <sup>31</sup>and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. <sup>32</sup>*One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord*; <sup>33</sup>*but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife*, <sup>34</sup>*and his interests are divided*... <sup>35</sup>*This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord*” (1 Cor.7:21 – 23). This is very instructive about how we read Ephesians and Colossians: In those letters, Christian teaching is given about the quality and purpose of wife-husband and slave-master relationships, even though the very important qualifications noted in 1 Corinthians 7 are absent. If *marriage*, which is good and designed from creation, has limits because of the preeminence of our responsibility to Christ, how much more does *slavery*, which was *not* intended from creation, have *its* limits? If Paul loosens the relationship between a Christian husband and wife, what will he say about the relationship between a Christian master and slave?
- For the same reason that Paul urges Christians to consider singleness as opposed to marriage, while still upholding the goodness of marriage (1 Cor.7:28), the practical criterion in 1 Corinthians 7 is discretionary independence (“undistracted devotion”) to serve the Lord. There may be situations in which being a free but employed person would give a person *less* discretionary time and energy than being a slave of a supportive master. This underlies Paul's statement, “Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called” (1 Cor.7:24). Upward mobility for its own sake was not highly looked upon in Christian ethics.
- However, Paul taught that lawfully obtained manumission is the ideal for slaves: “Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that” (1 Cor.7:21). Paul therefore has a general preference for a slave becoming free.
- Paul's admonition to “not become slaves of men” (1 Cor.7:23) shows an aversion to slavery or indentured servitude in general, despite the fact that in the Roman world, people voluntarily sold themselves into slavery to wealthy and powerful patrons to strategically advance their careers.<sup>58</sup> This is absolutely consistent with the overarching question of how we must live if our bodies are the Lord's.
- Skill in Christian service and leadership was valued highly, and led to early manumission (Philem.10 – 12). Since the slave's status may also conflict with any call of God to a new people, geography, or ministry task, in which case the master may have been asked to release the slave. Paul's letter to Philemon, asking Philemon to free Onesimus reflects that principle. This led to an early form of meritocracy based on Christian character and ability.

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<sup>58</sup> “In Roman Italy of the first century BC, it was evidently possible for the slave to achieve individual distinction despite his lowly origins and to be happily received into the free, civic community.” (Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, Cambridge: 1994, p.1) “It was possible for such men, whether born into the imperial familia or recruited from outside, to advance through what loosely resembled a career structure, beginning with subordinate positions while still young and proceeding to positions of greater authority after manumission, which typically came when they were about thirty. For some, especially in the first century AD, the way was open to participate directly in the highest levels of Roman government.” (p.69) “One captured slave from Smyrna “served as a young administrator in the household of the emperor Tiberius, by whom he was set free. He accompanied Caligula when the emperor traveled north in AD 39 and was probably promoted to a provincial financial posting under Claudius and Nero before eventually becoming a rationibus, secretary in charge of the emperor's accounts, under Vespasian. Vespasian indeed conferred upon him the rank of eques, second only to that of senator and his marriage, under Claudius, to a woman of free birth produced two sons who also gained equestrian standing.” (p.69ff.) “Some ambitious men did the same [sold themselves] in the hope of becoming the stewards of noblemen or imperial treasures. This, in my view, was the story of the all-powerful and extremely wealthy Pallas, scion of a noble Arcadian family, who sold himself into slavery so that he might be taken on as steward by a woman of the imperial family and who wound up as minister of finance and eminence grise to the emperor Claudius.” (Paul Veyne, editor, translated by A. Goldhammer, *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, Belknap-Harvard: 1987, p.55)



- The fact that several freed slaves became prominent leaders in the church (Onesimus, Pius I, Callixtus) is strongly suggestive that Christians simply ignored any social stigmas related to slavery.
- *The church as a voluntary, countercultural community:* Since the Christian community was not a civic state like Mosaic Israel, it did not stone unbelievers but simply let them voluntarily leave the community, or on occasion excommunicated them and treated them like an unbeliever again (e.g. Mt.18:17; 1 Cor.5), that is, like someone to be loved but at a level removed from the trust and responsibilities shared by the Christian community. Also, Christians did not hold non-Christians accountable for Christian ethics (Mt.7:1 – 6; 1 Cor.5:12). Thus, church and society are fundamentally separate in Christian thought and practice, and church and state are fundamentally separate as well. The church was and is a voluntary organization, and Christian ethics were given by Jesus for life in the church as opposed to being translated into public policy. Unlike the Mosaic Law, the Christian approach to ethics prescribes no set civic and legal punishments for crime or sin. Those questions would have to be answered through standard political means.
  - Christians have wrestled ever since with whether to apply sub-Christian ethics to others in public policy, and if so, how. For example, the first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine, made enslavement by kidnapping children punishable by death and forbade the separation of slave families. In my opinion, these are remarkably positive policies. Further legal developments in this area were very important to watch and require much thoughtfulness to analyze.
  - Any slave of a Christian master could voluntarily leave. Paul's way of handling the case of when a non-believing spouse wants to leave a believing spouse ("let them leave" in 1 Cor.7:12 – 15) suggests that a disobedient spouse, child, or slave would also be treated as an unbeliever, perhaps tolerated, and/or simply allowed or told to leave the Christian community. Jesus' teachings on loving enemies and letting go of wealth would have prevented retaliation from Christian masters. Moreover, Jesus had radically critiqued all social hierarchy (Mt.23:8 – 12), and the use of power was his most repeated lesson to his disciples (Mk.8:31 – 36; 9:31 – 50; 10:32 – 45; Lk.22:24 – 26). He laid the framework for the appropriate use of power by Christians: being under the authority of a Christian was a matter of voluntary obedience.
  - Philemon may reflect a continuation of the "runaway" principle of Dt.23:15 – 16 within the Christian community.
- *The Christian household as a platform for Christian mission:* The Christian household served as a foundation for ministry to the broader community, for households were still the basic social and political unit in first century Jewish and Greco-Roman culture. This was a strategy developed by Jesus when he sent twelve disciples to recruit other Jewish households (Mt.10:1 – 42; Lk.9:1 – 9) and a second wave of seventy disciples to do the same (Lk.10:1 – 24): "And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his *house* until you leave that city." (Mt.10:11) "Whatever *house* you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this *house*...' Stay in that *house*, eating and drinking what they give you...Do not keep moving from *house to house*" (Lk.10:5 – 8). Christians throughout the New Testament period met primarily in households (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 8:3; 10:14; 12:12; 16:15; 16:31 – 34; 18:8; 20:20; 21:8; Rom.16:3 – 6, 10, 11; 1 Cor.1:11, 16; Col.4:15; Phil.4:22). Generosity and hospitality were expected of Christian households (Rom.12:10 – 13; 1 Pet.4:9; Heb.13:2) to provide meeting space, care for the poor, room for the sick, etc. The ideal apparently was to multiply free Christian households. The "slave-master relationship" teaching in Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Peter, and 1 Timothy needs to be evaluated in this overall context.
  - Perhaps we become uncomfortable reading about Christian slavery in Ephesians 6:5 – 9, Colossians 3:22 – 4:1, and 1 Timothy 6:1 – 10 because we fear that the sum total of the slave's responsibilities was obedience to her/his master's every whim. To the contrary, we are required to conclude the opposite. Those letters, and especially the loosening of human relations in slavery and marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, indicate that the slave's responsibilities to Jesus qualified and took precedence over the slave's responsibilities to the master.
    - One's interpretation of the slave-master teaching in the New Testament completely depends on how one *sequences* the various responsibilities, ideas, and texts. One cannot simply read Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9, Colossians 3:22 – 4:1, and 1 Timothy 6:1 – 10 without regard for 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul challenges and limits all human relationships and commitments. I regard 1 Corinthians 7 as logically and theologically prior to Ephesians and Colossians because it gives the larger framework into which everything must be placed. That means the teaching on Christian household relationships in Ephesians and Colossians is limited by 1 Corinthians 7 and framed by the thoughts there. Christian marriage and Christian slave-master relationships are important and have ethical guidelines,

but must first yield to larger concerns about ministry, mission, and flexibility. The fundamental reason I believe this is that the opposite sequence makes the texts impossible to reconcile: If one takes Ephesians and Colossians as the larger framework, making those relationships paramount and binding (which would be additionally strange considering the fact that manumission happened fairly frequently in Roman society), then 1 Corinthians 7 with its *limitations* on relationships and *loosening* of human commitments – including marriage and slavery – would make no sense at all. Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Timothy fill out Christian teaching on slave-master relationships after all other Christian teaching is taken into account.

- Furthermore, the sequence of responsibilities within Ephesians itself (for example) suggests that we must read Ephesians in proper order. The dynamics of Christian responsibility required the master to grant the slave enough freedom to participate in Christian giftedness and leadership (Eph.4:7 – 16) and mission (Eph.5:7 – 14), not only to the local community but the whole world (Mt.28:18 – 20; Lk.24:44 – 47; Jn.20:21 – 23). Practically speaking, networks of house churches would have required very mobile and flexible groups of elders, deacons, preachers, and leaders, including those who were Christian slaves. Significantly, the prior material in Ephesians 1:1 – 5:20 and Colossians 1:1 – 3:17 affirms not only the equal worth of all Christians, but the equal responsibilities of all Christians to demonstrate love, integrity, gifts, and mission, all of which requires a significant degree of freedom of relationship, mobility, speech, and use of wealth. The master could not impede those responsibilities. Thus, the master becomes a sponsor of the slave for the purpose of Christian love and mission, which all are called to do. Paul’s teaching about slaves and masters in Ephesians and Colossians limits the power of the Christian master, and refocuses it.<sup>59</sup>
  - As Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 7, a commitment to Jesus’ mission and financial simplicity were admired Christian character qualities that probably made a Christian slave eligible for manumission. Paul’s letter to Philemon asking him to release Onesimus is based on Onesimus’ usefulness in Christian mission and leadership (Philem.10 – 12). A freed slave could become a prominent leader in the church, as Onesimus apparently did, which is significant in attesting to how Christians ignored the stigma of slavery, and to how Christians developed an early form of meritocracy based on ability and character. This is probably why Paul says, “For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave” (1 Cor.7:22); every Christian’s responsibilities were in essence the same. The Christian slave was responsible to do what Jesus calls each person to do, and the Christian master was responsible to let her/him do it.
  - If a master used coercive elements, it was seen as evil. The three relationships described in Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9 (marriage, parenting, master-slave) involve relations of power where the person in power is limited precisely in his ability to abuse his speech; this is significant because speech is the foundation of the use of social power. (1) The husband (5:25 – 33) is not to accuse his wife, separating himself emotionally from her in violation of the head-body unity of marriage; but he is reminded that Jesus washes his wife with the word. That is, Jesus speaks to the church not to condemn her, but to express his unity with her in love and build her up. (2) The father (6:4) is not to exasperate, anger, or embitter his children but to teach them patiently. (3) The master (6:9) is to “do the same” as the slave in what the slave was taught (!), that is,

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<sup>59</sup> I hasten to point out that my conclusions about slavery in Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Corinthians, Philemon, and 1 Timothy are rooted in *exegesis*, not *hermeneutics*. Some diminish Paul’s letters by saying that some or all of his letters were “occasional,” as if Paul delivered sub-Christian ethics in some situations. This hermeneutic of rendering Paul’s content null and void beyond their original audiences ultimately makes Paul’s mind completely inaccessible to us. Shrouding Paul behind the mists of time is, perhaps, what some interpreters want to do to nullify Paul on slaves, women, etc. Yet the argument that Ephesians in particular is “occasional” is weak since Ephesians is not a response to any problem. The same charge leveled at 1 Corinthians is unsustainable because all of Paul’s teaching in that letter is firmly rooted in Jesus’ resurrection (1 Cor.15), hardly a basis for “occasional” ethics tailor-made just for their situation. Hence, all of Paul’s teaching must be *exegetically* integrated together in some systematic way, including his teaching on slavery, so that Paul can be understood as a *person* with coherent thoughts, and coherent ethics. Nor do I believe that our cultural context plays a hermeneutical role in determining the true meaning of Paul’s thought. Some believe that doing biblical interpretation in liberal, post-slavery America, with its cultural bias towards freedom and individualism, means that we should look at the “trajectory” of biblical slavery, from Old Testament to New, as trending towards the political “freedom” and individualism we experience now. This would have been supremely unhelpful in the pre-Civil War debates about slavery in the U.S., because which hermeneutical context should one have chosen: free states or slave states? Moreover, are we to now think that the New Testament pointed beyond itself and looked ahead longingly for...today’s white American culture?

to respect, fear, and serve with sincerity, and additionally, “to give up threatening,” which is a verbal limit. One can imagine that any power relationship, not just these three, would follow this pattern. The Ephesians and Colossians passages are helpful because they assume that power is a fundamental reality in human relations; Christians simply inherit these relationships from the fallen world and/or the original creation order. Yet in every case, power is subverted for a distinctly Christian purpose, especially but not exclusively regarding how we speak. This is what leads the Christian community into being a community where songs of praise and a symphony of thanksgiving break forth from everyone, the vision of the church that Paul gives in Ephesians 5:18 – 20 right before talking about these three relationships. The church is to be a singing symphony where we all have a part. To be “filled by the Spirit” as Paul says is to be a community where all speak, not just the powerful.

- Slaves had recourse within the church to confront masters who sin, obstruct Christian mission, or ask for something immoral. Bringing Jesus’ process for reconciliation in Matthew 18:15 – 20 together with Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9, we get a very important insight. If the wife, child, or slave needed to address the sin of the husband, parent, or master, what recourse did they have? According to Jesus, they can confront their counterpart in private (Mt.18:15), then with one or two witnesses (18:16), and then before the church (18:17) for not repenting in a way commensurate with what love, service, mission, and reconciliation in Christ require. Hence, the New Testament does not require of slaves unconditional obedience to their masters.
- If the Christian slave was not manumitted immediately, s/he was still responsible for paying off her/his debt, finishing a sentence, etc. However, the desires for upward mobility and material gain were not considered appropriate motivations for anyone, including Christian slaves seeking automatic release from Christian masters (1 Cor.7:17 – 35; 1 Tim.6:2 – 11). Nor, on a practical level, did independence necessarily lead to an easier life, so manumission by a Christian master, while it certainly happened, was not automatic.
- As 1 Clement (ch.55) attests, Christians sold themselves into slavery, probably mostly to Christian masters, in order to free other slaves and provide food for the poor. Remarkably, this happened despite Paul’s teaching that Christians “not become slaves of men” (1 Cor.7:23). Their participation in a Christian household ministry, which would have happened anyway, may not have been very hindered by their status as slaves or indentured servants of that household.
- All this lends credence to the assertion that the early Christians, among themselves, *simply behaved as if slavery did not exist*.
- *Christian to non-Christian relationships:* As people became Christians and joined the Christian community, they brought master-slave relationships with them. Christian slaves who had non-Christian masters were encouraged to respectfully serve (1 Pet.2:18 – 25; 1 Tim.6:1; Ti.2:9 – 10) in order to help the master make a commitment to Jesus as well. Especially given Roman law which dictated that harboring a fugitive slave was punishable by death, this position seems reasonable.

### Entering and Exiting Slavery: Christian

Cause of slavery	Of anyone	Entering	Exit
War captivity	No	Christian mission did not advance through warfare or violence. The Christian condemnation of war resulted in an implicit condemnation of war captivity. Although there is a lack of explicit evidence, Christians probably cared for those enslaved by war captivity. <sup>60</sup>	Uncertain.
Kidnapping, piracy	No	The Mosaic Law held a kidnapper and slave trader to the death penalty (Ex.21:16; Dt.24:7), and the New Testament continued to see this as a heinous moral crime (1 Tim.1:10). In addition, the New Testament authors commanded that “no man transgress and defraud his brother” (1 Th.4:6) and taught that “thieves” – broadly understood to include kidnappers, slave traders, extortionists, and oppressors – would not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor.6:10). Revelation 18:13 condemns slave trading. Thus, the New Testament continued to evaluate the various sources of slavery.	They made consistent efforts to purchase slaves and give them their freedom. <sup>61</sup>
Purchase from slave trade	No		
Perpetual involuntary servitude	No		
Sale by parents	No	Paul indicates that lawfully obtained manumission was the ideal for slaves: “Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that” (1 Cor.7:21). He also taught Christians to avoid self-enslavement: “Do not become slaves of men” (1 Cor.7:23), but it was probably inevitable that some of this happened anyway. Jesus’ aggressive teaching about financial giving and sacrifice (see above) also contributed a great deal to Christians offsetting others’ misfortune (Acts 2:42 – 46; 4:31 – 34; 6:1 – 15; 2 Cor.8 – 9; Rom.15:26 – 27; 1 Tim.6:6 – 17; 1 Jn.3:16). It is unlikely that Christians enslaved other people for indebtedness, since they prayed constantly, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Mt.6:12).	They either allowed slaves to work off their debt, or freed them outright especially if the slaves became Christian and demonstrated capacity for Christian leadership. <sup>62</sup>
Indentured servitude: misfortune	Limited		

<sup>60</sup> For example, Acacius, bishop of Amida, in modern day eastern Turkey/western Mesopotamia from 400 – 425 AD, saw seven thousand Persian prisoners being held by Romans in Amida. Acacius gathered his fellow clergy, sold various items, purchased them from slavery, supported them for a while, and sent them furnished with supplies back to Persia. This was reported to have impressed Sassanid Emperor Bahram V so deeply that he requested to see Acacius personally. “When the war [between Byzantium and Persia] ended in 422, it may have been this generous gesture of Acacius that speeded the negotiations for peace and brought an end to persecution in Persia. The peace treaty contained the remarkable stipulation that freedom of religion was to be granted on both sides of the border, for Zoroastrians in the Byzantine Empire and for Christians in Persia” (Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Volume 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), p.160). This incident was surely unusual in its magnitude, but probably not in its character.

<sup>61</sup> At around 100 AD, *1 Clement* (ch.55) notes, “We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that they might ransom others.” Three centuries later, efforts were still being made. At about 400 AD, the *Apostolic Constitutions* (book 4, section 2, paragraph 9), a handy summary of the rulings of the early Christian community up until that point, probably compiled in Syria, still directs Christians, “As for such sums of money as are collected from them in the aforesaid manner, designate them to be used for the redemption of the saints and the deliverance of slaves and captives.” Augustine (bishop of Hippo 395 – 430 AD) noted that the Christian community regularly used its funds to redeem as many kidnapped victims as possible, and had recently saved 120 slaves whom the Galatians were boarding onto their ships (Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 1994).

<sup>62</sup> Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians: In the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), p.298 judges that “Christian masters were not specially encouraged to set a slave free, although Christians were most numerous in the setting of urban households where freeing was

Indentured servitude: debt	Limited	Paul indicates that lawfully obtained manumission was the ideal for slaves: “Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that” (1 Cor.7:21). He also taught Christians to avoid self-enslavement: “Do not become slaves of men” (1 Cor.7:23), but it was probably inevitable that some of this happened anyway. Jesus’ aggressive teaching about financial giving and sacrifice also contributed a great deal to Christians offsetting each others’ debts (Lk.6:34 – 35; 19:1 – 10). It is unlikely that Christians enslaved other people for indebtedness, since they prayed constantly, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Mt.6:12).	Lack of clear documentation; they probably allowed slaves to work off their debt, or perhaps forgave the debt and released them especially if the slaves became Christian and demonstrated capacity for Christian leadership.
Penal servitude	Limited	There were civic punishments for crimes that placed people into slavery. There is a lack of documentation, but I assume that if slaves were placed by the Roman state into Christian households, Christians probably accepted this as part of their respect for the state and the law (Rom.13:1 – 7; 1 Tim.2:2; 1 Pet.2:13 – 17).  Due to the teaching of Jesus about loving one’s enemy (e.g. Mt.5:38 – 48) and forgiveness (e.g. Mt.6:14 – 15; 18:21 – 35), Christians made notable efforts to forgive offenses done against them personally.	Lack of clear documentation; they probably retained the slave for the duration of the sentence unless the slaves became Christian and demonstrated capacity for Christian leadership. <sup>63</sup>
Voluntary servitude	Very limited	Self-enslavement was often undertaken in the Roman world for social, economic, and political advancement. Paul taught Christians to avoid self-enslavement: “Do not become slaves of men” (1 Cor.7:23). But some Christians were known to sell themselves into slavery in order to provide for others. <sup>64</sup>	Lack of clear documentation, but they probably either allowed slaves to work off their debt, or freed them outright especially if the slave became a Christian and demonstrated capacity for Christian leadership.
Political vassalage	No	Christians believed allegiance to Jesus made allegiances to the Emperor and other authorities complex and usually problematic (1 Cor.7:17 – 35). They accepted the state as a necessary institution for a fallen world (Rom.13:1 – 7; 1 Tim.2:2; 1 Pet.2:13 – 17) but did not make special allegiances to it.	NA

most frequent: our pagan evidence for the practice is overwhelmingly evidence for the freeing of slaves in urban and domestic service...Among Christians, we know that the freeing of slaves was performed in church in the presence of the bishop: early laws from Constantine, after his conversion, permit this as an existing practice.”

<sup>63</sup> For example, according to the *Philosophumena*, Callistus of Rome, as a slave, embezzled funds, was caught trying to escape, was released by his master in hopes he would recover the money, pressured Jews to pay debts and caused a brawl in a synagogue, was rearrested and sentenced by the government to the mines, was freed at the request of Christians, recovered his health, and later became a Christian leader, and then (remarkably) Pope from 217 – 222 AD.

<sup>64</sup> Clement of Rome (30 – 100 AD) observes, “We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that they might ransom others. Many, too, have surrendered themselves to slavery, that with the price which they received for themselves, they might provide food for others.” *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, ch.55

## Observations

1. Christians for 300 – 400 years did not enslave anyone. This is remarkable in its own right, for the way they encountered slavery was by inheriting it from the world around them, as people joined the Christian community, and then wrestling with how to handle it. Only when the Roman Emperors and Germanic leaders became Christians did they begin to produce justifications for wars (Augustine’s “just war” theory) and, only when Islam became a military power in the mid-600’s did Christians start to practice slavery by war captivity. The “just war” theory was defensive and can be seen as both a good faith effort trying to limit war and as a rationalization.
2. Christians during this early time period encountered slavery in its different forms by inheriting the problem. Slavery was a complex institution. Due to the theological ethics and sociology of the Christian community, they responded in two basic ways:
  - a. Manumission: “Paul’s explicit injunctions (1) to not become slaves, (2) against slave traders, and (3) for voluntary manumission are very strong indications that preserving the status quo in favor of the masters was neither a goal, nor an acceptable stopping point for the gospel of freedom.”<sup>65</sup> One ideal was to ransom captives forcibly taken. Another was to manumit one’s own slaves; Christians subverted the older Roman practice of killing slaves upon the death of the master; when the newly Christian master went through the rite of water baptism – a symbolic death – s/he often freed her or his slaves, often providing gifts to assist the newly freed persons.
  - b. Ignoring slavery: Christian response was not uniformly abolitionist because, within their own community, they simply ignored its legal status and social stigma. They probably worked within the debt-repayment and penal servitude purposes of slavery at the time, but they certainly rejected the Roman degradation of slaves in favor of the full humanity of the person. This is consistent with the vision of the church being a new spiritual and moral community in the midst of the nations.
3. The early Christians for over 1300 years understood themselves as following the teaching of the New Testament. Christians emancipated slaves within the church, or they made slavery a nominal issue but irrelevant in their relationships overall, and eventually translated this into public policy. As I said before, the process was not without its hiccups, and some rationalizations also appeared. Nevertheless, the remarkable fact is that Christian theology and people ended slavery in France, Hungary, England, Iceland, Sweden, and the Netherlands by about 1300 AD, not just on the law books nominally, but actually. Slavery persisted in all other countries of the world. Slavery was not the “peculiar institution.” Freedom was.
4. The Christian faith offers a very strong moral foundation for antislavery, and certainly against what we define as “slavery” today. In fact, it goes even further beyond that, regarding the treatment of the poor, the laborer, the immigrant, the treatment of interest-rate lending and debt, etc.
5. The Christian faith leaves open the possibility of applying sub-Christian ethics in public policy and intervention, with moral parameters on practices related to slavery like interest rate lending, limitations on the use of force, etc.

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<sup>65</sup> Glenn M. Miller, <http://www.christianthinktank.com/qnoslave.html>. Glenn’s research, posted on his website, is an excellent resource on the subject.



### Part 3: Slavery and Abolition in the Americas

So if this is true, then what happened? Why did European Christians get involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade? For one, sugar, which we now know is a semi-addictive substance. Portugal and Spain and then other Europeans got into the slave trade first to produce sugar. And also to compete economically with Islam. Portugal in the late 1400's, then Spain, wanted to trade with India and the Far East. But the Ottoman Empire stood in the way. So Portugal found a way around Africa. When they landed at port cities on the coast of West Africa, they discovered that they could buy African slaves. A whole slave system existed throughout Africa because of a combination of African tribal warfare and Muslim slave traders who played Africans against each other to fuel Islamic slavery, which is a whole other story.<sup>66</sup> Western Europe made a huge mistake and got into the slave game again.

Then we come to the U.S. Why did pre-Civil War American Christians insist on holding slaves? What went wrong? Historian Mark Noll writes: First and foremost, American Protestants believed that reading and understanding the Bible should be *simple*.<sup>67</sup> I may be exaggerating slightly, but American Christians during that time believed that the stupidest person should be able to read the Bible and understand it. That is an arrogant, superstitious approach to the Bible. Take any other 2,000 year old document, and you would not expect people today to read it and understand it. It takes study and discipline. But American Christians especially in the early 1800's were influenced by a cultural movement called the Scottish School of Common Sense, which said that understanding things is *simple*. So they thought understanding the world, religious texts, the ancient world, and sociology is *simple*. They thought you should just be able to read the Bible as an individual in your bedroom and understand it perfectly well. They said, "I believe in slavery because the Bible does." They thought that scholars of history, literature, and culture were arrogant elitists, and in their own arrogance going the other direction, they refused to listen to Christian scholars all over the world telling them they were wrong. Individualism was a problem.

British Christians, for instance, told Americans that they were wrong. British evangelical Christians were unified as abolitionists. There was no split between Christians in England over slavery. They abolished the slave trade in 1807 and slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833. Christians like John Newton, the author of the hymn Amazing Grace, John and Charles Wesley, the founders of the Methodist movement, the Clapham Sect, and the political activist William Wilberforce led the charge. The pro-slavery force in Britain was led by stuffy old men who attended the Anglican Church but did not put forward any biblical arguments for slavery, which is telling; they only put forward economic and political rationalizations because Christians in Britain knew where the Bible really stood on slavery. Coming to grips with it was the issue for them. But once they all did, they not only abolished slavery throughout the British Empire, they took the British navy and blockaded ports in Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, Zanzibar, Iran, and other places. They intervened in other nations' business and shut down the slave trade. They committed economic suicide in order to abolish slavery. So let's not think that the Bible is somehow ambivalent on slavery, and that there were biblical justifications for the forced enslavement of Native Americans and Africans, just because some white American Christians got it wrong. There was absolutely no justification for it. In fact, "no body of Protestants elsewhere in the English speaking world agreed that the Bible sanctioned slavery."<sup>68</sup> But American Protestants, having inherited a separatist mentality from the rest of the Christian community around the globe, largely failed to inquire about that.

### Part 4: Slavery and Abolition Today

Furthermore, it is worth comparing modern institutions to ancient and classical institutions. The fate of war captives has been transferred from slavery, which by our modern definition includes forced labor, to detention, which does not. The Hague Convention of 1907 and the Third Geneva Convention of 1929 developed

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<sup>66</sup> For more information, see Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1989). See also my ongoing notes/paper, "Slavery in Islam" at <https://www.anastasiscenter.org/race-slavery-belief-systems>

<sup>67</sup> Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006)

<sup>68</sup> Mark Noll, *America's God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.17

a protocol for detaining enemy prisoners of war without forced labor. There are now fairly significant limits to the type of forced labor that prisoners of war can do, although terrorists, saboteurs, mercenaries, and spies are not protected. However, according to the International Red Cross, after World War II, Britain forced 460,000 German prisoners of war to perform labor in Britain as reparations, in direct violation of the Geneva Convention. They were released between 1946 and 1949. France also enslaved German prisoners of war: nearly 750,000 to perform forced labor in France; the date of their release is unknown;<sup>69</sup> a December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945 memorandum clearly stated that German prisoners handed over to the French by the U.S. government “were chattels to be used indefinitely as forced labour.”<sup>70</sup> The United States detains terrorists at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and other facilities around the world because they are perceived to be too dangerous to be released. We do not officially call this “slavery” because there is no heavy forced labor involved, although according to the Hague and Geneva Conventions there could be; torture *has* been involved, and I suspect we do not know all the facts. I believe that in some ways, modern detention of war captives may be comparable to certain forms of enslavement in a household in classical times, especially when the forced labor was actually quite light, like being a tutor to a Greek or Roman family.

What about debt today? The reason I put “No but” in the indentured servitude categories is because Western institutions do reduce people to different forms of helplessness that are actually far worse than Old Testament Israel: poverty, bankruptcy, and perhaps prison. In Old Testament Israel, indentured servitude had a higher goal: You wanted to restore people in debt or in poverty to economic health – their own land, their own household, and their own prosperity independent of you. That was the goal: each person and each family would enjoy God’s garden land. In our society, the racial wealth gap between whites and blacks in the U.S. has increased by four times, from \$20,000 to \$95,000.<sup>71</sup> The gap between the richest and poorest is higher than it’s ever been in this country.<sup>72</sup> In Old Testament times, the Israelite lent money without interest, and forgave any remaining debt within seven years. The New Testament’s standards for compassion went even higher. In today’s times, households do not lend you money in the context of friendship; banks lend money *at interest* in the context of corporate profiteering. Banks don’t care if they keep someone in poverty – or reduce someone to poverty – as long as that person pays them back, and with interest. Then if you don’t pay them back, the banks will repossess your house, your car, and whatever else you put up for collateral. In fact, as we’ve seen, our banks *planned* on repossessing our houses. You still have freedom of movement and freedom over your labor, even though you won’t be able to buy land because of your credit rating. If you don’t own a home, then you don’t have equity and you can’t pass wealth down to your children. If you file for bankruptcy and then default, you will lose a lot and wind up in jail. So is our system necessarily more humane?

Let’s talk about our prison system. Slavery as a sentence for criminal wrongdoing continues as well. Incidentally, there are arguments for some form of appropriate forced labor servitude for criminal punishment; since confinement and even capital punishment cannot provide restitution for a crime, but forced labor can. This is why the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished forced labor slavery, allows for slavery as punishment for a crime: “Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” But how we do it is a big concern. Slavery still technically exists in the United States, since many of our large prisons are now run by private corporations who utilize inmates to make commodities and pay them very little to nothing. “They’re assembling computers, making women’s lingerie, booking airline flights over the phone, telemarketing for major corporations, and doing all kinds of tasks that free Americans used to be employed at doing. What appeared to be a normal plant closing by U.S. Technologies when it sold its electronics plant in Austin, was actually the company relocating its

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.ety.com/HRP/rev/warcrimetrials.htm>

<sup>70</sup> R.F. Keeling, *Gruesome Harvest*, (Chicago: Institute of American Economics, 1947).

<sup>71</sup> Thomas M. Shapiro, Tatjana Meschede, Laura Sullivan, *The Racial Wealth Gap Increases Fourfold, Institute on Assets and Social Policy* (Brandeis University, May 2010); see <http://iasp.brandeis.edu/pdfs/Racial-Wealth-Gap-Brief.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> Hope Yen, *Income Gap Widens: Census Finds Record Gap Between Rich And Poor* (Associated Press, September 28, 2010); see also Arloc Sherman and Chad Stone, *Income Gaps Between Very Rich and Everyone Else More Than Tripled in the Last Three Decades, New Data Show* (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, June 25, 2010); see <http://www.cbpp.org/files/6-25-10inc.pdf>.

operations to a nearby Austin prison. One hundred and fifty “free” employees lost their jobs to the new slaves.”<sup>73</sup> Do privately run prisons have an incentive to rehabilitate prisoners? Or to acquire a larger slave labor force that they can pay 25 cents an hour, and not pay for overtime, sick days, health benefits, pensions, and unions? Furthermore, we are very concerned today about the culture of prisons, which often harden inmates further, leading to high recidivism rates and great difficulty integrating an ex-con back into society. In earlier times, including biblical times, people sentenced criminals to slavery in a *household*, and that immediately integrated that person back into society, in the context of constructive human relationships. That’s an interesting contrast. The U.S incarcerates more people than any other country in the world, as a percentage of population. In absolute numbers, we lock up more people than China, India, and Iran combined. Plus there is racial bias: Black and Latino men are disproportionately stopped by police, tried, convicted, given longer sentences, and imprisoned. We imprison more black men as a percentage of black men than South Africa did during Apartheid in 1993.<sup>74</sup> In fact, some people believe the prison-industrial complex is a way to control the inner city.<sup>75</sup> We are building more prisons. California, for example, had 19,600 inmates in 1977. As of 2007, it has over 170,000, which is more than France, Great Britain, Germany, Japan, Singapore, and the Netherlands combined. So when we look at the sources of slaves in different systems, here is what we get.

#### Comparison of Forms of Slavery Across Time:

<i>Sources of Slaves</i>	<i>Ancient Near East</i>	<i>Hebrews with Hebrews</i>	<i>Hebrews with non-Hebrews</i>	<i>Christians</i>	<i>Modern West</i>	<i>Modern Illegal Traffic</i>
War captivity	Yes	No	Very limited	No	No, but	Yes
Kidnapping, piracy	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Purchase from slave trade	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Perpetual involuntary servitude	Yes	No	Very limited	No	No	Yes
Sale by parents	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Indentured servitude: misfortune	Yes	Very limited	Limited	Limited	No but	Yes
Indentured servitude: debt	Yes	Very limited	Limited	Limited	No but	Yes
Penal servitude	Yes	Very limited	Very limited	Limited	Common	Yes
Voluntary servitude	Yes	Possible, but limited	Possible, past jubilee	Very limited	No	Yes
Political vassalage	Yes	No	No	No	No	?

I point these things out because after the abolition of slavery internationally in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many people became disenchanted with the Scriptures themselves. But this disenchantment was rooted in three major errors. First, it is a failure to recognize that we have simply shifted the definition of the word “slavery” over time. So what was defined as “slavery” back in the Old Testament was not actually what “slavery” was later, or in other places. The Bible stood firmly and radically, a long time ago, against what we called “slavery” in the Americas.

Second, it represents a gross overestimation of, and perhaps an intentional self-blinding to, the ugliness of our own institutions. At times, it is pure arrogance: We think we have achieved social solutions inherently better than the institutions of yesterday. But that is debatable. So we snub our noses at earlier

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.greencommons.org/node/770>

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.prisonsofsucks.com/> notes South Africa under apartheid (1993), Black males: 851 per 100,000. U.S. under George Bush (2006), Black males: 4,789 per 100,000.

<sup>75</sup> Georgia law now treats children as adults in criminal courts. “Children convicted under this law usually serve their time in adult prisons and SB 440 allows children to be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Ninety percent (90%) of children sentenced under SB 440 and its companion legislation, SB 441, are African American.” <http://www.greencommons.org/node/770>

generations. We snub our noses at the Bible for not “abolishing slavery.” But we have only *redefined* it. The only sense in which we have “abolished slavery” is the extent to which the Bible already did. And we have not done as good a job on other issues closely related to the overall picture.

The third reason for disenchantment with the Bible on this issue is that people think they have a simple, moral basis for abolishing slavery today, along with a simple, moral basis for intervention, and so on. I want to examine that now and broaden out the field beyond just Christian faith but other traditions.

## Part 5: The Question of Moral Foundations

If you are a Muslim, how do you understand your moral foundation? The Prophet Mohammed said a great deal about caring for the poor. And I find it impressive that the slavery that did exist in Islam was much more humane than (say) the Roman slavery of the first century. And it is true that Mohammed freed slaves. But according to the hadiths, he also bought, kept,<sup>76</sup> and sold<sup>77</sup> slaves, which means that according to official Muslim tradition, he was a slave trader. This means that this goes beyond self-indenture. That poses a difficulty when we are confronting slavery of any sort.

Muhammed also allowed Muslim men to acquire an unlimited number of concubines: “And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice [between them, or for them], then [take] only one or what your right hands possess.” (Qur’an 4:3) That phrase, “what your right hands possess” refers to concubines, or slave girls, here and also in Qur’an 23:5 – 6; 33:50,52; 70:29 – 30. For example:

- “O Prophet! surely We have made lawful to you your wives whom you have given their dowries, and *those whom your right hand possesses* out of those whom Allah has given to you as prisoners of war” (Qur’an 33:50).
- “Forbidden to you are your mothers and your daughters and your sisters...And all married women except *those whom your right hands possess*...” (Qur’an 4:23 – 24). This means that sex with enslaved women who were previously married is permitted. The hadith Abu Dawud (2150) says, “The Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) sent a military expedition to Awtas on the occasion of the battle of Hunain. They met their enemy and fought with them. They defeated them and took them captives. Some of the Companions of the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) were reluctant to have intercourse with the female captives in the presence of their husbands who were unbelievers. So Allah, the Exalted, sent down the Qur’anic verse: (Qur’an 4:24) “And all married women (are forbidden) unto you save those (captives) whom your right hands possess.” This is the background for verse 4:24 of the Qur’an. Thus, the hadith indicates that not only does Allah grant permission for captured women to be raped, but allows it to be done in front of their husbands.
- “Successful indeed are the believers...who guard their private parts [refrain from sex] except with their mates [wives] or *those whom their right hand possess* [concubines or slave girls]” (Qur’an 23:1, 5 – 6).

And so historians are fairly confident that the ratio between female to male slaves in Islam was 2:1, if not 3:1, or 4:1. Slave women could not be forced into prostitution, which was a vast improvement over the common practice of the pre-Islamic Near East. But other rights were lacking. A Muslim man may take women as slaves and have sex with his slave women against their will, whenever he likes, starting from when they are nine years old, and without officially marrying them – this was agreed upon by all four Sunni schools: Shafi’i, Hanafi, Maliki and Hanbali. Before a slave woman bore a child for the master, she had no protection from dismissal. A free Muslim woman who was divorced left with her dowry and returned to her family. But a slave woman who was not a mother had no rights. Muslim apologists<sup>78</sup> defend the practice by saying that when a slave girl got pregnant by her master, she acquired a new status with rights matching a full wife, and would go free if the master died, just like any free widow. That is true, but the fact remains that *she had no rights before becoming*

<sup>76</sup> The hadith Bukhari (72:734) refers to a slave owned by Mohammed.

<sup>77</sup> The hadith Bukhari (34:351) refers to Mohammed selling a slave. In hadith Muslim 3901, Mohammed trades away two black slaves for one Muslim slave.

<sup>78</sup> For example, the fatwa issued on August 21, 2003 in the U.K. called “Status of Slave Women in Islam”; see [http://www.answering-christianity.com/umar/slave\\_girls.htm](http://www.answering-christianity.com/umar/slave_girls.htm).

*pregnant*. And the fact remains that *a man's right to acquiring concubines is still unlimited*. So the defenders' claim that Islamic slavery of women was meant to lead to freedom and liberation seems far-fetched. And that is a major difficulty when we are confronting modern day sex slavery. The larger question can even be asked: If Islam is supposed to be a *superior* revelation to Christianity, why is it, in this way, clearly *inferior*?

Furthermore, there is a sad connection between jihad and enslavement in general. Non-Muslims were offered a choice upon being conquered: Become a Muslim or become enslaved. The choice was given once; if a person became a Muslim after being enslaved, the master did not necessarily have to free the slave at that time.<sup>79</sup> I am aware of verse 24:33 which *might* refer to freeing slaves if they were "good." But it also might mean giving slave girls, if they are "good," to Muslim men who are single. One other verse, an early one, 90:13, says that freeing slaves is good, which is a positive. But the facts remain that there has never been an abolition movement within Islam; slavery in Islam was increasing in the 1800's when it was being abolished in the West; only when the British imposed abolition did Muslim nations comply; when that happened, Muslim leaders protested, saying that slavery was part of shari'a law; even today Saudi Arabia has up to 20% of its population enslaved, and many influential Saudi Arabian imams say that they should re-legalize slavery.<sup>80</sup> So this poses a very serious question for Muslims: perhaps a moral and theological foundation exists to *limit* slavery, but what is the moral foundation on which to *abolish* slavery?

If you are an atheist, and believe that science can provide a moral framework for human life, and even a firm foundation for the abolition of slavery, how exactly would that work? Let's say that you go into another culture and say: "It's time for you to abolish slavery." They might say, "This is our culture; this is the way we do things here. Stop telling the rest of the world how to live." You then say, "But science is universal, and it tells us that all people are equally valuable." They say, "People are not all equally valuable; that is not self-evident and science doesn't tell us that." You might say, "We should stop importing things made by enslaved people because we already have the Smoot-Hawley Tariff of 1930." They might say, "Look, we hardly ever enforce that law, and besides that we get cheap stuff."

Can science alone provide values that actually transcend culture? That depends on whether science alone can determine the value of the human species and the individual at the same time? Or the human species generally, but not each individual? Or neither one? It seems to me that science cannot determine either one. Here is a comparison of how people have thought about science as giving values:

Species and Individual	Species Only	Neither
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secular humanism?</li> <li>• <i>Does each individual have intrinsic value, not just instrumental value (for society)?</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilitarianism</li> <li>• Social Darwinism</li> <li>• Eugenics</li> <li>• Labor camps</li> <li>• Designer children</li> <li>• Aborting Down's Syndrome babies: 92% of those detected<sup>81</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nihilism</li> <li>• Simple self-interest</li> </ul>

<sup>79</sup> Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*, p.27 – 28, 32 – 35.

<sup>80</sup> For example, according to the independent news source Saudi Information Agency (SIA), Sheikh Saleh Al-Fawzan, a member of the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Fataawa (Saudi Arabia's highest religious body), a member of the Council of Religious Edicts and Research, Imam of Prince Mitaeb Mosque in al-Malzar in Riyadh, member of the Council of Senior Scholars, and member of the Fiqh Committee in Makkah, a member of the Committee for Supervision of the Callers in Hajj, and author of the country's religious curriculum, says in his textbook (*Al-Tawhid*, or "Monotheism") and lectures, "Slavery is a part of Islam...Slavery is part of jihad, and jihad will remain as long there is Islam." His religious books are used to teach five million Saudi students, both within the country and abroad, including the United States.

<sup>81</sup> See <http://www.voicesforlife.net/2010/02/staggering-92-of-down-syndrome-babies.html>. Also [http://abcnews.go.com/Health/w\\_ParentingResource/down-syndrome-births-drop-us-women-abortion/story?id=8960803](http://abcnews.go.com/Health/w_ParentingResource/down-syndrome-births-drop-us-women-abortion/story?id=8960803)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does science alone provide a basis for valuing the human species?</li> </ul>	
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In the center column is a list of social movements where science affirmed the value of the human species but not any particular individual. This is how we got utilitarianism, Social Darwinism by Thomas Huxley<sup>82</sup> who was nicknamed “Darwin’s Bulldog,” the Eugenics movement led by Darwin’s cousin Francis Galton,<sup>83</sup> labor camps in Siberia and Nazi Germany, and having designer children. Does science tell us anything about the morality of having designer children? Not that I can tell. The fact is that in the last 150 years, science has been used to try to *improve the human race*, not to protect the rights of each human being. That continues to be true. The U.S. aborts 92% of babies with Down’s Syndrome, which means that we aren’t using abortion as *birth control*; we are using it as *child selection*. Science doesn’t tell us whether that’s right or wrong.

If you don’t like all that, then what scientific basis do you have for saying that each and every human being has inherent worth and value? Does *each* human being have intrinsic value? Or only instrumental value to someone else’s happiness? If a whole group of people, like slaves, have less, eat less, drink less, and live less, is that a moral tragedy? Or is it helpful for the human race overall because there would be fewer mouths to feed? Science doesn’t tell you that; you have to bring in a moral framework from somewhere else.<sup>84</sup> That is why professor of biology and mathematics, Martin A. Nowak, a Harvard professor and Director of the Program for Evolutionary Dynamics, explains that, by itself, intellectual scientific life is “inherently unstable,” and is unable to answer the kind of questions religion can — like the meaning of life, or the value of each human life. Secular humanism tries to say that, but John Gray, professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics, says, “Secular humanism is a Christian heresy. It is a hollowed out version of Christianity.” Secular humanism only appears in places where Christianity has been before. And it doesn’t succeed in drawing converts from, say, Hinduism, where the equal value of each human life is *not* self-evident. Friedrich Nietzsche believed that if you cut the root, you lose the fruit. That is, if you cut the root of belief in Jesus, you lose the fruit of the worth and value of *each human life*. I think Nietzsche was right. That’s partly why atheist scientists of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s did not value each human life. They only valued the human *species as a whole*, and used science to try to *improve* the human race. But it’s not even clear that science can

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Huxley (1825 – 95), nicknamed “Darwin’s Bulldog” for contributing to the widespread acceptance of evolution, said, “No rational man, cognizant of the facts, believes that the average Negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man.” Charles Darwin himself wrote about “natural selection at work in the killing of indigenous peoples in Australia by the British, wrote of black people as a category between whites and gorillas, and spoke against social programs for the ‘weak’ because they permitted the least desirable people to survive. In his view, the ‘civilized races’ would eventually replace ‘savage races throughout the world.’” (Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p.74)

<sup>83</sup> Galton said, “It is easy...to obtain by careful selection a permanent breed of dogs or horses gifted with peculiar powers of running, or of doing anything else, so it would be quite practicable to produce a highly-gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations.” (*Hereditary Genius*, p.1) During the first few decades of the 20th century, eugenics was practiced around the world, and promoted by governments, through genetic screening, birth control, promoting differential birth rates, marriage restrictions, segregation (both racial segregation as well as segregation of the mentally ill from the rest of the population), compulsory sterilization, forced contraction of syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases, forced abortions, forced pregnancies, and genocide. Nevertheless, eugenics became an academic discipline at many colleges and universities, and received funding from many sources. This movement was hugely popular in the early 20th century and died out quickly after World War II after the realization that Adolf Hitler had been a major proponent of it. Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan had developed ideas of racial hygiene, human experimentation, and the extermination of “unwanted” people groups. British Christian journalist G. K. Chesterton was an early critic of the philosophy of eugenics, expressing this opinion in his book, *Eugenics and Other Evils* (1917).

<sup>84</sup> Hence, atheist physicist Sean Carroll objected to Sam Harris by saying, “What if I believe that the highest moral good is to be found in the autonomy of the individual, while you believe that the highest good is to maximize the utility of some societal group? What are the data we can point to in order to adjudicate this disagreement? We might use empirical means to measure whether one preference or the other leads to systems that give people more successful lives on some particular scale—but that’s presuming the answer, not deriving it. Who decides what is a successful life? It’s ultimately a personal choice, not an objective truth to be found simply by looking closely at the world. How are we to balance individual rights against the collective good? You can do all the experiments you like and never find an answer to that question.”

(<http://www.scienceandreligiontoday.com/2010/03/29/can-science-answer-moral-questions/>)



establish the value of the human species. What if all human life gets killed and nature just produces another self-conscious life species eventually? What does it matter? How exactly does science prevent us from falling into nihilism or just naked self-centeredness?

All that to say: I don't think science gives us a moral basis for anything. Science is helpful. But science is only a tool for those who are acting on moral values they get from somewhere else. Science by itself doesn't articulate moral values. So I don't think Sam Harris is correct when he says that science alone can produce a moral foundation for anything, least of all antislavery. I do think Christian faith provides a more solid intellectual and moral foundation on which to build a case for abolition. That is the Christian mandate, and that is the invitation to consider Christian faith.

## Part Six: Engaging Slavery Today

In this last portion, I want to finally come to the challenge of dismantling slavery today. I'll break it down into five main areas: economic development, legal advocacy, legal reform, aftercare, and Christian mission.

1. Economic development is a preventative measure. In poor areas, in rare cases, girls might be sold by their parents into slavery because of poverty. More common is the case where girls and, in some cases, boys, are tricked by pimps offering "jobs" where they can earn money. In response to this, we can work for, give money to organizations like WorldRelief, World Vision, and Compassion International. They do microfinance, job creation, community development, clean water delivery, and so on.
2. Legal advocacy is a present day measure. International Justice Mission does work where the law in a country already makes prostitution illegal, so they go into Cambodia or other countries in order to help law enforcement actually enforce the law. Why don't they enforce the law? Because they don't have the resources, or they're prioritizing something else, or corruption. So this type of work is important. There may be some things that you can do when you go back home. Talk to local law enforcement. Learn about what they're doing. Ask them what you as a citizen can be looking for. What is suspicious behavior?
3. Legal reform is a present day measure. This is where the law in a country doesn't protect people adequately. So it's not law enforcement that's needed. It's legal reform. Since I brought up debt and prison, let's engage those areas too. A friend of mine went to medical school and intentionally spent 1 month being homeless while in medical school, so that he could learn about what people went through. As a result, he went into prison medicine for a while. You might look into that, too. Or if you're going into finance and looking to work at some of these banks, you could call for financial reform. Exert pressure on the system from within.
4. Aftercare organizations assist people who were traumatized by being in some form of slavery. Love146 helps women and children rescued from sex trafficking. Come Let's Dance in Uganda helps rehabilitate former child soldiers.
5. Christian mission, evangelism, and community development. I believe this is critical. People are critical and Christian people have to get directly involved. There are some problems we just cannot throw money at. We have to get involved. There is no substitute for Christians getting directly involved to affirm the dignity of each human being, provide care, model relationships, and develop sustainable economics. For example, come to Uganda with InterVarsity and see what Ugandan Christians are doing in response to child soldiering.

If you want to build awareness, there are lots of good resources.

1. *The Price of Sugar*, re: Dominican Republic
2. *Invisible Children*, re: Uganda
3. *Born Into Brothels*, re: Kolkata
4. *Amazing Grace*, re: British abolition

For further study: modern day slavery

1. *Half the Sky*, Nicholas Kristof
2. *Terrify No More*, by Gary Haugen
3. *Good News About Injustice*, by Gary Haugen
4. <http://www.freedomcenter.org/>
5. <http://www.freetheslaves.net/>
6. <http://www.antislavery.org/>
7. <http://humantrafficking.change.org/>

For further study: slavery and abolition historically

1. *Abolition*, by Seymour Drescher, the foremost scholar on abolition
2. *Inhuman Bondage*, David Bryon Davis about the trans-Atlantic slave trade
3. *Slavery in the Arab World*, by Murray Gordon about the Islamic slave trade
4. *The Bible Against Slavery*, by Theodore Dwight Weld, the leading American Christian abolitionist, from 1837

For further study: the aftermath of slavery in the U.S.

1. *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, by Joe R. Feagin
2. *Ensuring Inequality: The Structural Transformation of the African-American Family*, by Donna Franklin
3. *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, by Douglas A. Blackmon
4. *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism 1865 – 1898*, by Edward J. Blum
5. *How the Irish Became White*, by Noel Ignatiev