

# **RAPE AND SLAVERY IN THE BIBLE**



## **DOES GOD APPROVE OF RAPE AND SLAVERY?**

By George Lujack

Some scoffers mock the God of the Holy Scriptures, declaring that He approves of rape and slavery by citing verses that address these criminal sins. This article will explain the verses in question that may seem to some to suggest that God condones and approves of rape and slavery.

RAPE?

### **DEUTERONOMY 22:23-24:**

**If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor's wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you.**

Deuteronomy 22:23-24 concerns the sin of adultery, which for Hebrews living in Israel 'under the law' was a death penalty offense. If a betrothed virgin, who was the betrothed wife of a man, but had not yet consecrated her marriage through sexual intercourse with him, does carnally lie with another man, her betrothed husband could have her stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:13-21), or write her a certificate of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). This was the option that Joseph had when he discovered Mary pregnant and he believed Mary had committed adultery. Joseph, being a just man, had decided to put Mary away (divorce) secretly and not stone her (Matthew 1:18-19).

### **DEUTERONOMY 22:28-29:**

**If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days.**

Deuteronomy 22:28-29 does not describe rape; it describes fornication (premarital sex). A man "seizes" his girlfriend, and lies with her carnally, and they both do so secretly, attempting to not be "found out." If these verses described rape, the woman would most certainly cry out, and report the man who forcibly raped her. What God's law does in this case is to try to make lemonade out of a couple of lemons, to make the best of a sinful deed and correct it. The man and woman committed the sin of fornication (premarital sex) and the virgin woman lost her virginity. A virgin woman was to keep and protect her virginity until her wedding, but when a young woman engages in fornication (premarital sex) this cannot be done. The law stated that if a virgin woman was "found out" to have lost her virginity to her boyfriend through voluntarily fornication (premarital sex), she must marry him. The law commanded the man, who took the woman's virginity, to pay a sum of shekels (in humility) to the young woman's father and marry her.

### **EXODUS 21:2-6:**

**If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.**

God's law concerning indentured servitude dealt with the harsh reality of the economics of the times. People were willing to sell themselves into servitude. A Hebrew male who sold his services would agree to a contract of six years and be freed on the seventh, in reflection of the Sabbath week of working six days and resting on the seventh. If the man gave his daughter to be the wife for his Hebrew slave, then the man could retain his daughter, or free her to go with her Hebrew servant husband. If the man refused to let his daughter go, then the Hebrew slave could volunteer to stay on as a servant. It was not uncommon for a good young male servant, if he loved his master, to voluntarily serve a wealthy older master until the master died, take the master's daughter as his wife, and the master's household as an inheritance. Volunteer Hebrew servants were also free to negotiate the contract terms of their servitude in variation of the Exodus 21:2-6 guidelines. Jacob agreed to be a servant to Laban for seven years for Laban's daughter Rachel, so he could marry her, and he wound up serving Laban for fourteen years after Laban deceived him into marrying his older daughter Leah. So, Jacob wound up serving his master Laban for fourteen years and received from him two wives for his service (Genesis 29:18-27).

SEX SLAVES?

**EXODUS 21:7-11:**

**If a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her. And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money.**

It is very easy for people of modern times to mock the customs and ways of the times of thousands of years ago. Some have suggested that God condoned sex slavery, but this is not the case at all. The Exodus 21:7-11 verses deal with arranged marriages and / or indentured servitude. Very often a father would try to find a good husband for his daughter(s), or a good household for them to live under if he was poor. The payment to the father was a dowry for his daughter. Women didn't have the options back then of going to college, starting a career, or relying on a social welfare state for their sustainability. Young women typically lived under the care and protection of their father or of the man of the household who they were sold to. A concubine was typically a female household servant, not a sex slave. Concubines could eventually marry the man who purchased her, or his son, and then they would become the married wife of the father or son.

SLAVERY? THE RIGHT TO BEAT SERVANTS THROUGH CORPORAL PUNISHMENT?

**EXODUS 21:20-21 (TLV):**

**If a male strikes his male or female servant with a staff, who dies by his hand, he must surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if the servant gets up in a day or two he will not be punished, for he is his property.**

At first glance, Exodus 21:20-21 seems to permit a master the right to strike his male or female servant and to not be held liable, unless he kills his male or female servant. The verses must be read in the context of all the verses of Exodus 21 specifically verses 12 through 26. Many people have a preconceived notion of slavery, and use the Exodus 21:20-21 verses to show that God approved not only of slavery, but beating slaves. Exodus 21:12-26 must be read in totality. These verses deal with when men quarrel. So, if it should come to pass that a servant was quarreling with his master, and this quarrel led to a physical fight, then the master would be held responsible by judges if the servant was severely injured or died (Exodus 21:18-19,23-25). Likewise, if the servant struck his master so that the master died, the servant would surely be held liable for his master's death (Exodus 21:12). God's law protected indentured servants, as Exodus 21:26 shows. A master could not abuse his servant, and if he did the servant was to go free.

**EXODUS 21:26:**

**If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth.**

FORCEABLE SLAVERY?

**LEVITICUS 25:39-46:**

**And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. And then he shall depart from you - he and his children with him - and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers. For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God. And as for your male and female slaves whom you may have - from the nations that are around you, from them you may buy male and female slaves. Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers who dwell among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them as a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves. But regarding your brethren, the children of Israel, you shall not rule over one another with rigor.**

They declare that brethren (fellow Hebrews) could become hired servants for a period of time, but not slaves, and then go free. Non-Hebrews from the surrounding nations and strangers could be purchased as slaves, become permanent slaves, property, and passed down as an inheritance. These passages do not say that slaves were herded like cattle in chains to the Israeli marketplace and sold against their will. The non-Hebrews were voluntary slaves who agreed to be servants to their Hebrew masters for food, shelter, and security. These verses need to be understood in the context and time in which they were written. God had made a covenant with Israel to be their God and they would serve Him as His chosen people. The servitude of non-chosen people to the chosen people was the way things were, and still are, to this day. Non-Hebrew servants often served the Hebrew chosen people, as the middle class and poor of today serve the rich.

**DEUTERONOMY 23:15-16:**

**You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him.**

Harsh treatment of slaves was not permissible. If a foreign slave wished to ultimately leave his master to be free, a slave owner was not permitted to oppress him, prevent him from departing, and was not allowed to retrieve his slave if his slave had departed.

**EXODUS 21:16:**

**He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death.**

It is clear that forced bondage slavery was not permitted under God's laws. God never allowed for the capture, kidnapping, or stealing of a man's life, to forcibly hold a man against his will, to be sold or retained as a slave.

JOSEPH'S STORY

**GENESIS 37:23-28:**

**So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the tunic of many colors that was on him. Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat a meal.**

**Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. So Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.” And his brothers listened. Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.**

Joseph’s brothers did an evil thing in capturing their brother Joseph and selling him to Ishmaelite traders. Joseph’s brothers lived on in shame, not being able to comfort their grieving father Jacob, who mourned the loss of Joseph in believing he was dead, as this was the story Joseph’s brothers told their father (Genesis 37:31-35). Joseph went on to be a good and valued slave in Egypt, was falsely accused of attempted rape, and imprisoned (Genesis 39). Then it came to pass that Joseph was summoned before the Pharaoh of Egypt and was able to rightly decipher the disturbing dreams Pharaoh was having and was able to warn him concerning a coming famine. Joseph was appointed governor of Egypt and he prospered in all that he did (Genesis 41). As fate and the plans of God would have it, Joseph’s family would reunite with Joseph, as the famine of the region caused Joseph’s brothers to seek food in Egypt, where Joseph had become governor (Genesis 42:1-6). It may seem to many that the reunion of Joseph with his father and brothers, and his forgiveness to his brothers for what they did to him, was a happy end to the story. That is not quite so. Joseph died, and Joseph’s brothers’ descendants were afflicted by rigorous slavery in the land of Egypt.

**EXODUS 1:8-14:**

**Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage - in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor.**

It was not by mere coincidence that God’s chosen people, the Hebrews, fell into harsh slavery. Joseph’s brothers’ descendants were punished in slavery for what Joseph’s brothers had done to Joseph, which was selling Joseph into forced slavery.

**GENESIS 15:13:**

**Then YHWH (the Lord) said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.”**

**EXODUS 12:40:**

**Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.**

**EXODUS 20:5; DEUTERONOMY 5:9:**

**For I, YHWH (the Lord) your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.**

God does not approve of rape or slavery and His laws were written to protect women and impoverished indentured servants in less opportunistic civil and economic times. Scripture contains laws that deal with fornication and indentured servitude, which are sometimes twisted to be confused with rape and slavery by ill-informed ridiculers of God and Scripture.