

## Slavery in the New Testament

1. In Syria (the Holy Land), slaves constituted a large part of the population. Some historians have suggested a third of the population in the Roman Empire was enslaved at the time of Christ.

2. Jesus ministered to Roman slaves and often mentioned slaves in His teachings and parables, yet He never criticized the institution of slavery.

Luk 7:2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die ...

Luk 7:10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

Mat 10:24 The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.

3. Many slaves living at the time of Christ were well-educated men who had been captured by the Roman armies. They were capable of managing large estates and business affairs and were so used by their masters.

4. Unlike classical Greece or Rome, the economy of Israel never became dependent on what we might call menial slave labor.

5. The term "servant" or "bond slave" (**Doulos**) is often used by Paul to describe his total dedication to his job as an apostle.

Rom 1:1 Paul, a "**servant**" of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

5.1 Paul warns against the slavery of legalism and exhorts all believers to eschew the slavery of the law. (Gal 4:22-31 and 5:1)

Gal 4:22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.

Gal 4:23 His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.

Gal 4:24 These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar ...

Gal 4:30 But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."

Gal 4:31 Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

5.2 Paul likens the one held in the grip of sin to a slave.

Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not “**serve**” sin.

5.3 At Christ's return all of creation will be delivered from the slavery of corruption.

Rom 8:20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

Rom 8:21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its “**bondage**” to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Rom 8:22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

5.4 Unregenerate men today are enslaved all their lives by the fear of death.

Heb 2:15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to “**bondage.**”

5.5 As the Gospel with its social implications spread throughout the Roman Empire, it became increasingly necessary to define the attitude of the church toward slavery.

5.6 Many slaves were turning to Christ in the households of Christian masters.

5.7 Some slaves desired emancipation, but Paul urged the Christian slave to remain a slave, with the right to accept manumission if offered.

1Co 7:20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

1Co 7:21 Art thou called being a “**servant?**” care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.

1Co 7:22 For he that is called in the Lord, being a “**servant,**” is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's “**servant.**”

5.8 Paul makes it quite clear that, whether slave or freeman, as Christians we are all one in Christ, baptized into one body. Christ is all, and in all.

1Co 12:13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, “slave” or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither “**bond**” nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Col 3:11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, “**bond**” nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

5.9 Thus Paul ordered slaves to be obedient for the Lord's sake. Obedience was to be a testimony to the rest of the world.

5.9.1 At the same time, he instructed the masters to treat believing slaves fairly and justly, thus furnishing another testimony to the world.

Eph 6:5 **“Servants,”** be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;

Eph 6:6 Not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;

Eph 6:7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:

Eph 6:8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

Eph 6:9 And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

1Ti 6:2 And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

5.10 In the case of Philemon and Onesimus, Paul makes clear his attitude toward slavery.

### **Plea for the Slave Onesimus, Philemon's Runaway Slave**

Philemon 1:10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.

Philemon 1:11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

Philemon 1:12 I am sending him -- who is my very heart -- back to you.

Philemon 1:13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.

Philemon 1:14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced.

Philemon 1:15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good --

Philemon 1:16 no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

Philemon 1:17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

Philemon 1:18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.

Philemon 1:19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back -- not to mention that you owe me your very self.

Philemon 1:20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

Philemon 1:21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

Philemon 1:22 And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

5.10.1 He did not ask his friend Philemon to free the runaway slave, but commended Onesimus to him as a beloved brother. Paul did imply, however, that he hoped Philemon would free Onesimus.

6. Do not be confused by our 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. The slaves of the Roman Empire for at least the first three centuries were not African Americans but conquered provincials.