

Facts About Slavery

(Many of these Facts Are Not Well Understood or Are Purposely Ignored)

⇒ Slavery has been part of the fabric of human society throughout history. Slavery was practiced by the Babylonians, the Hittites, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Persians, the ancient Brits, the Danes, the Romans, the African kingdoms, the South American kingdoms, the Chinese, people of India, Mongols, Burmese, Native Americans, the Muslim kingdoms, Spanish, British, Americans and others. Slavery is still practiced in many places in our world today.

⇒ Most are familiar with the slavery practiced by ancient Egypt. The Egyptians enslaved the entire nation of Israel for 400 years. A large portion of ancient Chinese society consisted of slaves. The Great Wall was built by slaves and there was little concern for the cost in human lives. It is said that “every stone (in that wall) cost a human life.” Slavery was commonly practiced in the ancient world.

⇒ The New Testament was written during the Roman Empire at a time when slavery was an established institution of Roman society. The historian Gibbon, who wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, said that one half of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves.

⇒ After Christopher Columbus reached the New World, he took some people as slaves from the native population. That was very unfortunate. Yet, here is what often goes unreported: the native tribes he discovered all had slaves. It is estimated that 20 to 40 percent of the indigenous American population were slaves. Slavery was a common practice among these people. It was part of their society along with cannibalism, head hunting and even human sacrifice. Slavery was an established institution in the Western Hemisphere before Columbus' ships ever appeared on the horizon.

Those who are busy reconstructing history often tell us that the original indigenous people were peace-loving and lived in harmony with each other until those evil Europeans came to their shores. But this idea of a peaceful savage is a myth. The people that were here before Columbus were cannibals, they conquered other tribes, they held women as sex slaves, their male prisoners they would torture and then kill. We should keep these things in mind before we cancel Columbus Day and start calling it Indigenous Peoples Day.¹

¹It's a myth that before the Europeans arrived the American Indians lived in peace and harmony. Archaeology has long disproved this. See *Cannibalism, Headhunting and Human Sacrifice in North America* by George Franklin Feldman and *Constant Battles—Why We Fight?* by Steven A. LeBlanc (archeologist at Harvard University). LeBlanc shows that primeval society was far more warlike than any of its civilized successors. Men's sinful depravity is accurately described by the Apostle Paul: “Their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known” (Romans 3:15-17).

⇒ Why did civilized societies allow for slavery, such an evil practice? The reason is because societies, both ancient and modern, are made up of depraved, sinful men who engage in wicked deeds and refuse to act in kindness and love toward their fellow men. What about American society today? We no longer have slavery, but does America society allow for any wicked practices?

Consider pornography. In America pornography is legal for adults, and it is a billion-dollar industry (over 90 billion). *Slavery treated people as mere property, not as persons. Pornography treats people as mere objects of lust, not as persons.*

Consider abortion. America's laws allow for the slaughtering of millions of unborn babies. *Slavery treats people as mere property. Abortionists treat the unborn as mere tissue, the property of the mother.* "It's her body and she has the right to do with her body whatever she wants." How different is the believing woman who says, "My body belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. It's His holy temple" (see 1 Cor. 6:19-20).

So even modern America allows for some very wicked practices.

⇒ The Bible does not attack the institution of slavery. The Bible does not instruct slave owners to free their slaves. Instead, the Bible instructs slave owners not to threaten their slaves but to treat them with fairness and justice. They were to remember that they had a Master in heaven who always treated them very fairly. So in other words, masters were to be the best slave owners they could be to the glory of God. Slaves were not told to run away from their masters and liberate themselves. Instead, they were told to obey their masters in all things, serving them well. As believing slaves they should first and foremost remember that they were also slaves of Jesus Christ, and privileged to serve Him to the best of their ability. In short, they were to be the best slaves they could be to the glory of God.

⇒ If masters were reasonable and kind to their slaves, and if slaves were faithful to their masters, hard working and diligent in their tasks, then the master/slave relationship could be a very pleasant relationship. It could even better than what some people experience today when they have to work for a boss who is very unreasonable, cruel and overly demanding. Exodus chapter 21 (verses 1-6) presents the situation where a slave is given his freedom, but instead he says, "I love my master" and he chooses to continue to serve him in voluntary servitude.

⇒ There is an overlooked condemnation against the slave trade found in the writings of the Apostle Paul. He strongly condemns the sin of "**men-stealing**" (1 Tim. 1:10). And of course, men-stealing was at the very heart of the African slave trade. Men, women and children were literally stolen, captured, taken away from their villages and sold as slaves. This practice is strongly condemned in Scripture, and the sin of men-stealing is listed in the same verse along with other terrible sins: "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers (fornicators), for them that defile themselves with mankind, for **menstealers** (often translated as "slave traders"), for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:9-10).

⇒ Keep in mind that Christianity and the power of the gospel can change individual hearts, but it is not meant to change godless societies.² And yet, as more and more hearts are transformed by the gospel of God's grace, this will have its effects on society. The spread of Christianity definitely had beneficial effects which helped to gradually eliminate slavery.

⇒ Little is said today about the role that Muslims have played in enslaving other human beings. Huge numbers of Africans have been enslaved in the Islamic countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

⇒ What is being taught so often today is that white people were the slave owners and the oppressors, and black people were the slaves and the victims. Yet it is a fact that down through history millions of white people were also forced into slavery. This was especially the case as Muslims enslaved many Europeans. At least a million Europeans were enslaved by North African pirates from 1500 to 1800, and some European slaves were still being sold on the auction block in Egypt years after the Emancipation Proclamation freed blacks in the United States. For example, the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of August 4, 1877 prohibited the continued sale of white slaves after August 3, 1885.

We get our word "slave" from the word "slav." **Slavs** were white Europeans who spoke a Slavic language. During the Middle Ages, Slavs were widely used as slaves in both Europe and in the Islamic world.³ The very word "slave" is derived from the word "Slav," not only in English, but also in other European languages, as well as in Arabic. So the very word "slave" is derived from the name given to **white** Europeans, many of whom were slaves.

⇒ Blacks are not guiltless. Many black people participated in the slave trade. Blacks in Africa captured and sold slaves and were active in the slave market. Africa had a system of slavery long before white men came to their shores, and had regularly enslaved war captives and criminals. Other persons sold themselves or their families in exchange for food during famine, or were kidnaped by native gangs. Many native [black] kings ran profitable slave businesses, and responded eagerly to opportunities for greater profits. The slave trade became a recognized and entirely legal form of business in Africa. Whites and Blacks **both** cooperated in this nefarious business of selling humans. It was the Africans who enslaved their fellow Africans, selling some of these slaves to Europeans or to Arabs and keeping others for themselves. Even at the peak of the Atlantic slave trade, Africans retained more slaves for themselves than they sent to the Western Hemisphere.

⇒ Here is another fact that is unknown by most Americans: The US Census of 1830 reveals there were 3,775 free blacks who owned 12,740 black slaves. In other words, prior to the Civil War there were thousands of blacks who owned slaves; indeed they owned over 12,000 slaves. So even here in America both whites and blacks were slave owners.

²God is not in the business of saving the Titanic, that is, saving this world system which He has already condemned. God is in the business of reaching individuals with lifeboats, that is rescuing individuals who will turn to Him and believe on Christ. The Titanic is doomed, yet there is hope for individuals to be rescued.

⇒ In America there were two trees which sprouted up and bore fruit. One was the tree of slavery and the other was the tree of freedom. In Virginia, before the Pilgrims ever landed, a group of traders and merchants founded the colony of Jamestown (1607). Their motivation was to earn profits by trading and selling goods. For the most part, they were not guided by Biblical principles. They did not live peaceably with the native tribes. Slavery was practiced by this colony and was protected by their laws. In 1619 an English ship brought about 20 slaves to Jamestown and these slaves were traded to the colony in exchange for food. This is the event that is highlighted by the 1619 Project (sponsored by the *New York Times*), seeking to redefine American history based on this pivotal event. Those supporting critical race theory, such as those at the *New York Times*, want to point to how evil the history of America has been. So it is interesting that to show the evils of our country, they point to Jamestown.

In 1620 the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts. Their great desire was to have religious freedom, and the Bible was honored. Overall they related well to the native tribes, negotiated a long-lasting peace treaty with them, and desired to reach them with the gospel of Christ. Thus there were two trees: the tree of liberty (Plymouth) and the tree of slavery (Jamestown). The fruit of one tree was greed and lust; the fruit of the other tree was liberty, equal rights and justice for all.⁴

⇒ England outlawed slavery in 1834, mostly due to the efforts of William Wilberforce who was a dedicated believer in Jesus Christ. This was decades before America's Emancipation Proclamation, so we might think that England was way ahead of America in abolishing slavery. But this is only partly true. Half of the American states had passed laws abolishing slavery by 1804, nearly thirty years before William Wilberforce effected the similar results in England. Massachusetts totally abolished slavery by the time the first census was completed in 1790, and Vermont was not far behind.

⇒ Is there slavery in our world today? There are 94 nations in the world today that do not have laws criminalizing slavery. An estimated forty million people are in slavery in the world right now, primarily in Islamic countries. In a tragic note of irony, Africa has the highest slave rate of any continent, closely followed by Asia, while North America has the lowest rate. And may we not forget those women who are taken as sex slaves, those people in Communist lands who are taken into labor camps or "reeducation centers," and those women and others living under strict Sharia law against their will.

⇒ Should we pay reparations for what our ancestors have done? We hear much talk today about the paying of reparations to make up for the sin of slavery. If we could go back and study the lives of all of our ancestors, every one of us would discover that we have wicked and depraved and murderous ancestors. Our ancestors did not swing from a tree by their tails, but they certainly could have hung from a tree by a rope. Isn't it enough for us to worry about our own sins, and not have to be responsible for the sins of all our wicked ancestors? The Jews were slaves in Egypt for 400 years and were forced to make bricks without straw, construct buildings, repair roads—backbreaking

⁴Obviously these observations about Jamestown and Plymouth are generalizations. They are statements that are generally true but not always true. There were probably some fine God-fearing people in Jamestown and there were probably some settlers in Plymouth who failed to live righteously with respect to their Native American neighbors.

labor. Should the modern nation of Egypt be forced to pay reparations to the nation Israel and to Jews all over the world in order to repay them for the harm done during those 400 years of slavery? Do you think the Arabs would support such an idea?⁵

Reparations for the ills of slavery have already been paid, in a very real sense. Such payments were made in the Civil War as nearly 400,000 Union soldiers were either killed in battle (110,100) or wounded in action (275,174). Over one hundred thousand white Union soldiers died in order to free slaves. They paid a great price. Did the families of these dead soldiers ever ask for reparations? No, in fact, many of these soldiers never had families, never were married and never had children because they were slain on battlefields in the prime of their youth. May we never forget that there were many thousands of white people who paid the ultimate price to free slaves.

⇒ There was once an Englishman who was deeply involved in the slave trade and captained ships which carried slaves. One night while on a ship in a violent storm, he feared for his life and remembered his mother's words about God's grace towards sinners. He turned to Christ in faith, and later wicked slave trader wrote these words sung by millions: "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see" (John Newton)."

⇒ As believers in Christ, we should understand slavery better than any other people. We who are believers know what it is like to be sold in the slave market and purchased with a price. This is what redemption is all about. We who were slaves to sin have been redeemed, not with silver or gold, but by the precious blood of Christ, so that we now have a new slave owner. We were bought by blood; bound by love. We know what it's like to be another Person's property. "We are not our own, we are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). We know what it is like to be servants of another Person 24 hours a day. We know what it is like to be **free**—free not to do whatever we want, but free to serve our Master, free to do what He wants us to do. As believers, we know what it is like to be slaves, love slaves of Jesus Christ. "There is joy in serving Jesus." "O **Master** Let me walk with thee! In lowly paths of service free." "I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy throne, My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ for Thee alone." The greatest privilege we have is to be slaves of Jesus Christ.

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⁵Actually God Himself repaid the Israelites as they left Egypt with great riches (Exodus 12:36).