

Interpretation & Application – “What does it mean and what am I going to do about it?”

Does the Bible Condone / Support Slavery?

“The Bible may, indeed does, contain a warrant for trafficking in humans, for ethnic cleansing, for slavery, for bride-price, and for indiscriminate massacre, but we are not bound by any of it because it was put together by crude, uncultured human mammals.” Christopher Hitchens

The Civil laws of Israel in the OT protected slaves

Paul Copan- Is God a Moral Monster? (chapters 12, 13 &14, Warrant for Trafficking in Humans as Farm Equipment)

1. Slavery in Israel was Indentured Service 125
 - A. People could [voluntarily](#) enter into servitude to pay off debts or avoid starvation and homelessness brought on by financial crisis.
 - B. An Israelite who sold himself to another Israelite served as a [hired](#) man, (Lev. 25:35-42) because OT law stipulates that Israelites were not allowed to enslave fellow Israelites.
 - C. The civil law in Israel stipulated that he be set free after 6 years of service. (Deut 15:1-2, and 12-15: Exodus 21:2) and freed every year of jubilee (which came every 50th year, Lev. 25:47-54).
2. Slavery in Israel was a way to Help Poor People 126
 - A. OT law sought to prevent the need for slavery (indentured service / debt servitude). Lev. 19:9-10; Lev. 23:22; Deut. 24:20-21 required that the edges of fields be left for the poor to glean. The law required that you lend to the poor freely (Deut. 15:7-8) at no interest (Exodus 22:25 and Lev. 25:36-37)
 - B. A person in financial straits could sell himself or a family member voluntarily (Lev. 25:39 and Deut 15:12)
 - C. Slave laws controlled and [regulated](#) slavery, without idealizing or institutionalizing it.
3. Slavery (indentured service / debt servitude) was temporary, not lifelong in Israel unless the servant chose to stay (Deut. 15:16-17).
 - A. After 6 years of service the slave (servant) was released in the 7th year and generously provided for by his master. (Deut. 15:12-15)
 - B. The OT servant laws existed to help the poor, not to harm them or keep them down. God’s will was that no one should live in poverty. (Deut. 15:1-18) 127
 - C. OT law commands the forgiveness of the poor person’s accumulated debt every seven years. Deut 15:1-18 The goal was the eradication of poverty and therefore slavery (debt-servitude) (Deut. 15:4)
 - D. OT law required fair and humane treatment of the poor. Deut. 24:10-15
 - E. All Israelite slaves were to be freed in the year of Jubilee year. This prevented [generational](#) slavery for the descendants of slaves (Leviticus 25:39–46).
4. Slavery in Israel recognized and protected the [dignity](#) of slaves (Debt-Servants) 129
 - A. OT law required that servants be treated like persons, not property. (Exodus 21:18-21) This was Job’s attitude. (Job 31:13-15)
 - B. OT law assumes the possibility that a slave would [love](#) his master and would not want freedom. (Deut. 15:12-17)
 - C. Israelites couldn’t harm or kill their slaves arbitrarily. (Ex. 21:20, 26-27)

As the *Anchor Bible Dictionary’s* essay on “Slavery” observes, “We have in the Bible the first appeals in world literature to treat slaves as human beings for their own sake and not just in the interests of their masters.” By comparison, in the ANE slaves were forcibly branded or tattooed for identification.

5. OT Laws in Israel required that slaves injured by their masters be set free. 130
 - A. Bodily abuse was not permitted. (Ex. 21:26-27)
 - B. A master who killed a slave was himself [executed](#). (Ex. 21:20)
6. OT law made kidnapping a capital offense.
 - A. Israelites couldn't kidnap and force fellow Israelites into slavery (Ex. 21:16, Deut. 24:7)
 - B. The Southern slave owners and the slave traders from whom they purchased their human cargo ignored these Bible verses. So do the New Atheists.
7. OT law required that runaway slaves be [protected](#), not returned. 131
 - A. Deut 23:15-16 says to offer safe harbor to runaway slaves.
 - B. A foreign slave was free to live anywhere in Israel he wished. (Deut. 23:16)

Israelites couldn't return runaway foreign slaves to their masters, but instead were commanded to let them stay where they choose (Deut. 23:15-16). While Israel was commanded to offer safe harbor to foreign runaway slaves (Deuteronomy 23:15,16), the Code of Hammurabi demanded the death penalty for those helping runaway slaves.

8. Enslaving non-Israelites was permissible and life long.
 - A. For prisoners of war this was [merciful](#) (because execution was the option) and was necessary (because rebellion was a possibility).
 - B. Foreign slaves still had the Sabbath day off and had to be treated humanely.
 - C. And the fact that run-away slaves were not to be returned to their masters (Deut. 23:15-16) would provide masters with incentive to show [kindness](#) to their slaves.

The Mosaic law (Exodus 21; Leviticus 25; Deuteronomy 15) provides the death penalty for those who kidnap people to sell them into slavery (Deuteronomy 24:7). Slaves could not be forced to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10), a concept unique to the Bible, indicating that Hebrew slaves were better treated than those anywhere else in the Near East at the time. People sold into debt-slavery were to be freed after six years of servitude (21:2–4). All Israelite slaves were to be freed in the Jubilee year, thereby abolishing the possibility of perpetual servitude for the descendants of slaves (Leviticus 25:39–46). Although slaves could be beaten, a master killing a slave was considered guilty of murder and could be executed for his crime (Exodus 21:20), while a slave maimed by his master was to be freed (vv. 26–27). Runaway slaves were to be given protection and not returned to their masters (Deuteronomy 23:15–16). The status of slaves in Hebrew law was in many ways superior to that of surrounding societies. Indeed, "we find in the Bible the first appeals in world literature to treat slaves as human beings for their own sake,"³² which eventually laid the foundation for the worldwide abolition of slavery.

POINT: OT slavery was not like colonial slavery.

"We can plainly affirm that if the three clear laws of the Old Testament had been followed in the South—that is, the anti-kidnapping, anti-harm, and anti-slave return regulations in Exodus 21:16, 20, 26-27 and Deuteronomy 23:15-16 and 24:7—then slavery wouldn't have arisen in America." Paul Copan, p 132

Veritas, Slavery in the Old Testament Posted on August 2, 2011 by Kyle Hendricks

"The laws on slavery in the OT were meant to regulate, not institutionalize slavery, an already existing structure (in the ANE). Their society almost depended on it because financially destitute people needed a way to stay sheltered and fed. Rather than immediately wipe it out of Israel, God chose to work slowly by regulating servanthood laws to combat abuses while leaving room for improvement. God wanted there to be no poor among the Israelites, so He called people to always take care of the poor, provide for them, and help them (Deut. 15). The regulations are meant to fight against poverty, not induce it."

Slavery in the New Testament

Ephesians 6:5 Slaves obey your masters

1. In first-century Rome, there was little difference between slaves and free people. (Keller, Reason for God, P.110-111)
 - A. Slaves looked like, spoke like, dressed like and lived like any other person. They were not any particular race.
 - B. Slaves were not segregated from the rest of society in any way.
 - C. From a financial standpoint, slaves made the same wages as free laborers, and therefore were not usually poor.
Some could accrue enough personal capital to buy themselves out.
2. Colonial slavery was "chattel" slavery.
 - A. The slave had zero rights and could be mistreated or killed at the will of the owner.
 - B. It was slavery for life, begun and resourced through kidnapping.
3. The Bible prohibits kidnapping people and mistreating slaves (1 Timothy 1:9-11; cf. Deuteronomy 24:7), so while the NT issued no call to abolish slavery, later Christians did call for the abolition of slavery when faced with colonial slavery, which clearly [violated](#) Biblical teaching and ideals.
4. Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ there is "neither slave nor free", and Ephesians 6:9 and Colossians 4:1 tells Christian masters to treat their slaves justly, impartially, and without threatening (because they too have a Master). And 1 Corinthians 7:21 encourages slaves to gain their freedom if they can.
5. Yes, slave owners in the American South quoted the Bible to support their beliefs and practices.
 - A. They [misused](#) the Bible the same way the New Atheists misuse the Bible, selectively quoting verses out of context to support beliefs and behaviors to which they are already committed, while ignoring anything in the Bible that would show their beliefs and behaviors to be wrong.
 - B. The New Atheists and the old slave owners use the same hermeneutic when it comes to interpreting the Bible. JPT3

A deep stain on Christian history is the African slave trade. Since Christianity was dominant in the nations that bought and sold slaves during that time, the churches must bear responsibility along with their societies for what happened... Christian abolitionists concluded that race-based, life-long chattel slavery, established through kidnapping, could not be squared with Biblical teaching either in the Old Testament or the New. Christian activists such as William Wilberforce in Great Britain, John Woolman in America, and many, many others devoted their entire lives, in the name of Christ, to ending slavery... Slavery was abolished because it was wrong, and Christians were the leaders in saying so. P. 62-64 Paul Copan.

Message

The Bible calls us to respect the dignity of every person.