

Does God Endorse Slavery?

Is God a Moral Monster? - part 7

May 27, 2018

1. Critics of the Old Testament point to, what they think, is God's endorsement of slavery. Others claim that the laws allowed people to trade slaves as if they were farm animals, and to treat them in the most despicable ways.

2. This week we'll look at what the Old Testament says about slavery, how it was regulated, and how God's redemptive purpose could be advanced even when someone had become a slave or servant.

DAY 1: Different kinds of slavery

3. When critics of the OT read verses about slavery they immediately associate these verses with slavery in the South, prior to the American Civil War.

4. Hebrew (debt) *servanthood* was dramatically and categorically different than chattel *slavery*.

5. Hebrew slavery is illustrated in Leviticus 25.

Leviticus 25:47 "If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien's clan, ⁴⁸ he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him:

6. Hebrew servanthood was very similar to "indentured servants." In the early days of the American colonies, Europeans wanted to travel to the "new world," but couldn't afford to pay the passage across the Atlantic.

7. A voluntary deal was struck, where a traveler volunteered to act as a servant for someone in exchange for the passage from Europe to America.

8. The essence of indentured servanthood is that it is:

- a. Voluntarily entered into,
- b. A means of paying off a debt.
- c. Only for a prescribed length of time.

9. OT language does use the terms "buy," "sell," and "acquire," in reference to servants, but that doesn't mean that servants were depicted as less than human.

10. If you're a baseball fan you regularly hear of baseball "owners," and players "traded" to other teams. We say a certain player "belongs" to his new team. The differences lie in the formal contractual agreements that players voluntarily agree to, per the rules of baseball.

DAY 2: A means to help the poor

1. In the ancient world and even up into the nineteenth century, chattel slavery involved three aspects:

- a. The slave was considered a property.
- b. The slave owner's legal rights over the slave were complete.
- c. The slave's identity was destroyed in every aspect of society, including racial, marital and societal.

2. God's laws beginning in Exodus 21 were not given with the intention of *idealizing* slavery but of *controlling* and *regulating* it.

3. In a fallen world where slavery was rampant and of a world-wide scope, the laws in Exodus are meant to be the next "higher standards" with which sinful men should attain.

Leviticus 25:39 "If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave.

⁴⁰ *He is to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident among you; he is to work for you until the Year of Jubilee.*

⁴¹ *Then he and his children are to be released, and he will go back to his own clan and to the property of his forefathers.*

⁴² *Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves.* ⁴³ *Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God.*

4. In the Leviticus verses, above, ...

- a. How did the person come to a predicament where he needed to sell himself? (v. 39)
- b. How is he not to be treated? (v. 39)
- c. How is he to be treated? (v. 40)
- d. Does the person have any say over his release? (vv. 40-41)
- e. What about his family? (v. 41)
- f. What is his status to become upon his release? (v. 41)
- g. What **five** factors is everyone to remember when it comes to this issue of servanthood/slavery?

DAY 3: The big picture goal: reduction of poverty; no need for servanthood

1. Deut. 15 gives a stunning plan to deal with financial / societal problems common to poverty.

Deuteronomy 15:1 At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.

² This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel the loan he has made to his fellow Israelite. He shall not require payment from his fellow Israelite or brother, because the LORD's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed. ³ You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your brother owes you.

2. What does this section propose regarding debts?

Deuteronomy 15:4 However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, ⁵ if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.

⁶ For the LORD your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.

3. What things are important regarding financial blessing?

Deuteronomy 15:7 If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. ⁸ Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.

⁹ Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin.

4. How are we to treat and think about our brothers who are poor?

Deuteronomy 15:10 Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

¹¹ There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

5. How are we to treat and think about our brothers who are poor?

DAY 4: Treating a servant

1. We continue with how to treat a servant.

Deuteronomy 15:12 If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. ¹³ And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. ¹⁴ Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you.

2. What was to be the mind-set of someone who had a servant?

Deuteronomy 15:15 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.

3. Why would remembering their former status as slaves help them now?

Deuteronomy 15:16 But if your servant says to you, "I do not want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, ¹⁷ then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life.

4. What does this verse imply about how someone was to treat a servant?

Deuteronomy 15:18 Do not consider it a hardship to set your servant free, because his service to you these six years has been worth twice as much as that of a hired hand. And the LORD your God will bless you in everything you do.

5. Once again, a person is challenged to be open-handed with his servant(s).

6. What should be the mind-set of the one who has had a servant? (Look for two items)

7. How does this passage challenge you if you have employees? Or your co-workers?

DAY 5: Accountability for how we treat people.

Job 31:13 "If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants when they had a grievance against me,

¹⁴ what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account?

¹⁵ Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?

1. How does Job see that he needs to treat his menservants and maidservants?
2. Job realizes that he is accountable for how he treats his servants.
3. What does Job understand about how God made his menservants and maidservants? What similarities does the servant share in common with Job?