

# Slavery and Oppression Ordained

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Slavery and oppression ordained (Gen. 9:25; Lev. 25:45-46; Joel 3:8).

Slavery and oppression forbidden (Ex. 21:16; 22:21; Isa. 58:6; Mt. 23:10).

The apostle Paul stated that he was a slave of Jesus Christ, although the translators of the New Testament chose to insert the word “servant” into the text,

Paul, a servant (1401 Gk. *doulos*, one bound to serve, bonds slave, servant, slave; one who gives himself up to another's will; devoted to another to the disregard of one's own interests) of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God (Rom. 1:1; cf. Ti. 1:1; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

Paul confirmed that slavery was an essential part of being a Christian,

...Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave (1401 Gk. *doulos*) (1Cor. 7:22b; cf. Mt. 23:10).

Jesus Christ pointed out that before anyone could be a good leader, they first needed to serve others as a slave would do,

and whoever among you wishes to be first shall be your bondservant (1401 Gk. *doulos*) (Mt. 20:27; RNT; cf. Mk. 10:44)

Christ also made it abundantly clear that mankind, with very few exceptions, is currently in slavery to sin (Jn. 8:44; cf. Rev. 12:9),

Jesus answered them, 'Amen, amen, I say to you that everyone who commits sin is the bonds slave of sin' (Jn. 8:34; RNT).

It is only those who have repented of sin, and made a covenant at baptism to begin obeying God's law and commandments, who are no longer slaves to sin. Paul confirmed that mankind as a whole is under slavery to their taskmaster, Satan,

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

So there are two main forms of slavery. One involves an individual who decides to submit and serve God, while the other is related to choosing Satan's system of religion and government, which inevitably enslaves a person to sinful behavior. Because the majority of mankind submits to Satan's way of living they are his slaves, whether they are cognizant of it or not (Eph. 2:1-3; 6:12). Christ emphasized this truth in this following scripture,

No one is able to serve two lords, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and have a low opinion of the other... (Mt. 6:24a; RNT).

Ancient Israel could not decide whether they would follow Satan's religious system, or willingly obey the law and commandments of Almighty God. It is no different today. In the case of this world's Christianity, most have decided to reject God's law and commandments including His appointed days of worship,

So (King) Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the (false) prophets together on Mount Carmel. <sup>21</sup> And Elijah came to all the people, and said, '**How long will you falter between two opinions?** If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.' But the people answered him not a word (1Kgs. 18:20-21; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis add).

When mankind refuses to submit to God's commands, by default they choose to follow the ways of this present evil world, which is under the influence of Satan,

Grace to you and peace from God, the Father, and **our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from the present evil age...** (Gal. 1:3-4a; emphasis added).

Because the majority of mankind chooses to believe Satan's lies rather than believing and following God's word, everyone is living in a world that does not reflect God's values (1Pet. 4:3). Decisions are made each day that have negative consequences on people and some of these choices contribute to widespread poverty (Mt. 26:11; Mk. 14:7). Unfortunately, when people are impoverished, they sometimes have no choice but to submit themselves to various forms of slavery. Historically, and presently, these have included prostitution, child labor, the selling of under-aged children, undocumented labor practices where people are underpaid, or not paid at all, and sometimes forced to work in dangerous conditions, etc.

Almighty God does not agree with any of these practices. However, He has allowed mankind the freedom to make wrong choices and ignore Him if they wish. Therefore, when God commented on the subject of slavery in the Bible, He was addressing the state of affairs that existed in society at the time due to man's sinful and erroneous decision-making processes. In the context of the first scripture that is used to accuse God of contradicting Himself and ordaining slavery, He is addressing an existing condition. Some of the nations that lived around Israel were impoverished and their only way to survive was to become slaves. By becoming a slave to an Israelite, the foreigner would have a roof over his head, food in his stomach, and clothes on his back. In addition, God gave numerous commands regarding how these slaves were to be treated and it was not harsh as some might like to suggest (cf. Ex. 22:21; Dt. 23:15-16; Prov. 22:22),

And as for your male and female slaves whom you may have – from the nations that are around you, from them you may buy male and female slaves. <sup>45</sup> Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers who sojourn among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. <sup>46</sup> And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them as a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves. But regarding your brethren, the children of Israel, you shall not rule over one another with rigor (Lev. 25:44-46).

As the nation of Israel was to serve Almighty God with the idea of becoming one with Him, so the foreigner could serve the people of Israel and become one with them and participate in the observance of God's Holy Days,

For the children of Israel are servants to Me; they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt (where they were slaves); I am the Lord your God (Lev. 25:55; Ed. note in parenthesis).

And when a stranger sojourns (stays) with you and wants to keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it (Ex. 12:48; Ed. note in parenthesis).

If a foreigner became a native, or citizen, of Israel through circumcision, that person would be the beneficiary of all that God's law and commandments offered, including freedom from serving as a slave on a Sabbatical year,

If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.<sup>13</sup> And when you send him away (set him free) from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed; <sup>14</sup> you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. From what the Lord has blessed you with, you shall give to him (Dt. 15:12-14; Ed. note in parenthesis).

This aspect of God's law was also prophetic in nature because it pictured a time in the future when Gentiles could fully participate in the kingdom of God; not in the physical nation of Israel through the blood of circumcision but in the spiritual household of God through the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for the sins of all mankind,

And those of the circumcision (the Jews) who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also (Ac. 10:45; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God (Ac. 11:1).

When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life (everlasting)' (Ac. 11:18).

In a figurative sense, Paul confirmed that the Gentiles could now become spiritual slaves of Almighty God because of Israel's failure to faithfully serve and obey Him. In essence, Israel had lost their inheritance and the rights and privileges that went with it. Now the Gentile nations could become full participants in God's household, which is first and foremost spiritual (cf. Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28),

I (Paul) say then, have they (nation of Israel) stumbled (failed temporarily) that they should fall (in a permanent sense)? Certainly not! But through their fall (trespass), to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.<sup>12</sup> Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness (when they repent)! (Rom. 11:11-12; Ed. notes in parentheses).

The next scripture that is misused to claim that God contradicts Himself, and ordains slavery and oppression, has to do with punishment for sin. The context has to do with Noah's grandson, Canaan, who appears to have committed an homosexual act which would have carried the death penalty (cf. Lev. 18:22; 20:13),

So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son (grandson) had done to him. Then he (Noah; not God) said: 'Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren' (Gen. 9:25).

Noah's anger and reaction was understandable. However, his proclamation did not mean that Canaan was going to be abused in some form of abject slavery. Instead, Noah's statement was prophetic because it pointed to a future time when the nation of Israel would dispossess Canaan's descendants and inhabit their land under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. Some of these descendants of Canaan would become impoverished after being defeated by the

Israelites, and they would willingly become slaves in order to have their basic needs met. As mentioned previously, the Israelites could not abuse their slaves.

Unfortunately, many people equate slavery with the activities of the slave-trade during the colonial days as well as those who were abducted to work in the cotton fields of the southern United States. If Almighty God's law and commandments were being enforced at the time of the slave-trade, it would have ended as soon as it had begun because God's law states that kidnapping is punishable by death,

He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death (Ex. 21:16).

The final scripture used to accuse God of contradicting Himself has to do with a future time of judgment and punishment that will come upon all the nations, both physical and spiritual. The location is the Valley of Jehoshaphat which is used to picture a gathering of people as well as those spirit-beings who comprise the fallen host of heaven. Most of the language is symbolic but the message is clear. Those who had practiced any forms of slavery that are against God's word, will be repaid in kind so that they learn what it feels like and this will be part of their rehabilitation, which hopefully will lead to their eventual repentance,

I (God) will sell your (those who practiced illegal forms of slavery) sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans (Shebaites), to a people far off; for the Lord has spoken (Joel 3:8).

So God does not condone any form of slavery and oppression that is against His law. Instead, God expects those He has created to willingly serve and obey Him. Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul taught about being slaves of God in a positive and willing sense. Those who serve God will not be oppressed. In fact the opposite is true,

Is this not the fast that I (God) have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke (Isa. 58:6; Ed. note in parenthesis)?

I (God) drew them (nation of Israel) with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them (both physically and spiritually) (Hos. 11:4; cf. Mt. 11:28-30; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Ultimately, the worst slavery is spiritual in nature in the sense that an individual remains under the penalty of sin (Rom. 6:23). This is accomplished through Satan's deception which prevents mankind from understanding God's truth (2Cor. 4:4; Eph.2:1-3; 6:12; Rev. 12:9). Christ explained that without knowing God's truth correctly, no one will be truly free from Satan's abusive slavery,

Then Jesus said to the Judeans having believed in him, 'If you continue in my word (which is identical with his Father's word; cf. Jn. 8:26, 28, 38), truly you are disciples of mine;<sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (from Satan's lies and deception) (Jn. 8:31-32; RNT; cf. Ps. 119:45; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Until Christ returns to rule this planet, Satan will continue to keep mankind and the fallen host in spiritual slavery. Also, the various abusive forms of physical slavery, that mankind has engaged in throughout man's history, will continue (see study: Improvidence Condemned). Almighty God does not ordain oppression or any form of abusive slavery. These conditions only exist because God has allowed mankind the freedom to choose which way they want to live. Unfortunately, by making choices that are contrary to God's word, mankind has unwittingly placed itself under the

influence of the most oppressive being that has ever existed, Satan the abusive spiritual slave-master.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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