

## Does the Bible Condone Slavery?

(September 4, 2020)

In Exodus chapter 21, ladies and gentlemen, this is right after God gives Moses the 10 commandments in Exodus 20...Exodus 21:2 says this, reading from the New American Standard Bible, considered one of the more accurate translations word for word. It says this, "If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment". That's what verse two says. Verse seven says, "If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do".

Ladies and gentlemen, this is in the Old Testament. Slavery. Is slavery condoned and supported by the Old Testament? That's going to be our topic today. And let me just give you a little bit of context. The reason we're bringing this topic up today is we put a Q&A from the University of Nebraska that we did earlier this year. We put it up on our YouTube channel. We put up a couple of Q&A's from the college campus on our YouTube channel every week. So, if you haven't subscribed to our YouTube channel, CrossExamined, go do that. Because as I say, you're going to get a new video every few days. There's over 800 of these short Q&A videos on our YouTube channel.

And so, we put this video up. I answered a question about slavery, and I won't tell you my answer right now, because we're going to unpack it as the show goes along. But it was a three or four minute answer. And most people like the answer, but there were several skeptics on there who said, well, you didn't address the verses that I just mentioned. You didn't address about a Hebrew slave, or about a female slave, selling your daughter. What kind of God would say that you can sell your daughter into slavery? Is this really what the Old Testament teaches?

Well, there is no better person on the planet to discuss this issue than my friend Dr. Paul Copan, who wrote a seminal book in 2009 called, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense Of The Old Testament God*. Now for those who have listened to this show for many years, you know we've had Paul on several times. In fact, we've covered the slavery issue before. If you get the CrossExamined app, two words in the App Store, Cross Examined, go back and listen to the

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May 11, 2013 show where we spent a lot of time on this issue of slavery. We're going to review some of that, but we're going to drill down on these issues I just brought up here in a little bit more detail.

Dr. Copan teaches at Palm Beach Atlantic University. A great place to go. They have a new Philosophy of Religion program down there. They also teach apologetics. Paul has written several other books. And in fact, there's going to be a new version of, *Is God a Moral Monster*, coming out in a couple of years. It's always great to have Paul on. Paul, how are you today?

**Paul:**

Doing well. Thank you so much. I appreciate any opportunity to be with you, Frank. And thanks for helping me walk through some of these tough issues that some of your audience is raising. So, great grateful for that.

**Frank:**

Well, you actually helped me walk through them because much of my answer is taken directly from your book, *Is God a Moral Monster*. So, let's just start from 30,000 feet if we can, Paul. When we hear the word slave, here in America, we immediately think of slavery in America prior to the Civil War, but that's not Old Testament slavery. In fact, it wasn't actually slavery at all. What was the kind of slavery the Old Testament talks about? How did that compare to slavery in America 150 years ago?

**Paul:**

Yeah. That is a common confusion and the servitude of the Old Testament is more like indentured servitude, where you are contracted to serve, again, no more than six years, unless you want to extend it beyond that voluntarily. But you are in debt. That's what puts people into servitude. And so, people will contract themselves out, or if you want to put it, you know, the language of the Bible talks about selling oneself or parceling out one's family. You're selling your daughter to family members, you know, uncles, and so forth, who live in the same tribal territory, so that they can have a roof over their heads, that they can have food, they can have a job, and so forth. And then once they're done with that obligation, you know, then the contract is done, and their debt is free.

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So, it's not as though this is just like the antebellum south, where the master has, basically, the rights over body and soul of the slave. This is far different. In fact, in the Old Testament...if an employer, the term servant could also be it translated worker. If the employer strikes his servant so that he dies, then the term *nacom* [Hebrew word] is used for capital punishment even. So, this is a capital offense, as the maximum penalty in Israel. So again, it's not as though this is his property. Not at all. In ancient Israel, if you struck your servant so that he dies, you could be capitally punished. So again, a vast difference here.

And the term slavery is just an unfortunate translation. Because the word slave, *avad* [Hebrew word], is actually related to the verb to work. And it's a very neutral term. It just has to do with a dynamic dependency relationship. You're dependent upon someone else. And so, there is that contractual element, that legal element, as well, that sometimes uses that transactional language of "buying, selling", kind of like we do with our sports teams. You know, this person was sold to such and such a team, or this team has an owner. So again, a vast gap between ancient Israel and modern day slavery.

**Frank:**

In fact, Paul, I just noticed this morning that the NIV translates the word slave as servant. In other words, it says in the same verse I started the show-off with. In the NASB it said, if you buy a Hebrew slave...the NIV puts it, and I think the King James, as well does...if you buy a Hebrew servant. Why are the translators coming up with different English words, do you think, for these two Hebrew words?

**Paul:**

It's a very unfortunate thing because, when you look at the King James Version, in the Old Testament, there is only one use of the term slave. And again, that's actually not even in the Hebrew text. It's found in Jeremiah. But you think of all that's happened since 1611, when the King James Version came out. You think of modern day slavery, colonialism, you think of the Civil War, you think of the Jim Crow laws, you think of the civil rights movement, and so forth, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act, etc. All of that happens and then you get to maybe, say the New International Version of the Bible came out in 1984 and the term slave is now used 104 times, slavery 17 times. Given all of that history of slavery it's just stunning that this very loaded, emotive term will just be used without qualification.

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So, a lot of modern day translations just resort to that term slavery, but they don't think about the ramifications of that. And it's interesting, like I said, the term slave, or servant, *avad*, is related to the cognate work. And again, you'll see Moses and Joshua are called the servant of the Lord. It's an honorific title. It's not something that's seen as demeaning or degrading. So, like I said, it's neutral. It just depends upon the context. In the book of Exodus, we see that the Israelites are slaves, same word there, of Pharaoh in Egypt. But God tells Pharaoh, let my people go that they may serve me. That same word that's used in the wilderness. So, they're moving from the bondage in Egypt, one dependency, to another state of dependency, namely upon God. But that is seen as liberation or freedom. So, again, it's a neutral term, and that needs to be understood. It's denoting a dependency relationship. It's not referring to something degrading or, you know, owning a person, or oppressing a person. That's not bound up with that term.

**Frank:**

We're talking to Dr. Paul Copan. His book is, *Is God a Moral Monster*. And we're unpacking the true meaning of Old Testament slavery today and responding to some of the skeptics who think that the Bible is teaching the kind of slavery we had in America here 150 years ago. That's simply not the case. And we're going to talk more about it right after the break. You're listening to, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, with Frank Turek. Back in two minutes.

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**Frank:**

Slavery in the Bible. What really was slavery in the Old Testament? That's what we're talking about today. And could you sell your daughter as property to somebody else? Is that really what the Bible teaches? You're listening, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, with Frank Turek on the American Family Radio Network. Our website is [crossexamined.org](http://crossexamined.org).

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My guest today is Dr. Paul Copan who wrote the seminal book, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense Of The Old Testament God*. Whenever I go on a college campus and I get a question about slavery, or the Canaanites, or some of these moral questions from the Old Testament, I always refer people to Paul's book because it covers all these issues in great detail and great nuance. And you can't do that in a two or three minute answer. It really kind of amuses me when I see skeptics on our YouTube feed trying to say, well, you didn't address this, and you didn't address that. Of course, I did. And I had three minutes to kind of give an overview of an answer. You can't cover every nuance. You need a book for that. And that's what Dr. Copan has done.

So, Paul, we've already established that the Old Testament kind of slavery wasn't the kind of slavery that we would think about here in America. It was indentured servitude; was more like an employer-employee relationship. And it actually benefited both parties. How did it benefit both parties, Paul?

**Paul:**

Well, of course the person who is indebted, the person who is economically strapped; this person has a roof over his head, the person has clothing on his back, the person has food on the table, the person has work to do. And during that contracted period of time, that person is also part of the family. John Goldingay, a noted Old Testament scholar says that, a servant in Israel, an Israelite servant, was basically part of the family. So, it wasn't as though that person was somehow sitting outside and removed from family life. No, this person was basically bound up within the family. And that person is also a relative. You're living in tribal lands. You're living near your relatives.

So, it's not as though you're going to some complete stranger across the across the country. You're dealing with people who are closest to you, who are nearby, people you're related to and so forth. So, that is so that benefits the person who is the servant, or the worker, but it also obviously benefits those who are who are caring for and hosting that person. So again, they're the providers, but they're also getting work done for them to pay off the debt that is owed. So, there are services rendered. And so. it's a win-win situation.

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**Frank:**

Now, Paul, I think I've heard you say, or write, the fact that the Old Testament law tried to abolish even the need for this kind of [unintelligible] by providing for the poor in certain ways. What would be some of those laws where God said provide for the poor in these ways?

**Paul:**

Right? Yeah, well, we see this most pronouncedly in Deuteronomy 15, where when the servant's contract is done, you're to load him up with provisions. That your heart should not be closed to that servant that you have been hosting, but you're to give him plenty of provisions and set him on his way. You also have, not just this abundant provision before departure, but you also have certain gleaning laws that you can actually go to people's fields like Ruth does in Boaz' field in the book of Ruth. It kind of exemplifies how the poor were to be cared for, even the outsiders, the Gentiles...Ruth was from Moab...how they were to be cared for within Israel. You see a picture of compassion, you see a picture of grace, you see a picture of provision.

And so, you are not allowed to cut the edges of your field, but you are to allow those edges of your field to be harvested by the poor of the land. That's called gleaning. Or you shouldn't take all of the fruit off of your fruit trees, or your olive trees, but you should allow the people of the land who are poor to come and to pick the food on your property. That was just a basic provision for those who had little means to sustain themselves. So again, if you go into servitude it's because you're poor. And so, Israel is providing, God is providing these kinds of gleaning laws that are available for people.

Again, this is something unique in the ancient Near East. And you see that this kind of provision, of course, we can add other things to that. Of course, kidnapping was prohibited, and it was a general prohibition in the ancient Near East. But in Israel, let's emphasize that if you kidnap someone, which is the basis of modern day slavery, then you could be executed. You could be put to death. Also, if a slave ran away from a foreign land, the law of Moses says you are to allow that person to settle in any of your cities. Unlike the Israelite who is basically bound to be within his own tribal land, here the runaway slave from another land, probably under harsh circumstances, was allowed to find refuge in Israel. So, a lot of people think oh, foreigners, they were not well received. No foreign slaves were not to be treated harshly. They are to find refuge in the land of Israel.

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Again, this is a unique feature in the ancient Near East. Other countries, like the Hittites lands, the code of Hammurabi of Babylon, they had extradition treaties to send back runaway slaves, kind of like the fugitive slave law in the antebellum south, that you had to return that person, that runaway slave to the master from whom he had run. So again, a very different picture here. There's a great humanitarian concern when it comes to the servitude in the land of Israel in contrast to the ancient Near East.

**Frank:**

Paul, I'm I want to emphasize the point you made because I'm not sure that people have put two and two together. This is one of the things I said on the video at the University of Nebraska, that if we lived by the Old Testament kidnapping law in early America, slave traders would have been executed. And people don't seem to realize that but that's exactly what the Old Testament said, and in the New Testament, Paul condemns it, as well. So, for all the people who tried to say, well, people use the Bible to try and affirm slavery, and many of them did illegitimately, if they were trying to use either the old or the New Testament, then they would have run into these verses which say that kidnapping is prohibited. And yet, as you just mentioned, slavery in America was predicated on kidnapping.

**Paul:**

Exactly. And the same chapter in Exodus 21 indicates that if you knock out your servant's eye or tooth, then that servant gets to go free. So, this kind of permanent injury, this meant that the servant was released, debt free, because of the injury that the employer had caused him. So again, this too is another contrast between the biblical law and the antebellum south.

**Frank:**

The other point that you made, Paul, with regard to that is, sometimes the skeptics will read the passage that says, well if a master...using the loaded term again...if a master beats up his servant, or a slave, and he dies, okay, he's gonna pay for that. But if he lives a couple of days, there shall be no punishment. Why is there a distinction there?

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**Paul:**

Okay. And this is again taken from Exodus 21, verses 20 and 21. Let me re-emphasize what we've talked about; how the person will be punished, the person who strikes his servant and kills him. The term that is used is for the death penalty used throughout the the Mosaic Law. So, we see clearly that the servant, the worker, was not just a piece of property. This person was someone who had rights. This person was fundamentally an equal even though there was a contractual arrangement in which he was dependent upon his employer. So, we need to understand that first. So, a lot of people just kind of gloss over that. Oh, he's going to be punished. Yeah, maybe a slap on the wrist. No. This is execution. So, that needs to be understood. So, we see the servant has full status as a person within Israel, so keep that in mind.

So, when it goes on to say that, if he survives a day or two, no vengeance will be taken. There's that theme of that kind of judgment, that capital punishment connection. And then some translations have, for he is his property. The term is literally silver. Now this could be understood in a couple of ways. But let me first clear away some sort of an idea that the critic will say...again, this is just highly uncharitable, it's unnecessarily critical...oh, you can beat your servant to with an inch of his life and because he didn't die then the employer is in the clear.

You're missing the spirit of this. For one thing, even if you if you gouge out an eye or knock out a tooth, the servant gets to go free without any debt. So, if you're leaving a permanent injury here, even though the servant survives, you're bringing harm to your servant. And again, we read in exodus 25 that an Israelite was not to treat a fellow Israelite harshly. That this is, again, in the context of servitude, in the context of people who are in debt to you. You're not to treat them harshly. So, we see this pervasive theme throughout the Old Testament law, that there's a humanitarian concern.

Now, people can do bad things to another person, and so, striking a person was not a good thing, but it's sort of like saying, if someone steals, if someone murders someone, this is what you're to do. And the same thing here. If this person is struck, but he doesn't die, it's understood that it was not a malicious intent, but rather it was something that was accidental that wasn't malice aforethought. So, that is also another component here.

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Thirdly, the point that we should stress here is that this is in the context of accidental injury. We see just prior to this, verse 18, if men have a quarrel and one strikes another etc., that there is a medical fee that is to be paid. And verses 20 and 21 actually pick up on that theme of that medical fee. The terms, when it says that, he is his silver, in verse 21, that "he" could also be translated "it", that that medical fee. And Harry Hoffner, of the University of Chicago, Hittitologist, made a very strong case for this, that this medical fee indicates that he's getting out of his own silver to pay for the medical treatment. And so, when this injured servant, when the judge looks at this case, and he sees, oh, this person paid the medical fee for his servant, then there is a greater context to make a judgement. Oh, this person did this accidentally and is looking out for his own servant, therefore, I need to take that into consideration.

**Frank:**

Excellent, and it wouldn't make any sense for him to kill a servant if the servant owes him money. Right?

**Paul:**

Exactly. Yeah, he's hurting his own pocketbook, as it were.

**Frank:**

Yeah. He has no way to recover the debt. That's why the guy is a servant to him because he's in debt. We'll talk much more with Dr. Copan. right after this. I'm Frank Turek. You're listening to, I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. Back in two minutes.

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**Frank:**

If you're low on the FM dial looking for National Public Radio go no further. We're actually going to tell you the truth here. I can guarantee you you're not going to hear this at NPR. You're listening to, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, with Frank Turek. My guest is Dr. Paul Copan, author of the book, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense Of The Old Testament God*. We're talking today about Old Testament slavery. And I do want to make a couple of points before I go back to Paul. Number one, when atheists condemned the Old Testament for slavery, or anything else, I always want to ask them by what moral standard are you judging these apparent immoralities in the Old Testament. Where are you getting your moral standard from? Because if there is no God, there is no objective moral standard by which you can criticize anything in the Bible or outside the Bible. So that's number one.

But secondly, I think that the atheists they don't really study the text. What they do is they mock the text rather than seeking to understand. And Paul, many skeptics, and unfortunately, I think some Christians today, think the Bible is a rule book and it's supposed to be straightforward and understood without any background information, without any new nuance. But you know better than I do that that's not the Bible. It is a complicated and multifaceted series of documents written over 1400 years by 40 different authors in numerous genres. It addresses many different times periods and changing situations. So listener, if you're not ready to study the details, discover the context, and make distinctions, you're not ready to comment on the Bible.

So Paul, I've got a couple of quick questions. Well, maybe they'll be longer questions by the time you're done answering because there's a little bit of nuance here. The first question is, when we read the Old Testament, why is it important for us to interpret it as an Old Testament Israelite would rather than an American? And secondly, what is the purpose of the Old Testament law? Is it the ideal for all time? So, let's deal with the first question first. When we read the Old Testament, why is it important for us to interpret it as an Old Testament Israelite would?

**Paul:**

Well, that's a critical question because our modern individualistic Western mindset is a far cry from an ancient Near Eastern one, where things like polygamy, warfare, even certain purity

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codes, that were involving semen and blood, that these were all part of a purity, ritual culture that we just don't understand today. We also, you know, when we look at the ancient Near East, we need to understand that there was a certain mindset that is just far different from our own, in general. Some people say, oh, that's that's so barbaric, or that's so primitive, and so forth. Of course, that can be a very subjective judgment. But on the other hand, we need to understand that many things in the ancient Near Eastern world were not ideal. And so, what ends up happening, this kind of leads into the second question, is that God is addressing the people where they are. He is working with them within their own context, rather than giving them the kind of ideal, perfect law.

We read in Jesus comments on this, in fact, in Matthew 19:8 where he says that Moses permitted certain things because of the hardness of human hearts. It wasn't because these were ideals for all time, as you've said. But what we see is that God steps into the situation and tries to, in some cases, regulate how things are done. In other cases, improve them. And what he's doing is moving his people in a redemptive direction, to bring them back to the ideals of Genesis chapter one where there's a full equality, where man and woman are equal, where servant and master are understood to be equal, that there is no essential difference between them. And then chapter two where we get to, you know, one man, one woman is one flesh for one lifetime. This is the ideal. It's not polygamy and so forth. So, God is pointing his people in those redemptive directions.

So, we need to understand there's a difference between the biblical vision, the Old Testament vision, of this fundamental equality of monogamy, etc., of this non-hierarchical structure. There's a difference between that and sometimes the particular laws that are allowed to stand, or to regulate, within ancient Israel. It's not as though those are necessarily expressing the ideal that God has, but those are temporary, but yet pointing people in the right direction.

One person has used this example of the law of Israel being kind of like a booster rocket. It has a purpose in aeronautics, it has the purpose of getting the spaceship out of the atmosphere. And then what happens? The booster rocket drops off. It's let go. Is it because it just serves no purpose? No, it did serve a very important purpose. But again, once that time came for the booster rocket to be dropped off because the ship is out of the atmosphere. Again, we see that now a new phase takes over and that the booster rocket is no longer necessary. And so, in the

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same way, we can talk about the law of Moses being kind of like that booster rocket to move the people in a redemptive direction. But again, it's not the permanent law for all time, that when Jesus comes, we see that the law is, as a covenant, kind of, block of obligations for the people of God, is no longer binding upon them.

**Frank:**

In fact, the writer of Hebrews, Hebrews 8:13 says, the Old Covenant is obsolete. And I don't know Paul, even Christians don't seem to get this. We tend to mix our covenants and take stuff from the Old Testament law and try and apply them today. And they were never meant to be applied today. Now there are many moral principles in the Old Testament that are repeated in the New Testament. Many of the 10 commandments obviously are and they're still binding. But the Old Testament law, per se, is obsolete. As you put it, I think it was N.T. Wright's example about the booster rocket, that it has its purpose, but after it gets the rocket into space, it's then obsolete. It doesn't do anything anymore. And too many people, I think, just think the Bible is a rulebook and we read it with our eyes today, without any understanding of the culture into which it was written. And we try and apply it today and that's why so many of these rules, and laws, and civil laws, and ceremonial laws, seem so strange to us. And that's what you unpack so brilliantly in the book, *Is God a Moral Monster*. Folks, if you haven't read that book yet. You need to get it by Dr. Paul Copan, my guest today.

Paul, I do want to go back, if we can, to the verse I started the program with. 2 "If you buy a Hebrew slave"...really should be translated Hebrew servant..."he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment." There's a parallel to Egypt and Israel and slavery here, isn't there?

**Paul:**

Yes, there is. In fact, that term "buy" a lot of people think, oh this is property. Actually, the same term, [Hebrew word], is used in Exodus 15, where in the song of Moses, where we read that the people of Israel have been delivered out of Egypt. And it says, until the people pass over whom you [God] have purchased. So, that same term, purchase, or buy, is being used, and it has that sense of legal right, that legal transaction that has taken place. God by delivering this people, shows that he is their God, that they belong to him, and so forth. But again, it's, you know, this is a people that he has. So, it's not as though they're just property, that they're

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nothing, that they're just chattel. No, this is the people who he loves, who he has redeemed, who he has brought out of Egypt. That same term is used when you acquire a Hebrew servant. So again, I just wanted to set the record straight on that. So, thanks for that opportunity.

**Frank:**

Now, Paul, is there a difference between how the Old Testament law treats, say, a Hebrew servant and a non-Hebrew servant? And are there distinctions there?

**Paul:**

Yes, there are some distinctions. For example, in Leviticus 25, we see that there is one key difference and that the Israelites can own land. I mean, it's on loan to them from God, but they can have property. And only Israelites. It's sort of like the American Express card. You know, membership has its privileges. That this is something that the Israelites had, as God's privileged people, that the land belonged to them as a gift from God. And foreigners could not own land in Israel. So, by coming into Israel, you know, for example, through warfare, if there were war, and they were prisoners of war, that they could come into Israel. If there were refugees who came into Israel, they would typically...like Ruth came into Moab, she was attached to Naomi an Israelite, came from Moab into Israel. But her mother-in-law, Naomi, was from Bethlehem. And so, she was attached to her mother-in-law.

In the same way, the foreigner who came to live in Israel had to attach himself or herself to an Israelite family, because that person could not own land, because that person was a foreigner. So, there is that difference that we've noted. And because that couldn't acquire land, what ended up happening is that these foreigners would, you know again, and their children would continue on in that family. And sometimes the language and Exoduses, you may pass them on, or bequeath them, to the next generation. Well, these people don't have anywhere to go. So, the only way to attach themselves to Israel was through a family, through a home, because they could not acquire land for themselves.

**Frank:**

So, you have the Israelites; they could have land. You have, say the alien, who couldn't. Was there a third category, like a foreigner who did not want to live by the rules of Israelite society, that that person would be treated even differently? And maybe I don't have this right but I

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know there were people in Israel that would be considered, say, prisoners of war, just like we have, say, prisoners of war today. We put them in Gitmo

**Paul:**

Yeah.

**Frank:**

Guantanamo Bay down there in Cuba and we may have that make license plates. So, that would be different than, say, an Israelite indentured servant, or a alien indentured servant, correct?

**Paul:**

Sure. Sure. Yeah. Sometimes, you know, the term foreigner, the [Hebrew word], the sons of foreigners, there was a kind of another category because they did not abide by the laws of Israel. And many of them came in as doing business. And so, that's why you could charge this foreigner a different term. You could charge interest to this person on a business loan. But those who were Israelites, those who are living in the land and living under the law of Moses, which again, could pertain to the alien, as well as the Israelites, they were to have the same law that you couldn't charge interest to those who were impoverished within your own land.

But again, the foreigner there's almost a sense of suspicion sometimes like the foreign woman, the stranger in the book of Proverbs, who is seducing an Israelite man and so forth. So, you do see that, sort of a picture, that there is yet another element. But in Leviticus 25, there is, you know, we'll come back and talk about this.

**Frank:**

Yeah, hold the thought on Leviticus 25, because there's a lot we need to talk about in that passage, because a lot of skeptics have questions about that, or objections. And we'll get to it. You're listening to, I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, with Frank Turek on the American Family Radio Network. My guest is Dr. Paul Copan, and his book is, *Is God a Moral Monster*. You need to get it. It's an amazing book that goes through much of the Old Testament and clears quite a bit up. We're back in two.

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**Frank:**

It would be strange if an infinite God wasn't strange to us. And just to be honest, when I read some aspects of the Bible I go, this really is strange. How do we interpret this properly? Well, one text that can help you do that is, *Is God a Moral Monster*, by Paul Copan. He's my guest today. We're looking mostly at the issue of slavery today, but how to interpret the Bible is extremely important. And in fact, I'm running a brand new online course, which begins this coming week called, How to Interpret Your Bible. We sold out the first online section. We've added a second section. So, if you want to be a part of that, in the premium version, where we will do six live Q&A sessions via zoom, you need to go to [crossexamined.org](http://crossexamined.org) Click on online courses and you can join me. We're going to have our zoom sessions on Wednesday nights. We have two periods; one at 7:30pm (ET) and one at 9:00pm (ET) for one hour zoom sessions for Q&A. Hope you can join us.

Also, I'll be teaching, Why I Still Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, for high school and college, young people and their parents. That begins on the 17th of September. And Sean McDowell is teaching, How to Reach Gen Z. That begins on the 28th of September, I believe. Just go to Online Christian Courses, or click on [crossexamined.org](http://crossexamined.org) and click on online courses. You'll see it there.

Okay, my guest is Paul Copan, and we're talking about slavery today. And Paul, I want to go back, because we covered this kind of in a glancing blow, as we were discussing other issues. This issue of property. Let's be crystal clear, because the Bible does refer to people as property; the Old Testament does. Like you can sell your daughter as a slave, or your slave or your servant is your property Why does the Bible refer to people as property? Or is it referring to people as property?

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**Paul:**

No. This is simply referring to those who have been legally acquired. And so, legal language, or purchase languages used, just like God purchased his people out of Egypt. And also, we use that language today, of a player who gets traded, a player who is bought, an owner of a team, and so forth. So, we see throughout the vision of the Old Testament that there is no essential difference between a master and a servant, or an employer and a servant. Things are fundamentally equal. And that is part of the biblical vision. And so, that needs to be that needs to be underscored. And we see throughout, you know, at least 30 times in the law of Moses that you are to care for the alien in your midst because you were once aliens in the land of Egypt. That is the heartbeat. And so, we ought to make sure that that repeated line is our go to line rather than one obscure verse that may seem to throw that in jeopardy. To what do we give the benefit of the doubt? Well, the the drumbeat that's been going over and over again, you give that the priority, rather than a verse that you may not actually understand from Leviticus 25.

**Frank:**

Hmm. Also, I want to go to Leviticus 25 here, verse 39, Paul, because it seems to indicate there's a distinction between a slave and a servant. When we are saying, well no, what Old Testament slavery was servanthood, unless we're talking about somebody who would be a POW. And we do that today. We put POWs, we basically make them slaves. I mean, we feed them, we take care of them, but they're forced servitude. The kind of slavery that we read about in the Old Testament is predominantly voluntary servitude. It's like an employer employee relationship, but this particular passage seems to indicate a distinction between those two, servant and slave. Let me read it. It's Leviticus 25:39. It says, "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." So, is there in this passage a distinction between a servant and a slave?

**Paul:**

Well, there is a kind of a bondservant, you know, and you do have certain distinctions within. You could have day laborers, you could have longer term servants, and so forth. So, yes, there are distinctions. But again, the essential point here is that there is no difference in terms of

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actual intrinsic status, so that needs to be highlighted. You know, even when it comes to the passage later on where it says, you're not to treat your fellow Israelite harshly, the tendency is, given the drumbeat of treating the aliens who come from another land, the tendency is to give them greater priority than those who are fellow Israelites in your midst. To perhaps treat them more generously because you were once slaves in the land of Egypt, and to kind of overlook those who are closest to you. And so, there is this.

And of course, keep in mind that the Israelites, they would eventually get their land back. Also, we read later on the chapter that if a person who is a an Israelite, if he is poor, the priority should be given to a fellow Israelite to purchase him out of his debt, to redeem him, to buy him out of his debt, rather than allowing him to go into servitude to an alien who is who is living in the land of Israel. So, there are certain prerogatives that are given to the people of Israel that don't come to the foreigner who is living in their midst.

So, I can't go into a lot of detail here because I think we should address something right at the end of Leviticus 25. Because that's really the primary sticking point. So, maybe we're going to shift there.

**Frank:**

Go ahead, Paul. Go right to it.

**Paul:**

Let me just say something briefly here. It does say in Leviticus 25, verse 45, it talks about gaining acquisition of these sojourners who are living in your midst. You can gain acquisition; uses the language of the becoming your possession, and so forth. Interestingly, that term "gaining acquisition", like I've said, is that term [Hebrew word], that is used where God purchased his own people. So, some people think, oh, that's just property. No, it's just referring to a legal transaction. In fact, in verse 50, an Israelite...you know, it's possible that one of those aliens could actually have an Israelite servant working for him. Does that mean that the Israelite is an object? No, of course not. In fact, it says in verse 50, that the Israelite could be purchased by a fellow Israelite so that he doesn't have to live under an alien who's living in the land of Israel. It says so, then the purchaser, the Israelite, shall calculate the amount that, and so forth, the language of selling, and so forth.

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But here, notice, it is the Israelite who is being purchased. That same word, [Hebrew word], is being used, that is used of foreigners of whom you gain acquisition. So, the terminology is the same. And keep in mind, again, that heartbeat within Israel that you are to treat the alien, or sojourner in your midst, as one of you because you were once aliens in the land of Egypt, Leviticus 19, the same book says you are to love the alien as yourself. So, there is a great humanitarian concern for those who are outsiders who have come into Israel. And so, that is the steady theme that we see throughout the law of Moses. And so, I just wanted to come back to those latter verses, because I think those are important and shouldn't be overlooked.

**Frank:**

It also seems to be, Paul...and we just got a few minutes to unpack this. People are going to have to get the book, *Is God a Moral Monster*. There seems to be some change from, say, Leviticus to Deuteronomy. In Leviticus, it seems to say that if a man marries somebody who is part of his master's family, or marries somebody while he's in indentured servitude, he can leave but his family can't, once his time is up, his seven years is up. But then when you get to Deuteronomy, it appears that the family can leave. Why the change there?

**Paul:**

Well, I think what Deuteronomy, the later book, is doing is making explicit what is implicit in the exodus text. So, it's not as though it prohibits the woman from leaving at a certain time. And I think you can just kind of flip it around. Basically, there's still a contract; the woman is under a six year contract. So, whether it's a woman or a man, whoever goes in first, the contract applies to him or her. But Deuteronomy 15 makes it very clear that it applies to both. But again, I said it's implicit within the Exodus 21 text and so I just encourage people to take a look at the moral monster book in which I unpack that.

**Frank:**

Also, Paul, this is a great insight you gave me by reading, *Is God a Moral Monster*. And that is, when you see an if-then in the Old Testament, that's case law. That's not necessarily advocating the behavior. Take a minute and unpack that for us.

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**Paul:**

Sure. A lot of times you'll see certain instances of just what happened to the ancient Near East. It's not as though God is speaking approvingly of these things, but he's saying, if this is a situation, while this is what you do, then this is what you do. If a man steals someone's property, then this restitution is to be given fourfold. If a person strikes another person, then this is what has to happen. So, it's not saying, oh, this is great. This is ideal. No, it's saying, well, you know, we're living in a sinful world. We're living in a world where things break down. If these sorts of terrible things happen, well, then this is how you are to act. And so, it's giving a guidance for judges to understand how, how judgments are to be made, given some of these scenarios. It's to guide them in wisdom so they can make just judgments. So again, it's a sinful world. Israel had plenty of sin within it. And so, there's just this guidance that is available to the Israelites that in case these terrible things happen, these inferior things happen, then this is how you deal with them. Even though it's not God's ideal.

**Frank:**

Yeah, I remember reading one passage where it says, if a man takes another wife, and you're like, well, why would he take another wife? He's not supposed to do that, you know. It says don't multiply wives, yet he takes another wife. But it goes on to then say, make sure that his current wife gets these benefits. So it's not advocating him taking another wife. It's trying to say that if the guy sins and does this, make sure you take care of the wife he had.

**Paul:**

Whenever you see polygamy in the Old Testament, it's never a great advertising campaign for polygamy. It's always negative. It's always bad. Things always go wrong.

**Frank:**

That's right. Well, Paul, you've cleared up so much, and there's so many more details in the book. Ladies and gentlemen, when you hear an atheist going off, or a skeptic going off on this, you got to say, you just need to study more. You don't know too much; you know, too little. And Paul's book can really help; *Is God a Moral Monster*. Paul, thanks so much.

**Paul:**

Great to be with you, Frank. Thanks for the opportunity.

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**Frank:**

Hey, Paul. Give folks your website in case they want to learn more.

**Paul:**

Yeah, it's just PaulCopan.com and they can look there.

**Frank:**

Make sure you check that out. Great being with you again. Don't forget about the online courses. Go to [crossexamined.org](http://crossexamined.org), click on online courses. Hope to see you in, How to Interpret Your Bible, this week. Great being with you. See you next time. God bless.

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