

BUT THE BIBLE CONDONES SLAVERY!

- ✓ **Q:** “How can you take moral advice from a book that condones slavery? (What could be more immoral than one human being owning another?) God could have forbidden it, but He didn’t! That makes God immoral! I don’t think a God that condones slavery is worthy of worship and adoration.”
- ✓ The biggest problem people have (when they talk like this) is they’re equating the slavery they read about in the Bible with the slavery that existed in the early days of the United States. (“Roots”.) Those two things are very different! (What was slavery like in Israel?)

I. Kidnapping People (to Sell Them into Slavery) Was Absolutely Forbidden!

- ✓ It was a crime that was punishable by death. (Both the seller and the buyer of a kidnapped person were put to death – Ex. 21:16.)

II. Kinds of Slaves

- 1.) Debt Slaves – Most people that wound up in slavery, sold THEMSELVES into slavery, either to pay off a debt, or to prevent starvation. (Rather than starve to death, a poor person would sell themselves into slavery. At least they’d be fed and clothed – Lev. 25:47 – “sell themselves”; Gen. 47:12-14,19.)
- ✓ In an ideal world, people wouldn’t have to do that. But, because of the socio-economic situation of Old Testament Israel, (there was no gov’t aid and no welfare), slavery was permitted. One reason God allowed it was to help poor people survive.
 - ✓ Obviously, selling yourself (or a family member) into slavery was seen as a last resort. Several OT laws existed to prevent it. (a) God told the Israelites not to reap their field right up to the edge, but

to leave some for the poor (Lev. 19:9-10). (b) The Israelites were to lend without charging interest, so borrowing would be an option for some (Lev. 25:35-37). (c) The poor were allowed to sacrifice less expensive animals (Lev. 5:7,11). (d) All debt was automatically cancelled every 7 years. Despite these provisions, sometimes people were still forced, by need, to sell themselves into slavery.

A Much Higher Standard for Slavery

- ✓ **God regulated how slaves were to be treated.** (Lev. 25:47,52 – “If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself (into slavery) ... During those years he should serve his buyer as a hired worker. His buyer should not treat him harshly.”)
- ✓ Masters were acutely aware that God would hold them responsible for how they treated their slaves. (Job 31:13-15 – “If I have denied justice to my slaves ... what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? Did not He who made ME in the womb also make THEM? Did not the same One form us both?”)
- ✓ Slaves were given the Sabbath day to rest, just like everyone else – (Ex. 20:8-11). Significant compensation was required for abuse – (Ex. 21:27).
- ✓ Hebrew slaves were to be set free after six years. (Plus, they were to be sent out with generous support, to help them “get on their feet”.)

Exodus 21:2 – “If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall leave as a free man. He will owe you nothing for his freedom.”

Deut. 15:13-14 – “Moreover, when you set him free, don’t let him leave empty-handed; You shall give him generous provisions from your flock, from your threshing floor and from your wine press. The more the Lord has given you, the more you should give him.”

- ✓ At the end of the six-year term, sometimes slaves didn’t want to

go free. Why not? (i) Deut. 15:16 – “But if your slave says to you, ‘I don’t want to leave you’, because **he loves you and your family**, and **he has a good life with you** ...”

(ii) When a single man sold himself into slavery, many times, the master would provide him with a wife. After the 6th year, when it came time to leave, the slave was free to go. But his wife and kids had to stay behind. (She was a slave too, and she couldn’t leave, just because *her husband* was free. Deut. 15:12.) If he didn’t want to leave his wife and kids behind, he could stay permanently.

Ex. 21:5-6 – “And if the slave shall plainly say, ‘**I love my master, my wife, and my children; I don’t want my freedom**’ ...” (Earring.)

- ✓ That’s a much different picture than most of us have when we’re picturing slavery. (And, probably the atheist, too!)
- ✓ Stoic philosopher Epictetus – (Eh-puhk-tee-tuhs) – “What evil did I suffer in my state of slavery? Another clothed me, another supplied me with shoes, another fed me, another looked after me in sickness; and I did only a few services for him.” (Epictetus, Discourses Book 4.)

Luke 7:2 – “And a certain centurion’s **slave, who was dear unto him**, was sick and ready to die ...” (ERV – “... **loved him** very much ...”)

2.) Servant Girls as Future Wives

- ✓ In Israel, men didn’t “date” to find a wife, like we do. Marriages were arranged. (If a young man wanted a certain girl to be his wife, he’d pay a dowry to her father, and she’d be released.)
- ✓ If a girl’s father was in desperate need of money (but his daughter wasn’t old enough to be married), he could release his daughter into “slavery” with another family (with the understanding that when she was old enough, she would become the wife of one of the man’s sons.) The girl’s dad would get the dowry immediately, and ultimately, his daughter would function as a slave until she was of marrying age. (She was to be treated as a daughter from the first.)

3.) Foreign Slaves

- ✓ The rules were different for prisoners of war and foreign slaves.

4.) Slaves in the New Testament

- ✓ Masters and slaves were expected to treat each other as brothers and sisters, and equal members of the Body of Christ – (Eph. 6:9, Col. 4:1)

III. Why Didn’t God Just Abolish Slavery?

- ✓ Some people condemn the Bible because it doesn’t call for the immediate abolition of slavery. What they don’t understand are the cultural conditions that made slavery a sad necessity. If God outlawed it, a lot of people would have died of starvation.
- ✓ Wisdom is necessary when dealing with situations like this. Let me illustrate using a similar example: polygamy – (a man having multiple wives). Suppose a missionary went into a country and got several heathen families saved. Many of those heathen men would have had multiple wives. (And, likely, he’d have had children by all of them.)
- ✓ If the missionaries instantly demanded that “a man can only have ONE wife”, then all the other wives and children would have to be put out into the street with no one to care for them. (Women had little or no education, and consequently, no way to support themselves. Essentially, it would have been a death sentence.)
- ✓ A Better Way: Teach that from then on, men can only have one wife. True, you’re temporarily “allowing polygamy”. But, in one generation, you’ve fixed the problem.
- ✓ Yes, for a time, God *did* allow slavery. But masters didn’t “own” their slaves’ humanity; they leased their work. Like divorce & polygamy, slavery was never in God’s perfect plan. But, because of sin, for a time, slavery was permitted by God. But, with restrictions.