



Biblical Teachings on Slavery

Goals for This Study

- To become acquainted with the range of ways slavery is referred to in scripture.
- To understand slavery as it existed in biblical times.
- To explore the meaning of slavery in light of scriptural calls for justice.
- To broaden perspectives by exploring how different communities have appropriated biblical teachings.
- To help you discern what God calls you to do.

Introduction

The Bible has long been used both to justify and to condemn slavery.

American slaveholders in the 19th century felt vindicated by Old Testament passages regulating slavery and New Testament passages urging slaves to serve their masters faithfully.

At the same time, American slaves drew strength from the Exodus story of the liberation of God's people. Abolitionists founded their cause on the biblical calls for justice and the simple dictum to "do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31).

Looking up all the references to slavery in a concordance is one way to study biblical teachings on slavery. But looking only at passages that specifically mention slaves or slavery is not sufficient for a full understanding of the responsibilities human beings have to one another in the eyes of God.

This Bible study will help you think about slavery in the context of the broad prophetic calls for justice and liberation issued by the Hebrew prophets and by Jesus Christ.

Suggestions for Group Study

This Bible study can be used by individuals or groups. In a group setting, it might be part of a four- or six-week study. A multi-week class might be planned as follows:

Week 1: What is modern-day slavery? This topic may be divided into two or more sessions, using the handout "Modern-Day Slavery" as an introduction, showing some of the films listed in the Resources handout, and assigning or summarizing chapters from books such as Kevin Bales' *Ending Slavery* and David Batstone's *Not for Sale*.

Week 2: Biblical teachings on slavery. This topic may be divided into two or more sessions using the sections outlined below.

Week 3: Church of the Brethren history and current action on slavery. Use the handout, "Church of the Brethren Statements on Slavery."

Week 4: Use the handout "Suggestions for Action on Modern-Day Slavery" to develop your own action plan.

The Church of the Brethren Study and Action Guide on Modern-Day Slavery

is posted at www.brethren.org/slavery and includes pieces on:

- Modern-Day Slavery
- Biblical Teachings on Slavery
- Church of the Brethren Statements on Slavery
- Resources for a Worship Focus on Slavery
- Suggestions for Action on Modern-Day Slavery
- Resources on Modern-Day Slavery
- Bulletin Insert

Bible Study

I. A Regulated Institution

Read: Exodus 21:7-27

Leviticus 25:39-46

Deuteronomy 21:10-14,
23:15-16, and 24:7

Ephesians 6:1-9

Colossians 4:1

- What are the characteristics of slavery in Old Testament times?
- What regulations are there concerning treatment and liberation of slaves?
- How does biblical slavery compare to the system of chattel slavery that existed in the American colonies and early republic?
- What types of relationships are described in Ephesians and Colossians as parallel?
- How does this affect our understanding of the responsibilities of human beings for each other?

II. Liberation

Read: Exodus chapters 3 and 11,
12:29-51, 13:17-22, and
chapter 14

Daniel 3

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Isaiah 61

Luke 4:14-30

Philemon 8-18

- Why does the Exodus have such meaning for African Americans?
- The passages in Daniel and Ezekiel were written for a people in exile. How are we also a people in

exile, and how does God call us to life in the midst of that exile?

- How does Isaiah describe the nature of God's desires for humanity?
- Why did Jesus' declaration of a ministry of liberation anger his hearers in Nazareth?
- Was Paul a liberator?
- What does it mean that Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, but also asked that Philemon welcome Onesimus as a brother?

III. The Law and the Spirit

Read: 1 Corinthians 7:21-23 and
12:12-26

Galatians 3:19-29

Colossians 3

- What is the relationship between the law and the spirit?
- What are the obligations involved in being baptized into Christ?
- What does it mean that in Christ there is no longer "slave or free" or "male and female"?
- How should spiritual equality affect relationships in the world in which we live?

IV. Justice

Read: Deuteronomy 16:18-20

Isaiah 1:10-20

Jeremiah 21:12 and 22:13

Matthew 7:12 and 23:23-24

Luke 6:31 and 11:42

- How are we to understand the biblical call for justice in the midst

of the legal codifications in Deuteronomy?

- What, says Isaiah, is truly important to God?
- Jeremiah warns of God's punishment of oppressors; what is our responsibility within unjust situations?
- How are we like the Pharisees in our concern for externals and our neglect of essentials?
- How does the Golden Rule inform our daily living and our actions for justice worldwide?