



Is Slavery Acceptable to God?

Proverbs 30:10: (NASB) *Do not slander a slave to his master, or he will curse you and you will be found guilty.*



We are fortunate to live in a country where the stated core belief is that all men are created equal. With such a basis, it is theoretically much easier to identify and condemn the domination of one over another against their will. Yet, slavery in many forms not only has existed for most all of history, it continues to exist in this age of enlightenment. The Bible is full of examples of slavery and full of God's seeming acceptance of this practice. So, does God support the idea of slavery? Stay with us as we endeavor to unravel this very tricky and emotional topic!

Is slavery by God's design?

Slavery is fashioned after the rule of Satan and not the rule of God!

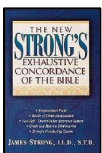
Genesis 2:15-17: (NASB) ¹⁵*Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to **cultivate <5647>** it and **keep <8104>** it. ¹⁶*The LORD God commanded the man, saying, From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.**



Cultivate: Strongs #5647, 1) to work, serve, 2) to labor, work, do work
1b1) to be worked, be tilled (of land)

Keep: Strongs #8104, 1) to keep, guard, observe, give heed, 2) to keep, have charge of

Genesis 3:16-19: (NRSV) ¹⁶*To the woman he said, I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. ¹⁷And to the man he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in **toil <6093>** you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*



Toil: Strongs #6093, pain, labour, hardship, sorrow, toil

Problem of Child Slavery in Benine, Africa, CBS News

- According to Unicef, the overall numbers are staggering. 1.2 million children are trafficked each year worldwide, 50,000 of them in Benine alone. Many are sold by their parents.
- Poverty fuels the slave trade, forcing parents to either sell their children to traffickers on purpose or inadvertently.
- Traffickers often swoop on the poor remote villages, offering money for the children or promising paying jobs in bigger cities...

God's creation was equitable while Satan was a usurper, power hungry, proud and a liar. As a result of the of a choice to not obey God the Creator and instead obey Satan the usurper, the curse destabilized the "would be" (equitable) society. This sets up circumstances for slavery to thrive - the idea of domination of one person over another.



So, if slavery is not of God's design, then why did he let his people have slaves?

Why wouldn't God just condemn slavery? Here are the guidelines to keep in mind as we look into the treatment of slaves and slavery within the ancient nation of Israel. All of the following laws were part of the blossoming culture of Israel. Many of these texts are general sweeping statements/principles that would obviously apply as background in the application of specific laws:

Exodus 21:16: (NASB) *He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death.*

This is a general application, very focused on the individual rights of each man.

Exodus 21:26-27: (NRSV) ²⁶*When a slaveowner strikes the eye of a male or female slave, destroying it, the owner shall let the slave go, a free person, to compensate for the eye.* ²⁷*If the owner knocks out a tooth of a male or female slave, the slave shall be let go, a free person, to compensate for the tooth.*

The Law inherently contained the warning against all abuse. Slaves were to go free if they were abused.

Leviticus 19:9-10: (NASB) ⁹*Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest.* ¹⁰*Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.*

This was a blanket command of compassion upon the less fortunate.



Leviticus 19:33-34: (NASB) ³³When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. ³⁴The 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.

There was to be a common respect for all men. God never advocated abuse of another. So when studying the topic of slavery in the Hebrew Law, we need to put it in context of the Scriptures we just discussed.

13 Colonies small part in the triangular slave trade, *Choices Program*

- *The 13 colonies were a relatively small proportion of the slave trade - in all about 500,000-600,000. But in Brazil, about 4 million enslaved Africans are imported over the course of the slave trade. Cuba and Haiti in each case were well over a million...If you ask the question from the other side of the Atlantic, "What countries were involved?" The answer is, all of them.*

(For more on the triangular slave trade, see the CQ Rewind Full Edition Bonus Material.)

Is this the same kind of "slavery" that was in the Old Testament? No!

Deuteronomy 5:14: (NRSV) *But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work - you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.*

Slaves were mentioned twice to make the point of compassion. Even slaves were to rest on the Sabbath. This demonstrates a very specific respect for humanity.

Leviticus 25:39: (NASB) *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.*

Slave's service meaning the lifetime assignment of slavery.

Job 31:13-15: (NASB) ¹³If I have despised the claim of my male or female slaves when they filed a complaint against me, ¹⁴What then could I do when God arises? And when He calls me to account, what will I answer Him? ¹⁵Did not He who made me in the womb make him, and the same one fashion us in the womb?

Although not part of the Law, here is a principle that is a reflection of the proper common respect for all men.

Proverbs 30:10: (NASB) *Do not slander a slave to his master, or he will curse you and you will be found guilty.*

This shows that the slaves had a right to be heard.

God established sweeping guidelines for how to treat others - they are to be treated with respect.

Did God establish a difference in the treatment of Hebrew slaves and foreign slaves?

Treatment of Hebrew slaves:

Exodus 21:1-6: (NASB) ¹Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them. ²If you buy a Hebrew slave, (This refers to someone who sold themselves into servitude.) he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. ³If he



comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. ⁴If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone. ⁵But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,' ⁶then 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.

If the Hebrew individual serving the master decides that he loves working for him and doesn't want to leave behind his wife and children, he can stay permanently.

 **Slaves in New Jersey, human trafficking, modern day slavery in America, CNN**

- *These girls were victims of something hard to believe, something you might never expect, something that happened in plain sight. You are looking at girls who were held as slaves in America. Not for a day or a month, but for year.*
- *It was like being trapped, being in a cage. It's horrible. Sometimes there is not enough food for us to eat, no freedom at all...*

There is a great difference between voluntary and involuntary servitude.

On the idea of "buying" people:

Numbers 18:15-16: (NRSV) ¹⁵The first issue of the womb of all creatures, human and animal, which is offered to the LORD, shall be yours; but the firstborn of human beings you shall redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. ¹⁶Their redemption price, reckoned from one month of age, you shall fix at five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary.

There was a value placed on the life of every firstborn, and there was a value placed on the life of every man, no matter how poor they were when they came to the master.



Observations on Exodus 21:1-6:

- The one who served left servitude in the same state as he came in.
- The individual a choice right from the start, as he also knew the Law.
- The fact that he could choose to be bound to his master for life indicates fair treatment.
- It is all about the man, as he is the one who is liable for wealth protection and all payments.

 **Building Roman Cities, Slaves of Rome, History Channel**

- *To build these powerful cities, Rome needed manpower. While many of the people from conquered lands became citizens, many more were auctioned off as slaves.*
- *Thousands of these slaves were educated and secured positions as philosophers, musicians, dancers and teachers. But tens of thousands more were forced into brutal manual labor.*

In Jewish history, there weren't big cities built on the blood of slaves.



Deuteronomy 15:12-18: (NRSV) ¹²*If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and works for you six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free. ¹³And when you send a male slave out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty-handed. ¹⁴Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the LORD your God has blessed you. ¹⁵Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today. ¹⁶But if he says to you, "I will not go out from you," because he loves you and your household, since he is well off with you, ¹⁷then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his earlobe into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. You shall do the same with regard to your female slave. ¹⁸Do not consider it a hardship when you send them out from you free persons, because for six years they have given you services worth the wages of hired laborers; and the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.*

The Hebrews were to be thankful to those indentured servants for the work they did. This allowed people to get out of debt and although it was hard and was at cost to the slave, their treatment was not to be cruel.

What happened to Hebrew women who became slaves?

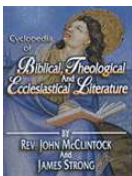
 **Hidden in plain sight, human trafficking, Modern Day Slavery in America, CNN**

- *The girls were forced to work in hair braiding salons, serving customers all day, right out in the open. Their captors took everything they earned, every penny. They worked seven days a week, 14 hours a day. This went on for five to six years. Traffickers held the girls in several houses.*
- *They were housed in a typical middle American neighborhood, not where you would expect to find slavery.*

This type of slavery was not allowed in the Hebrew system of servitude.

Exodus 21:7-11: (NASB) ⁷*If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do.*

Why would a man sell his daughter?

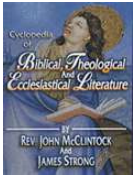


(Source: McClintock and Strong's Bible Cyclopedia) Again, a father might sell his young daughter to a Hebrew, with a view either of the latter's marrying her himself or of his giving her to his son (verses 7-9). It diminishes the apparent harshness of this proceeding if we look on the purchase money as in the light of a dowry given, as was not unusual, to the parents of the bride...

This does sound harsh, but we don't have a culture based on arranged marriages. Women simply did not have the same rights as the men. Why? Remember the curse on Eve? *Your husband shall rule over you.* This is showing the fulfillment of that curse. This was not the way God originally designed the arrangement.

⁸*If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her. ⁹If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. ¹⁰If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. ¹¹If he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.*

If the young lady did not end up marrying him, she could be redeemed through the repayment of her dowry. This was not human trafficking. It provided for



her rights and human dignity. The servitude of the Old Testament was very different from the slavery in the world today.

(Source: McClintock and Strong's Bible Cyclopedia) In respect to marriage, there were some peculiarities which, to our ideas, would be regarded as hardships. A master might, for instance, give a wife to a Hebrew servant for the time of his servitude, the wife being in this case, it must be remarked, not only a slave, but a non-Hebrew. Should he leave when his term had expired, his wife and children would remain the absolute property of the master (Exodus 21:4, 5). The reason for this regulation is, evidently, that the children of a female heathen slave are mere slaves; they inherited the mother's disqualification....

Exodus 21:20-21: (KJV) ²⁰And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished. ²¹Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money.

The proper use of a rod was moving back into order. The rod was used as a method of discipline, it was not to be abused. The master could not come to the servant with a sword, an implement of war. The rod was to discipline, not to be cruel.

(Source: Matthew Poole, Biblical Commentator) "With a rod" - a fit and usual instrument for correction, whereby it is implied, that if he killed him with a sword, or any such weapon, he was to die for it. "Under his hand" - i.e. whilst the master is correcting him. He shall be surely punished; not with death, for then it would have been said so, as it is before and after; but as the magistrate or judge shall think fit, according to the diversity of circumstances; and therefore no particular punishment is set down.

What about the treatment of pagan slaves?

Leviticus 25:39-43: (NASB) ³⁹If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he man, as if he were a sojourner; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. ⁴¹He 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. ⁴²For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt; they are not to be sold in a slave sale. ⁴³You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to revere your God.

Leviticus 25:44-46: (NASB) ⁴⁴As 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. ⁴⁵Then, 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. ⁴⁶You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as permanent slaves. But in respect to your countrymen, the sons of Israel, you shall not rule with severity over one another.

This is talking about people voluntarily enslaving themselves. Notice, there is no provision to sell the slave. Why? Citizenship has its advantages as well as the circumstances of war and crime.

Slavery is an example of evil. Like war, disease and social injustice it can cause despair. We correct what we can in the moment knowing that God's plan, God's future for His people, will triumph. John 15:15

Korean women for sex, Slavery in America

- Harris County, Texas - Harris County's Human Trafficking Task Force is carefully orchestrating a sting operation at this Houston massage parlor, renowned for trafficking foreign women. Police are now seeking to better understand how the Korean women got there.
- When initially questioned, all three women say they have only been in the country a few days and as the team searches the facilities, all the tell-tale signs of human trafficking reveal themselves, from the ATM in the lobby to



the cramped living spaces filled with mattresses and personal items. Investigators have no doubt that the owner is exploiting the women by selling sex for cash.

Was this following action “sanctioned” or “advocated” by God? After all, the pain and suffering increased upon the Hebrews for no other reason than having God’s own representative appear on the scene:

Exodus 5:15-23: (NASB) ¹⁵Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, Why do you deal this way with your servants? ¹⁶There is no straw given to your servants, yet they keep saying to us, Make bricks! And behold, your servants are being beaten; but it is the fault of your own people. ¹⁷But he said, You are lazy, very lazy; therefore you say, Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD. ¹⁸So go now and work; for you will be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks. ¹⁹The foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble because they were told, You must not reduce your daily amount of bricks. ²⁰When they left Pharaoh’s presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them. ²¹They said to them, May the LORD look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh’s sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us. ²²Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, O Lord, why have You brought harm to this people? Why did You ever send me? ²³Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all.

God allowed His people to suffer terribly under harsh slavery and cruelty. It was given to them as a remembrance so that they would not treat other people cruelly. They were reminded of the inequity. God accepted the concept of ancient slavery as long as there was humane treatment, choices, and honor.

What is the New Testament view on slavery and Christianity?

 **Worked to death, slaves of Rome, History Channel**

- I'm standing in front of the Syracuse stone quarries, which were some of the largest stone quarries in the ancient world. The jobs that were most dangerous that no one else would do were jobs that slaves had to do. These were places where people worked and were worked to death. Whenever we think about classical antiquity, whenever we think about what was produced - the wonderful buildings in literature - we have to remember that all of what was produced was based on slave labor.*

The Hebrew approach to slavery was not a national one. It was individual. An individual could sell themselves into servitude. God taught that the master should have compassion.

The New Testament view on slavery: (Remember, this is in the context of the Roman style of slavery, not the Hebrew style under the Law.)

Ephesians 6:5-9: (NASB) ⁵Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; ⁶not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. ⁹And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Just as there was a constant reminder of Israel’s deliverance from bondage and cruelty to focus the Jews on the respectful care of those in their service, so we have a New Testament constant reminder of our accountability to God for our actions - even if we are in a situation that is unjust.



Our accountability spreads through all aspects of our life:

Titus 3:1-2: (NASB) ¹Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ²to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

Christianity was implemented as a change to a person's spiritual life, not to change the existing social structure or government regulations. Its purpose wasn't to overthrow all evil but instead to provide an example of righteousness so that evil could be recognized by comparison.

All in Christ are equal no matter what their earthly status.

1 Corinthians 12:13: (NRSV) *For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free (the Roman version of slavery, not the Jewish version of servitude) - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

Galatians 3:28: (NRSV) *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

Your heritage or earthly status no longer becomes the defining factor in your life.

Colossians 3:11: (NRSV) *In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!*



Observations about slavery:

- There are widely varied degrees of servitude, some very civil and some utterly cruel;
- God NEVER sanctioned any abuse of, or cruelty to, any servant at any time;
- Men, in an effort to justify their own hard-heartedness, found ways to use the Bible to defend their position.

Jesus was sent to release all captives of sin:

Isaiah 61:1-2: (NRSV) ¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

Jesus came to bring good news to the oppressed and proclaim liberty and freedom to all prisoners of sin.

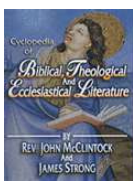
**So is slavery acceptable to God?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions,
Think about it...!**



**And now even more to think about...
only in the Full Edition of CQ Rewind!**

We are providing several third party references to verify the nature of the servitude of the Hebrews compared to the human torture and forced labor that we always associate with slavery.

(Source: McClintock and Strong's Bible Cyclopedia)





Forms of Scriptural Slavery. It is difficult to trace the origin of slavery. It may have existed before the Deluge, when violence filled the earth, and drew upon it the vengeance of God. But the first direct reference to slavery, or rather slave trading, in the Bible is found in the history of Joseph, who was sold by his brethren to the Ishmaelites (Genesis 37:27, 28). In Ezekiel 27:12, 13 we find a reference to the slave trade carried on with Tyre by Javan, Tubal, and Meshech.

Patriarchal Servitude. The exact nature of this service cannot be defined there can be no doubt, however, that it was regulated by principles of justice, equity, and kindness. The servants of the patriarchs were of two kinds, those "born in the house" and those "bought with money" (Genesis 17:13). Abraham appears to have had a large number of servants. At one time he armed three hundred and eighteen young men, "born in his own house," with whom he pursued the kings who had taken "Lot and his goods, and the women also, and the people," and recaptured them (Genesis 14:16). The servants born in the house were, perhaps, entitled to greater privileges than the others. Eliezer of Damascus, a home born servant, was Abraham's steward, and, in default of issue, would have been his heir (Genesis 15:2-4). This class of servants was honored with the most intimate confidence of the masters. and was employed in the most important services. An instance of this kind will be found in Genesis 24:1-9, where the eldest or chief servant of Abraham's house, who ruled over all that he had, was sent to Mesopotamia to select a wife for Isaac, though then forty years of age...The servants of Abraham were admitted to the same religious privileges with their master, and received the seal of the covenant (Genesis 17:9, 14, 24, 27)...

Jewish Slavery. The institution of slavery was recognized, though not established, by the Mosaic law with a view to mitigate its hardships and to secure to every man his ordinary rights. Repugnant as the notion of slavery is to our minds, it is difficult to see how it can be dispensed with in certain phases of society without, at all events, entailing severer evils than those which it produces... In the case of war carried on for conquest or revenge, there were but two modes of dealing with the captives, namely. putting them to death or reducing them to slavery.... as citizenship involved the condition of freedom and independence, it was almost necessary to offer the alternative of disfranchisement to all who through poverty or any other contingency were unable to support themselves in independence....It should further be noticed that a laboring class, in our sense of the term, was almost unknown to the nations of antiquity. Hired service was regarded as incompatible with freedom; and hence the slave in many cases occupied the same social position as the servant or laborer of modern times, though differing from him in regard to political status. The Hebrew designation of the slave shows that service was the salient feature of his condition; for the term *ebed*, usually applied to him, is derived from a verb signifying, "to work," and the very same term is used in reference to offices of high trust held by free men. In short, service and slavery would have been to the ear of the Hebrew equivalent terms, though he fully recognized grades of servitude, according as the servant was a Hebrew or a non-Hebrew, and, if the latter, according as he was bought with money

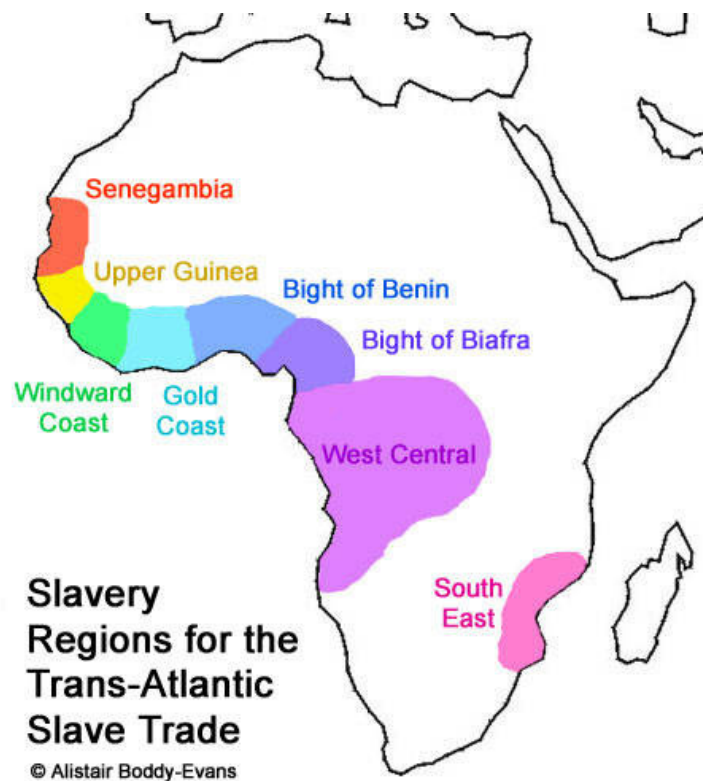


(Genesis 17:12; Exodus 12:44) or born in the house (Genesis 14:14; 15:3; 17:23).

The Apostle Paul's letter to Philemon was all about a slave:

Philemon Excerpts: (NASB) *¹Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker,...¹⁰I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, ¹¹who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. ¹²I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, ¹³whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. ¹⁵For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, ¹⁶no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ¹⁷If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. ¹⁸But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). ²⁰Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.*

Paul is drawing clear attention to the fact that freedom in Christ (which he ironically calls being a prisoner) is greater than any earthly bondage, even if that bondage remains throughout one's entire lifetime!



(Source: About.com)

Origin of African Slaves Sold in the Triangular Trade

Slaves for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade were initially sourced in Senegambia and the Windward Coast. Around 1650 the trade moved to west-central Africa (the Kingdom of the Kongo and neighboring Angola).

The transport of slaves from Africa to the Americas forms the middle passage of the triangular trade. Several distinct regions can be identified along the west African coast, these are distinguished by the particular European countries who visited the slave ports, the peoples who were enslaved, and the dominant African society(s) who provided the slaves. The map shows the regions where slaves were sourced.



At Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, retracing slavery's steps

Saturday, July 11, 2009, By Karamagi Rujumba, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ([Portions here quoted](#))

CAPE COAST, GHANA -- The door of no return, which for more than 100 years opened to the certainty of a short and brutal life for the millions of Africans that were captured off these shores and sold into slavery, now opens to the serene and awesome vastness of the Atlantic Ocean.



And the beach beyond the notorious exit door at Cape Coast Castle, which was the main British hub of the transatlantic slave trade in West Africa from 1665 to 1807, is now lined with an extensive slum of wooden shacks and colonial-era brick buildings covered with tin roofs.

"You have to use your imagination to understand what it must have been like to be here back then, to see the evil of what one man did to another," said Isaac Mensah, a tour guide at the castle, which is seated on the oceanfront about 90 miles west of Accra.

And because people of all walks are compelled not only to imagine how the horror of slavery was implemented, but to walk and inhale the air in the dungeons where millions of Africans died -- in body and soul -- said Mr. Mensah. Cape Coast Castle remains as one of Ghana's key tourist attractions...

To descend into the exposed brick castle is to enter what feels like the depth of the underworld. Underneath the castle, there are five dungeon chambers for men. The strongest ones were separated during branding, when hot iron rods were used to mark their chests, and then chained and shackled together in the first chamber.

At any given three-month period, the castle held 1,000 men and 300 women. The men were confined in groups of 200 per chamber roughly the size of a 30-by-15-foot holding cell before they were shipped to America, the Caribbean and elsewhere.

Standing in the first chamber dungeon filled with heavy, musky air, Mr. Mensah ordered that the only lightbulb in the room be turned off to simulate the atmosphere for the future slaves.

And as the tour group stood in near pitch darkness with only a sliver of light seeping through a peep hole, nobody said a word when he asked: "How does it feel?"

Women were locked in two similar dungeons, 150 of them per chamber. There were both commercial and domestic slaves. The domestic slaves served the British masters in and around the castle.



And any slave who challenged the authorities was thrown into the condemned cell, which held 50 in a room no bigger than most walk-in closets. There, they would die deprived of food, water, light and oxygen, clawing the brick walls and floors as they suffocated.

The majority of slaves ranged between 15 and 35 years of age.

Meanwhile, for the British traders, it was a life "of relative comfort, discovery and adventure in their newfound home," said Mr. Mensah.

"They even had a church on one of the top floors of the castle and on Sundays they would have their services and sing, and the slaves would hear them," he said.

"A soldier would then have to come and check through a peep hole and see whether the slaves in the dungeon were behaving themselves," Mr. Mensah added.

But it was not the British alone who were responsible for all the evil that happened in the confines of Cape Coast Castle, or for slavery itself.

After all, the African chiefs who controlled much of this region at the time played a major role as well. They were the ones who paid the British and other Europeans by offering them slaves. They were the ones who sold women to British traders.

Read more: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/09192/983229-82.stm#ixzz1odNb7bV9>