

## Does the Sabbath promote slavery?

When we say that we believe in God's Law, the Ten Commandments, and/or the Sabbath, we must be prepared to be criticized. We should be both prepared to defend the truth from attack, and also be able to use scripture offensively.

Some have criticized the Sabbath Command for promoting slavery. "But the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; *on it* you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male **slave** or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you," (Exo. 20:10 NASB). The word correctly translated 'slave' here in the New American Standard Bible comes the Hebrew word '*ebed*', (Strong's # 5650), which means 'slave'. It is sometimes simply translated as 'bondage'. It does not mean a hired servant, but rather an indentured servant.

The Sabbath, and the Ten Commandments as a whole, represent the core of God's Law. The Commandments do NOT exist separate from the rest of God's Law. We can learn many things just from examining the Ten Commandments alone – for example, the right to own private property and marriage is to be only between male and female. The Commandments also give us a glimpse into God's penal system. When someone committed a capital crime, like murder, they would be put to death. (Other scriptures explain that they will be resurrected at a later time.) For lesser crimes, they would have to pay a fine. If they could not pay the fine, their relatives were expected to pay it for them. If they had no way to pay their fines, they were put into an indentured servant program.

In the indentured servant program, the servant would go to live with a family and learn a trade for a period of up to seven years. "If your fellow countryman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you for six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free," (Deu. 15:12 NASB). When the service was up, the former servant was given all he or she needed in order to go into business for himself or herself. "And when you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. You shall give generously to him from your flock, your threshing floor, and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you," (Deu. 15:13-14). However, the servant may choose to permanently live with the family for whom they had been working. "But it shall come about, if he says to you, 'I will not leave you,' because he loves you and your household, since he is doing well with you, then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant permanently. You shall also do the same to your female slave," (Deu. 15:16-17).

If necessary, corporal punishment could be applied to the indentured servants, as it would be to the family's own children. These indentured servants were not permitted to be abused or overworked. "You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to revere your God," (Lev. 25:43). They were to rest on the Sabbath and celebrate on the festivals. Ask anyone in the prison system of today if they would rather finish their sentence in God's program, or finish it in prison.

If learning both how to be part of a family and acquiring skills in this apprentice program is slavery, then yes, the Sabbath supports slavery. This, however, was in lieu of having prisons. God never intended anyone to live in prison. God's system is a much fairer and just system than today's prison system.

The temporary servitude according to God's Law is a program to teach people who have fallen through the cracks, how to earn a living, and be part of a family. This is completely different than the slavery that existed in America. The African slaves were kidnapped and sold into slavery. Kidnapping slaves is one of the worst crimes according to God's Law. "You shall not steal," (Exo. 20:15 NASB). The word used for steal here is '*ganab*' (Strong's # 1589), which means 'kidnaps, kidnapped,

kidnapping, carried away, stolen away, etc.' This Commandment specifically forbids the kidnapping of slaves.

We must be prepared for attacks on our beliefs. We need to be ready with the truth and NOT be ashamed of it.