

## Slavery USA (David W T Brattston)

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The Bible and early post-Biblical Christian literature opposes slaveholding by Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world, although for a reason you probably did not expect. This article reconciles Biblical acceptance of slavery with modern-day Christian opposition to it.

As you are aware, the Bible does not condemn slavery. In fact, there are passages that condone it: Exodus 21.2-4, Exodus 21.6f, Exodus 21.32, 1 Corinthians 7.21, Colossians 3.22f, Colossians 4.1, 1 Peter 2.18, and the Epistle to Philemon. Colossians 3.22 even instructs slaves to work diligently for their Christian masters. Much of the material on employer-employee relations in the Bible pertains to owners and slaves.

In the post-Biblical literature we have the *Epistle to Polycarp* 4.3 (ca AD 107) by Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, which discountenances the practice of a local church buying the freedom of slave members. Origen's *Homilies on Genesis* 16.1 (ca AD 240) contains a Bible-based justification for the enslavement of the Egyptians in Genesis 47.13-21 by the Pharaoh and the Patriarch Joseph. Origen was the foremost Bible scholar, teacher and preacher of his time, and was himself

# TO BE SOLD & LET

BY PUBLIC AUCTION,

On *MONDAY* the 18th of *MAY*. 1829,

UNDER THE TREES.

FOR SALE,

THE THREE FOLLOWING

## SLAVES,

VIZ.

HANNIBAL, about 30 Years old, an excellent House Servant, of Good Character.

WILLIAM, about 35 Years old, a Labourer.

NANCY, an excellent House Servant and Nurse.

The MEN belonging to "LEECH'S" Estate, and the WOMAN to Mrs. D. SMIT

TO BE LET,

On the usual conditions of the Hirer finding them in Food, Clo<sup>t</sup> in<sup>v</sup>. and Medical

THE FOLLOWING

MALE and FEMALE

## SLAVES,

OF GOOD & STEADFAST.

ROBERT BAGLEY, about 20 Years old, a good House Servant.

WILLIAM BAGLEY, about 18 Years old, a Labourer.

JOHN ARMS, about 18 Years old.

JACK ANTONIA, about 40 Years old, a Labourer.

PHILIP, an Excellent Fisherman.

HARRY, about 27 Years old, a good House Servant.

LUCY, a Young Woman of good Character, used to House Work and the Nursery.

ELIZA, an Excellent Washerwoman.

CLARA, an Excellent Washerwoman.

FANNY, about 14 Years old, House Servant.

SARAH, about 14 Years old, House Servant.

Also for Sale, at Eleven o'Clock,

Fine Rice, Gram, Paddy, Books, Muslins,  
Needles, Pins, Ribbons, &c. &c.

AT ONE O'CLOCK, THAT CELEBRATED ENGLISH HORSE

**BLUCHER,**

ADDISON PRINTER GOVERNMENT OFFICE.

Although the Old Testament and early Christian writings do not forbid owning a slave, they do forbid making someone a slave: Deuteronomy 24.7, Nehemiah 5.1-9, Jeremiah 34.8-18 and 1 Timothy 1.10. Some Bible versions translate people who reduce another person to slavery as "enslavers" or "kidnappers", while the New King James Version has "slave traders", but the spirit of the activity is best expressed by the KJV term "menstealers".

In the twenty-first century all people are born free, because slavery and involuntary servitude are forbidden by national laws, except for backward Muslim countries, where I doubt this article will be read. Even Muslim countries are subject to United Nations conventions and other international accords against slavery. Christians are bound in conscience to obey the laws of their countries, except when they interfere with religion, and only to the extent they interfere: Romans 13.1-6, Titus 3.1, 1 Peter 2.13f, 1 Peter 2.17, the church fathers Justin Martyr *1 Apology* 17 (ca AD 160), Theophilus *To Autolycus* 3.14 (late second century), and Tertullian *On Idolatry* 15 (early third century). Thus, the only way for an American to own a slave is through the process of (illegally) turning a free person (anybody) into a slave. Because any slave is ultimately obtained through an activity that violates human

laws and Deuteronomy 24.7 etc., slaveholding is unchristian today.

This thesis would be supported even by Origen's *Homilies on Genesis* 16.1. He distinguished there between Egyptians becoming slaves, which he condoned, and Pharaoh's enslavement of the Israelites, which he condemned. Origen's distinction hinged on the circumstance that the Egyptians in Genesis 47 gave up their freedom willingly, in exchange for something of value. On the other hand, preached Origen, the Israelites' freedom was "wrenched away" "violently", "by force", and "against their will". Because this is the only way a person can be enslaved today in Christian and socialist countries, the enslavement is unlawful and thus invalid. Masters are therefore not to hinder a slave seeking his/her freedom.

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