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Slavery, the Enslaved, and the Gospel of Matthew: A Narrative, Social-Scientific Study

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

SLAVERY, THE ENSLAVED, AND THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW: A NARRATIVE, SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC STUDY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY

BY
JONATHAN JESS HATTER
CHICAGO, IL
AUGUST 2021
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is fitting that I begin with an expression of my deep gratitude for all of those who diligently labored on this project alongside me and whose support and encouragement contributed in vital ways to the final product.

First and foremost, I must thank the members of my committee, Dr. Edmondo Lupieri, Dr. Christopher Skinner, and Dr. Devorah Schoenfeld, whose guidance and support throughout this process have been invaluable. I hope that they are able to recognize the benefits of their feedback in the strongest parts of this work. I also want to thank Dr. Olivia Stewart-Lester for spearheading the organization of our department’s New Testament Colloquium, without which I am not certain this project would have ever been completed.

I am grateful, too, for the incredibly supportive community of graduate students in our department who happily discussed my project with me, read and commented on early drafts, and perhaps most importantly offered their encouragement on the hardest days. I am particularly grateful in this regard for Fr. Shane Gormley and Joshua King, who have contributed to this project, and to my life, in immeasurable ways.

My deepest debt, by far, is owed to Nicole Hatter, for her unconditional support through all the highs and lows of this decade of graduate work. Without her constant encouragement, understanding, and inspiration, this project would not have been possible. My most heartfelt gratitude must, therefore, be reserved for her alone.
In memory of H. Dean Warren
1929–2004
πᾶσα μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ δουλεία χαλεπή…
—Dio Chrysostom, Discourses 66.13
PREFACE

This project has occupied my thoughts and the whole of my academic imagination for the better part of a decade. As a biblical scholar, I have long been troubled by the prevalence of slavery and slave language in the biblical texts, on the one hand, and the habit of biblical scholarship to dismiss or ignore it, on the other. Slavery in the ancient world is reduced by these scholars to little more than an inconvenience for the enslaved. Such scholars often go so far as to describe their enslavement as ultimately “beneficial.” Modern readers are urged to look past the biblical slaves as scholars assure them that “there is nothing to see here.” And, as is often the case with the biblical texts in particular, such interpretations are not confined to academia but eventually find their way into pulpits as pastors and priests, dependent as they are on such scholarly work, repeat these views (which in turn take root among their congregants).

What ultimately is the harm of such interpretations? Why should it matter to the modern scholar or pastor or parishioner that the biblical “slaves” were individuals trapped in a violently abusive system that stripped them of their power, agency, and humanity? Why must these enslaved persons be seen for what (or rather, who) they were?

It is of vital importance that we recognize in the biblical depictions of slavery and enslaved persons the implicit biases of the human authors who, as often as not, take for granted the institution of slavery and the violence perpetrated against the enslaved. To read past these biases, to ignore them, only serves to perpetuate them in our own place and time, where the legacy of slavery is ever-present and racism remains ubiquitous. As we struggle against
systematic injustice and work to actively recognize and call out oppression, it is important for us to recognize these same oppressive forces, previously unnoticed, in Christianity’s most sacred texts. If we do not recognize these injustices in the very text of scripture, we may come away with the false impression that scripture has nothing to say about such injustices and the appropriate Christian response to them. Or worse, we might blindly accept a pseudo-biblical approach that actually accepts and bolsters unjust systems by misrepresenting the past.

I certainly foster no illusions that this project offers a solution to the pervasive issue of racism in this country. However, as recent events are forcing us to reckon with the ways in which racism is embedded in our social structures, it is also an apt time to reckon with the ways that similar injustices may be at work within the Christian scriptural traditions. As we are seeing each day in the news, simply ignoring such problems does not make them go away but rather allows them to fester unseen below the surface. This is no way to proceed.

In a recent work entitled *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*, Esau McCaulley presents a mode of interacting with such difficult texts that has grown out of the Black ecclesial tradition using an evocative, biblical image. He writes, “We have a patience with the biblical text born of its use against us. We have had to wrestle like Jacob until the text delivered its blessing.”1 This work will strive to follow after McCaulley and the rich tradition he describes and represents. It is a first step in my struggle with these difficult and problematic texts, undertaken in the hope that some edification may yet be found in their words.

As I said above, I recognize that this project will not solve the issues presented here. I do hope, however, that it will represent a necessary step toward understanding and reconciliation. I hope it will help us to better understand Matthew’s Gospel, the social world from which it emerges, and especially the way its portrayal of slavery and enslaved persons represents the privileged perspective of the slave-holding class. I hope it will help us to better understand the radical nature of the biblical call for Christians to choose to be “slaves of God,” “slaves of Christ,” and “slaves of one another.” I hope that asking these questions of Matthew will give us new ways to ask similar questions about our own world, that it helps us to see privilege and injustice where it has not been recognized before and to listen to voices previously unheard and unheeded. Ultimately, I hope that this project brings us just a little closer to peace and reconciliation, “that all of [us] may be one” (John 17:21).
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<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABR</td>
<td>Australian Biblical Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.J.</td>
<td>Josephus, Antiquitates Judaicae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASV</td>
<td>American Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBR</td>
<td>Bulletin for Biblical Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BECNT</td>
<td>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BibInt</td>
<td>Biblical Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.J.</td>
<td>Josephus, Bellum Judaicum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJS</td>
<td>Brown Judaic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTB</td>
<td>Biblical Theology Bulletin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQMS</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTT</td>
<td>Dansk teologisk tidsskrift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>English Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDI</td>
<td>Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-inschriften</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gos. Thom.</td>
<td>Gospel of Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBR</td>
<td>Journal of Bible and Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JFSR</td>
<td>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJS</td>
<td>Journal of Jewish Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JQR</td>
<td>Jewish Quarterly Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
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<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSNTSup</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LNTS</td>
<td>Library of New Testament Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>The Septuagint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Masoretic Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NABre</td>
<td>New American Bible Revised Edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASB</td>
<td>New American Standard Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBC</td>
<td>New Cambridge Bible Commentary Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICNT</td>
<td>New International Commentary of the New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIGTC</td>
<td>New International Greek Testament Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIV</td>
<td>New International Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NovT</td>
<td><em>Novum Testamentum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td><em>New Testament Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNTC</td>
<td>Pillar New Testament Commentary Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td><em>Revue biblique</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBL</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCH</td>
<td>Studies in Church History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNTSMS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Sacra Pagina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td><em>Studies in Religion</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRev</td>
<td><em>Sewanee Theological Review</em></td>
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ABSTRACT

This project combines social-science methodology with a narrative critical reading strategy in order to explore the use of slave language in the Gospel of Matthew. I argue that the core of Matthew’s slave metaphors is not the rendering of service (to God or to others) or “slave” as an honorific title but rather “slavery” serves primarily as a metaphor for obedience and radical humility. Adopting sociologist Orlando Patterson’s definition for slavery as a base model, I show that Matthew’s portrayal of enslaved characters tends to conform to the prevailing views of the larger Hellenized Roman world (that is, slavery is marked by domination, natal alienation, and a lack of honor). I then use Matthew’s own portrayal of enslaved persons/slavery as the hermeneutical lens through which the audience should understand this Gospel’s three slave metaphors (believers as slaves to God, as slaves to Christ, and as slaves to one another). The introductory chapters set out the project’s methodological framework (chapter 1) and then survey the history of scholarship on first-century slavery in Roman, Jewish, and Christian contexts (chapter 2). The next two chapters establish that Matthew’s characterization of enslaved persons conforms to Patterson’s model, looking first at enslaved characters in the narrative passages (chapter 3) and then in the narrative parables (chapter 4). After a brief excursus on slave language in biblical quotations, the final chapter utilizes Matthew’s image of enslaved characters and slavery, established in chapters 3–4, as the basis for interpreting the Gospel’s slave metaphors.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

[A]ncient history [derives] its relevance from the possibility of direct confrontation with the modern world (both in its intellectual and in its political problems), not necessarily always to the advantage of the modern world. 2

Introduction

It has rightfully been noted that the study of slavery in the Roman world is “not always edifying, but [is]…essential to a proper understanding of Roman antiquity.” 3 Such studies are essential because they protect against “sanitized and distorted [versions] of the past.” 4 This is, perhaps, especially true for the study of slavery within early Christianity. Modern moral teaching, both inside and outside of Christian circles, has rightly condemned slavery of any sort and at any time as reprehensible and inhumane. So how is one to cope with the idea, on the one hand, that slavery is morally wrong regardless of the time or place, and the simple fact, on the other hand, that slavery plays a prominent role in several early Christian texts and, presumably, in the early Christian communities?

1 All translations in this work are the author’s own unless otherwise noted. All scripture citations are references to the Gospel of Matthew unless otherwise noted.


3 Keith Bradley, Slavery and Society at Rome (New York: Cambridge, 1994), xi.

4 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 181.
This is a difficult but I think important question to contend with. It might be simpler to circumvent the question entirely, or to gloss over the problematic nature of the scriptural texts that rely heavily on enslaved characters and servile images. But this merely avoids the problem, it does not solve it. To confront these texts directly is a challenge which, as Bradley says, may not ultimately be “edifying” but which is necessary to ensure that a “sanitized and distorted” understanding of scripture does not prevail. It is with this conviction—that an unpleasant truth is to be preferred over a pleasant fiction—that I approach this project.

Why Slavery

In 1990, Clarice Martin wrote an article in which she discussed at length the translation of δοῦλος/δοῦλη. Noting the importance of “faithfully rendering biblical terminology in English” and, more than that, of “assessing its ideological import and sociopolitical impact,” she addresses the question “Would it not be better…to translate doulos regularly as the more euphemistic ‘servant’?” Her response is “a resounding No!”

The reasoning Martin gives is twofold. First, she notes that “doulos in Greco-Roman parlance is generally translated as ‘slave’” and that “servant” is consistently used as a gloss for δοῦλος only in biblical translation. The distinction between these two translations is significant because the involuntary nature of the service rendered by the δοῦλος (which is central to that word’s meaning) is not captured by the English “servant” as it is by the word “slave.” Second, to translate δοῦλος as “servant” “minimizes the full psychosocial weight of the institution of

---


slavery itself.” She writes “I have always been troubled by exegetical arguments and interpretations of slave existence in the Common Era that suggest that ancient slavery was only a sporadically stressful interruption in an otherwise ‘quite normal’ existence.”

Martin acknowledges the complexity of the question, noting the importance of considering how people of color hear such texts. She specifically points to the “concern about whether the term slave is in some sense ‘offensive’ to the African-American reader.” The term “slave” is certainly one that comes with its share of baggage (as did δοῦλος, one could imagine). However, Martin concludes, “an etymologically faithful reading of doulos is preferred to the more euphemistic reading, even if the motive for the euphemistic reading is purportedly conciliatory.”

I have chosen to begin with Martin’s work because her reasons for preferring to translate δοῦλος as “slave” are also, in large part, my reasons for approaching the topic of slavery and enslaved persons in this study. In biblical studies generally, and in the study of the New Testament

8 Martin, “Womanist Interpretations,” 45. As an example of such interpretations, Martin cites Derek Tidball who argues that slavery was “not a severe and cruel institution,” that slavery was “inconsequential,” and that “a slave can remain happily a slave and still serve the Lord in spite of his social limitations” (Derek Tidball, The Social Context of the New Testament: A Sociological Analysis [Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984], 114–16).
11 Here and elsewhere I avoid the term “slave” when not referring directly to the biblical text and prefer instead “enslaved person” or similar phrases. While I think it is important to render the biblical vocabulary faithfully, as Martin argues, and to confront the realities of ancient slavery present in these texts, I think it is likewise important to highlight the personhood and dignity of those individuals who were reduced to slavery. P. Gabrielle Foreman, et al. wrote “Using enslaved (as an adjective) rather than ‘slave’ (as a noun) disaggregates the condition of being enslaved with the status of ‘being’ a slave. People weren’t slaves; they were enslaved” (P. Gabrielle Foreman, et al. “Writing about Slavery/Teaching about Slavery: This Might Help” community-sourced document, https://naacpculpeper.org/resources/writing-about-slavery-this-might-help/).
Testament Gospels specifically, the topic of slavery is obscured by issues of translation and of interpretation. The way scholars choose to translate slave vocabulary in these texts often renders enslaved persons invisible, and the way that slavery is represented when it is discussed often serves to conceal the most uncomfortable elements of what was a wholly inhumane institution.

The New Testament contains a number of words which may appropriately be translated into English as “slave.” We have already mentioned δοῦλος/δούλη, which always portray the referent as being of servile status. Additional servile vocabulary includes παῖς/παιδίσκη, as well as οἰκέτης and the related terms οἰκονόμος, οἰκιακός, and οἰκετεία. Table 1 demonstrates the frequency with which these terms appear in the Gospel of Matthew.

________________________________________

12 Besides these two nouns, the δοῦλ- word-group also contains a relevant compound noun συνδοῦλος (fellow-slave), and a verbal form δουλεύω (to serve as a slave). Other words utilizing the δοῦλ- root (δουλεία, δοῦλος, δουλαγωγέω) do not occur in the texts with which this project is interested.

13 A number of lexica differentiate between uses of παῖς as a designation of age (“youth”), of descent (“child”), and of status (“slave”). See entries in BDAG, GE, L&N, and LSJ. The feminine παιδίσκη shares the same root, and always refers to someone of servile status in the New Testament literature (see BDAG). While it is sometimes argued that words in this group may have served as terms of endearment when used in reference to enslaved persons, it is equally likely that their diminutive force was employed in a derogatory way. This will be explored more fully in later chapters. This study is not interested in the related terms παιδόν and παιδάριον, diminutives which have lost any connection to status in our literature. Compare LSJ, which continues to list “young slave” as a gloss for these terms, with L&N. BDAG lists “young slave” as a gloss for παιδάριον but without reference to any New Testament passages.

14 Words with the οἶκ- root refer to different elements of the οἶκος (household). Οἰκέτης (a household slave) may be considered roughly synonymous to δοῦλος, with δοῦλος emphasizing the dependence of the enslaved on the master while οἰκέτης emphasizes the position of the enslaved in relation to the rest of society (Karl H. Rengstorf, “δοῦλος,” TDNT 2:261). The οἰκονόμος (household manager) was often, though not always, an enslaved or servile figure. Οἰκιακός (member of one’s household) may be used to refer both to enslaved and free members of the household. This term is used only twice in the New Testament, both in Matthew 10. One use is connected directly to other servile vocabulary, which is why the term is included here. Οἰκετεία (household or household staff/slaves) may refer to the household broadly or specifically the household’s (enslaved) staff.

While the word-groups just mentioned have been the most important for my research, they do not represent the only relevant words for this study. Διάκονος (servant), while not explicitly referring to individuals of enslaved status, is sometimes used in parallel to words in our main groups. On the other side of the master-enslaved relationship words like κύριος (lord/master), δοσπότης (master), and their derivatives will be important to note as we proceed.
Table 1. Matthew’s Slave Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wordgroup</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Appearances in Matthew(^{15})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>δουλ-</td>
<td>δουλος, δουλη, συνδουλος, δουλευω</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>παιδ-</td>
<td>παις, παιδιςκη</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>οικ-</td>
<td>οικιακος, οικετεια</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, Matthew contains 37 words which *must*, in my opinion, be translated as “slave” (i.e., those words in the δουλ- word group) and 12 words which *may* be translated as “slave” depending on context.

These numbers have not always been reflected in English translations. A comprehensive examination of all English translations would be prohibitively long (and unnecessary) but it will be illustrative of my point to look at some of the more influential translations from the last century. Table 2 shows the number of times the terms “servant” and “slave” appear in seven modern English translations of Matthew.\(^{16}\)

Table 2. “Servant” vs. “Slave” in English Translations of Matthew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>“Servant”</th>
<th>“Slave”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASV</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRSV</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASB</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NABre</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIV</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{15}\) For the appearances of slave vocabulary in the rest of the New Testament, see appendix A.

\(^{16}\) The ASV and RSV were both standard translations in the 20th century. The former was revised in 1995 and became the NASB. The latter served as the foundation for both the NRSV and the ESV. The revised edition of the NAB has been used in the Catholic lectionary since its release. The NIV is the best-selling version of the Bible according to the Evangelical Christian Publishing Association.
A simple comparison of these two tables shows a large disparity in many translations between the appearance of “slave” language in the Greek text and the use of “slave” as a translation in the English. Whatever the reasoning behind the decisions of the translation committees, many of these translations have minimized (or even completely erased) the role of enslaved persons in Matthew’s text. If we are to talk about the place of slavery and the enslaved in early Christian texts and communities then we must begin by recognizing their presence with our translation decisions.

Once the enslaved have been so identified, the scholar of biblical antiquity must discern what is the nature of the institution in which these individuals found themselves constrained. Until recently, the abundant references to slavery and the enslaved in the New Testament texts have been largely ignored (in no small part because of the choices of translators), or the institution under which these ancient enslaved persons lived has been described as benign (often in contrast with antebellum slavery in the United States). This trend has been and is being upset by a growing number of biblical scholars who are critically engaging with the work of classicists and historians on Roman slavery.

One New Testament scholar who has called for a shift in the way slavery is discussed in biblical scholarship is Richard Horsley. In his 1998 article “The Slave Systems of Classical Antiquity and their Reluctant Recognition by Modern Scholars,” he argues that for most of the 20th century classicists approached ancient slavery as “an embarrassment to be downplayed, hedged about with sophisticated apologies, or, if possible, explained away,” and that New
Testaments scholars, dependent as they were on classical studies, adopted this same view.\textsuperscript{17} The time had come, wrote Horsley, for biblical scholars to recognize the new consensus among historians—following important works by such figures as Moses Finley, Orlando Patterson, and Keith Bradley, among others—which pointed to the violent and coercive nature of Greek and Roman slavery.\textsuperscript{18} These studies have important implications for the way the New Testament is to be understood.

This shift in the way slavery is portrayed in biblical studies is not an insignificant matter. To the contrary, it fundamentally changes the questions that we ask of the biblical texts. How are we to understand Jesus’s interactions with enslaved persons? How are we to understand the use of enslaved characters in the parable traditions? What do these narratives tell us about early Christian attitudes towards slavery and the enslaved? Why do the Gospel authors choose to use such a violent institution as a metaphor for Christian relationships and discipleship? These questions and others like them become more significant when, like Horsley, we recognize the ancient slave systems for what they were.

Why Matthew

Horsley’s article gives us opportunity to explore a second question: why study Matthew’s Gospel? Like many other works on slavery in the New Testament texts, Horsley focused mainly on how modern studies of slavery impact our understanding of the Pauline material. He writes

\begin{quote}

18 These studies and others relevant to the scholarly understanding of first-century slavery will be explored in-depth in chapter 2.
\end{quote}
that the Gospel traditions, particularly the parables, are “rooted in [a] Galilean Israelite culture not permeated by typical Greek and Roman slavery,” and that the δοῦλοι of these texts were likely understood originally as “servants.”\(^\text{19}\) It should not be surprising then that when Horsley released an edited volume entitled *Christian Origins* seven years later its chapter on slavery in early Christian communities focused entirely on the epistolary material, making no mention of the Gospels at all.\(^\text{20}\) A chapter in the same volume on the people of the Matthean community, a community that the author places in Roman Antioch, also makes no mention of enslaved persons, even though slavery is a common theme in Matthew’s Gospel.\(^\text{21}\)

The emphasis that Horsley placed on the Pauline material in his discussions of slavery is illustrative of biblical scholarship more broadly. Jennifer Glancy makes this point well when she says that although slavery is a very common theme in the teachings of Jesus, as portrayed in the Gospels, “discussions of slavery and the New Testament often overlook the Gospels in their emphasis on epistolary materials.”\(^\text{22}\) By way of example she points to the work of I. A. H. Combes, who presents an overview of the slavery metaphor in the early Christian tradition “from the New Testament to the beginning of the fifth century”\(^\text{23}\) but who spends less than two pages


on the Synoptic Gospels. She also notes Peter Garnsey, who claims to survey slavery “from Aristotle to Augustine” but ignores the Gospels altogether.

New Testament scholars are beginning to fill this lacuna as people like Glancy and J. Albert Harrill bring the more recent classical studies on slavery to bear on the Gospel texts. A number of books and articles have been published in recent years investigating how this new understanding of slavery might apply to individual parables or teachings in the Gospel corpus. At the 2017 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, a panel in the “Historical Jesus” section presented new research on the topic of “Jesus and Slavery.” Still, slavery in the Gospels has been broadly ignored. There are many new and important avenues yet to explore.

This project takes as its focus the Gospel of Matthew. As has just been noted, the Gospels have received comparatively little attention where slavery and the enslaved are concerned. The recent studies that have focused on Gospel material tend to focus on individual pericopae or


smaller clusters of material (most notably the parables) rather than on any one of the Gospels in its entirety. While any or all of the Gospels would have benefited from such a study, I have chosen Matthew for the following reasons. First, it contains a sufficient number of references to slavery and the enslaved to merit an extended treatment. Second, Matthew lends itself to being studied as a single literary unit. Finally, though the provenance of the Gospel is far from certain, there is sufficient consensus among scholars to provide the study of slavery in Matthew with a compelling historical setting (in both time and place).

This in-depth study of Matthew’s usage of servile language across the entire Gospel (in the Gospel’s larger narrative, in the parable material, and in the other teachings of Jesus) will allow us to better grasp Matthew’s own understanding of the institution, which will in turn allow us to better understand Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’s teachings which utilize slavery as a metaphor. This study may also open a window that allows us to see more clearly one small aspect of one early Christian community, Matthew’s intended audience in Roman Antioch.

**Methodological Considerations**

Methodologically, this project will combine elements of social-science criticism with a narrative critical reading strategy. In what follows, I will briefly highlight the major assumptions and strategies of these two methods in order to provide a clear path on which this project can proceed.

28 Matthew contains 14 passages which deal explicitly with slavery or which contain enslaved characters. Compare with Mark, which has only 5, or John, which has only 6.

29 Compare with Luke, which is often read alongside (or at least in conversation with) Acts.
Social-Science Criticism

Elliott defines social-science criticism as “the phase of the exegetical task which analyzes the social and cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences.”

It studies the biblical texts as “both a reflection of and response to the social and cultural settings” in which they were produced.

Thus social-science criticism works in two ways. The models of ancient society and culture that this method utilizes can tell us about the biblical texts, and the biblical texts can inform and even change our understanding of these models. Put another way, our analysis of texts is informed by cultural models as our knowledge of the cultural models (and their usefulness) is also informed by the texts.

Elliott is careful to differentiate social-science criticism from historical criticism, arguing that the two methods represent distinct but related enterprises. He writes

Historical critics concentrate on discrete detail with an interest in concrete description and a skepticism toward overgeneralization. Social-scientific critics are concerned with commonalities and connections with an interest in generalization, abstraction, theory building, and a skepticism toward claims of complete objectivity.

Historical study looks for the unusual, the exceptional, the specific; social-science criticism looks for the typical, the unexceptional, the generic. These fields, though distinct, are each critical, according to Elliott, for the adequate interpretation of texts. “Both offer complementary and


mutually corrective approaches to the subject matter. For to discern the unusual, we first need to establish the usual.”34 In arguing for the necessity of social-scientific study, Elliott says “To speak of ‘unusual’ or ‘unique’ phenomena implies some sense of assumed generality. The identification of the former, in fact, is impossible without the identification of the latter.”35

Another distinguishing feature of social-science criticism is its explicit use of models in the interpretation of texts. The models utilized do not provide new data, but instead provide “a new and more comprehensive theoretical framework” within which such data can be understood. Thus, these models function heuristically, as Elliott argues, “[aiding] discovery…and thereby the [stimulating] of imagination and the expanding of conceptual horizons.”36 These models are constructed “for collecting and analyzing data that illuminate salient features of ancient Mediterranean and early Christian society and culture.”37

Elliott provides a long list of models which have proven relevant to the study of the biblical texts. Here I will restrict myself to three which are of particular interest to this study. First is the description of the Mediterranean world as driven by the concepts of honor and shame.38 Next, the social and cultural models that help us understand the dynamics of the ancient

34 Elliot, Social-Scientific Criticism, 57.
35 Elliot, Social-Scientific Criticism, 96–97.
36 Elliot, Social-Scientific Criticism, 15.
37 Elliot, Social-Scientific Criticism, 32.
Finally, the ubiquitous patron-client system and its impact on social relationships and interactions. Exegetes utilizing social-science criticism have successfully and beneficially applied each of these models to different biblical texts in order to help interpret them within their ancient contexts.

A vital methodological consideration for social-science criticism is that its analysis “must include means for distinguishing and clarifying the differences between the social location of the interpreter and the social location of the authors and objects to be interpreted.” Here Elliott borrows terminology from anthropology to distinguish between information and perspectives that are *emic* and those that are *etic*.

In anthropological field study, the term *emic* identifies information provided by the ‘natives,’ accounts of phenomena as perceived, narrated, and explained according to the experience, folk knowledge, conceptual categories, ratiocinations, and rationalizations of the indigenous narrators in their historical, social, and cultural locations… The term *etic*, on the other hand, identifies the perspective of the external investigator or interpreter as determined by his or her different social, historical, and cultural location, experience, and available knowledge and the conceptual categories used for analyzing these same phenomena. For biblical studies, emic data would be provided by the biblical texts themselves, along with other ancient sources, while etic data would come from modern commentaries, scientific studies,

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39 See Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997). Part one of this volume explores data concerning the family from social scientific fields such as archaeology, cultural anthropology, and sociology. Part two takes these models and applies them to the biblical texts.


and other contemporary “theories, models, [and] knowledge.” When exegetes confuse emic and etic data the results are interpretations fraught with anachronism, as Elliott illustrates.

Social-science criticism provides a necessary foundation for the study of slavery within the Gospels. The models produced by the social sciences give us insights into the social and cultural assumptions of the world which produced these texts. They help us to understand the “norms” of the society in which and to which these texts were first written, which in turn allows us to see how these texts adhere to or deviate from these “norms.” The use of such models also provides a safeguard against the imposition of etic data into the interpretation of these texts.

For our particular purposes, they provide a method for reading the Gospels with ancient slavery, rather than modern slavery, in mind.

This project will utilize a model for understanding slavery that is based on the definition provided by sociologist Orlando Patterson, who wrote that slavery is “the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons.” According to such a definition, enslaved persons were, in essence, excluded from participating in the cultural

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43 Elliot, Social-Scientific Criticism, 39.

44 Elliott gives the examples of Galatians 3:28, a call for Christian unity, which is often confused for a statement of equality when interpreted in light of modern values. Elliot, Social-Scientific Criticism, 50.

45 Moses Finley writes that such a “methodological fallacy…pervades [many accounts of slavery].” This fallacy, he says, “consists in assuming the existence from the beginning of time, so to speak, of the writer’s values—in this instance, the moral rejection of slavery as an evil—and in then examining all earlier thought and practice as if they were, or ought to have been, on the road to this realization; as if men in other periods were asking the same questions and facing the same problems as those of the historian and his world.” Moses Finley, Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology (New York: Viking, 1980), 17. Emphasis original.

46 Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 13. Chapter 2 will serve to defend our use of this model based on developments in historical studies on slavery in Roman, Jewish, and early Christian contexts.
structures noted in the three models above (honor/shame, ancient family structures, and patron-client relationships). An enslaved person is incapable of having honor (and thus cannot suffer the shame of its loss). An enslaved person, though part of the household, is denied any real place in the _familia_. The relationship between the enslaved person and his or her master is not reciprocal (as patron/client relationships are) but is characterized by total domination. Thus, Patterson’s definition provides us with a better “starting point” as a model for understanding the place of slavery and the enslaved in the Gospels than these other models do.

As a social-scientific study, this project will begin with Patterson’s definition as the model for understanding the institution of ancient slavery in general terms. The “usual” experience of slavery will be described as lacking honor, lacking family, and lacking power. This is not to say that some enslaved persons may not have received honor, had meaningful family connections, or had mutually beneficial relationships with masters who acted as patrons (or even friends). However, this project will approach our texts with the “norm” defined by our model in mind and will attempt to interpret the relevant texts as either conforming to or deviating from that norm.

**Narrative Criticism**

Mark Allan Powell describes narrative criticism as an approach to reading and studying the biblical texts which attempts to take the narrative character of these texts seriously. Traditional historical-critical methodology, writes Powell, has attempted to interpret not the

47 Consider, as illustrative of this point, Jesus’s statement in John 8:35: “The slave does not remain in the household forever” (ὁ δὲ δοῦλος οὐ μένει ἐν τῇ οίκῳ εἰς αἰῶνα).
stories of scripture themselves but the “historical circumstances behind them” in an effort to “reconstruct the life and thought of biblical times.” 48 Narrative criticism reminds us that the biblical books were “intended to be read from beginning to end, not dissected and examined to determine the relative value of individual passages.” 49 It applies methods borrowed and adapted from the field of literary studies to the reading of the narrative texts of the Bible, insisting that each text is complete, autonomous, and should be read and evaluated in its final form.

Powell notes that one of the major differences between narrative criticism and historical-critical approaches is the way that these disciplines view the text. The latter understands the text as “the final form of something that has evolved through sequential stages.” 50 An original historical event is passed on in oral traditions, finds its way into early written sources, and ultimately is compiled in the biblical text. For these critics, the exegetical task is understood as taking the text and attempting to work backwards through these stages in order to arrive at an understanding of one or more of the previous stages.

Narrative critics, on the other hand, understand the text using a literary “speech-act model.” 51 According to this model, all communication involves a sender, a message, and a receiver. When applied to literature, we can understand the sender as the author, the message as the text itself, and the receiver as the audience. Viewed in this way, the text is not a means to an


49 Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 2.


51 Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 9. Powell credits Roman Jakobson with this theory.
end, but is an integral part of the communicative act. Thus, as Powell writes, “the story that is
told and the manner in which it is told deserve full scholarly attention.”

This is not to argue that narrative criticism has no room for or interest in historical data.
While some early literary critics argued for interpretations of texts completely divorced from
their historical context, modern narrative critics understand the importance of such information
for setting the story of the text in context. Georg Iggers, bemoaning the impulse in postmodern
scholarship to reject claims of historical reality in literature, wrote,

There is…a difference between a theory that denies any claim to reality in historical
accounts and a historiography that is fully conscious of the complexity of historical
knowledge but still assumes that real people had real thoughts and feelings that led to real
actions that, within limits, can be known and reconstructed.53

Iggers was reacting against literary critics who, following individuals like Foucault, argued that
“reality doesn’t exist…only language.”54 Certainly one should be aware of the complexities of
writing history, but these complexities do not render literature devoid of historical data. Powell
makes a similar argument, adding that “narrative criticism is certainly not an antihistorical
discipline.”55 Narrative critics understand the Gospels as “story” but that is not to say they regard
them as “fiction.” Powell writes elsewhere,

To the contrary, these scholars all recognized that the Gospels do convey reliable
information about actual historical events and that they also reflect upon those events
theologically in ways that must be understood in terms of the historical contexts of the
authors. Accordingly, the earliest narrative critics (and virtually all narrative critics since)

52 Powell, What is Narrative Criticism, 7.

53 Georg G. Iggers, Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern

54 Powell, What is Narrative Criticism, 133.

55 Powell, What is Narrative Criticism, 98.
understood their discipline as one approach to the Gospels, to be practiced alongside others.56

The relationship between narrative and various historical approaches can be “symbiotic” as these disciplines complement and supplement one another.

It was noted above that narrative critics think of the biblical texts as an act of communication between author and audience. It is appropriate to ask at this point “What author?” and “What audience?” Narrative critics recognize the necessity of a real author(s) and audience57 but, like the literary critics from whom they adapted their methodologies, they focus instead on the implied author and the implied or ideal audience of the texts they explore. This is because knowledge of the persons of the real author and audience are typically based on extrinsic data, but the persona of the implied author and of the implied audience are derived from the text itself.58

The distinction between implied and real author can be illustrated in various ways. Moloney notes a modern book with four real authors in which the implied author’s voice is always presented in the singular.59 Powell points to Treasure Island and Dr. Jeckyl and Mr.


57 “Real audience” may refer to the first audience of the Gospel or to any person reading the text throughout history or today. Moloney uses the terms “intended reader” and “real reader” to distinguish between the first individuals to receive the text (the intended reader) and other historical persons, past or present, who have received the text (the real readers). Francis J. Moloney, “Narrative Criticism of the Gospels,” Pacifica 4 (1991): 192. Here and elsewhere I prefer the term “audience” to “reader” as a reminder that people have not always interacted with the text by reading it themselves.

58 The helpful distinction between “person” and “persona” when talking about real versus implied author/audience comes from Moloney, “Narrative Criticism,” 189.

59 Moloney, “Narrative Criticism,” 189.
Hyde, two works with the same real author but whose implied authors are very different. For the four Gospels, the implied authors are “omniscient and omnipresent” and are almost indistinguishable from the narrator.

An important literary function of the implied author is to establish the point(s) of view upon which the narrative depends. Adele Berlin writes that “Discovering the point of view of the implied author…is the first step in discovering the meaning and purpose of the story.” Included in this authorial point of view are such elements as the “norms, values, and general worldview that the implied author establishes as operative for the story.” Such a point of view provides the audience (both real and implied) with the framework they need for understanding and evaluating elements of the narrative.

James Resseguie specifies the importance of “ideological point of view” for narrative criticism. More than just the “angle of vision” of the author with reference to “space, time, and voice,” the ideological point of view offers tools for evaluating action, dialogue, characters, setting, and events. This point of view may be stated outright at times, but more often it must

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60 Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 5.

61 Moloney, “Narrative Criticism,” 188–89. Moloney says the implied authors and narrators of the Gospels “act as one.” This is not necessarily the case in all literary works, where a narrator may be distinct from the implied author (and where the narrator may be unreliable).


63 That is, the point of view of the implied author.

64 Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 24. See also James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 167, who similarly defines point of view as “the norms, values, beliefs, and general worldview that the narrator wants the reader to adopt or reject.”

be determined by looking at how characters are described, what characters are made to say, and how events are narrated (and perhaps which events are narrated).  

The point of view of the implied author is important for New Testament narrative critics for another reason. Resseguié notes, almost in passing, that the point of view of the narrator, by which all characters in the Gospel are judged, is made to coincide with Jesus’s point of view. In this way, the “norms, values, beliefs, and general worldview” which the implied author presents are given divine sanction, at least in some way. This is of particular interest to my study of slavery in the Gospel narratives, since the worldview of the authors (real and implied) make particular assumptions about the place of the enslaved in society. These texts, created by free persons, may be biased against the enslaved individuals which they portray.

Feminist critical readings of the New Testament offer a number of helpful insights regarding the problem of reading around the biases in a text. Katherine Shaner, in a recent book on the role of the enslaved in early Christian leadership, asks “How…do we incorporate the pervasive presence of enslaved persons in ancient life when our ancient materials often render them invisible apart from their masters’ perspective?” She goes on to say that feminist historians have dealt with similar issues as women in antiquity have also been hidden from view.

68 Powell makes an important distinction between identifying the points of view in a narrative text and promoting those views. Such a distinction is of the utmost importance for this study especially, which will ultimately identify in the narrative a point of view that accepts ancient slaveholding practices (Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 36).
(1) by the rhetoric of the original sources and (2) by the questions asked by modern scholarship. Both of these insights, she writes, also “apply to scholarship about slaves.”

Shaner uses the term “kyriarchy,” coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “to signal the multifaceted power dynamics present in social structures.” Schüssler Fiorenza uses the term to indicate that traditional societies are ruled not simply by “fathers” (that is, they are not simply patriarchal) but that they are ruled by “elite propertied men [who] have power over those subordinate to and dependent upon them.” Such “kyriarchal” power “operates not only along the axis of gender but also along those of race, class, culture, and religion.” For Schüssler Fiorenza, the Bible is a product of its kyriarchal culture and is, therefore, androcentric; it is “divine revelation...articulated in historically limited and culturally conditioned human language.” Her solution to this issue as a feminist historian and biblical scholar is not to do away with these texts, but to approach them with a method of analysis “sharpened by a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion.’”

Elizabeth Clark makes a similar argument, writing that, because of the highly rhetorical nature of ancient Christian texts, scholars can “safely assume that their texts lie in a largely unknown and dubious relation to the ‘reality’ of the ancient Church, and

70 Shaner, Enslaved Leadership, xiii.
71 Shaner, Enslaved Leadership, xiv n16.
73 Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, 123.
74 Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, 13.
75 Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, xxiii.
should often be approached with a hermeneutic of suspicion and by reading against the grain.”

Clark finds this especially helpful in critiquing the ideologies present in Christian texts that portray various “Others,” particularly women.77

As Shaner has noted, reading strategies like those suggested by Schüssler Fiorenza and Clark also promise to bear exegetical fruit for those interested in slavery in the early Christian texts. Interacting with the slave texts of the Gospels, one should recognize that the point of view presented by the implied author is (or at least may be) “kyriarchal” in nature and thus statements made about “others” (women, the enslaved, etc.) should be approached with critical suspicion. The stories about enslaved persons and their masters and the teaching material that relies on these metaphorical characters are colored by social and cultural biases that are often unfriendly to the enslaved character. The careful and responsible reader must keep their eyes open for such prejudices as they interact with texts which reflect the implied author’s point of view.

In addition to identifying the implied author, one of the “most pressing issues in literary criticism” is identifying the readers/audiences of the text.78 Different branches of literary criticism interest themselves in different “readers”: intended readers, competent readers, first-time readers, or even reading communities.79 Generally speaking, narrative criticism is interested

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78 Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 19.
in the “implied reader who is presupposed by the narrative itself.” There is no way to determine how any actual audience (intended or real) may react to a particular text, but this is not so for the implied reader as the text contains indicators of how the implied author expects the implied audience to respond to the narrative as it unfolds.

One barrier faced in narrative criticism when it comes to constructing the implied audience’s experience of the text is the issue of social setting and socio-cultural symbols. Social features of setting include such elements as “political institutions, class structures, economic systems, social customs, and general cultural context.” Each of these may contribute important information to how an audience (real or implied) understands a narrative. However, since the implied audience (and likely the intended audience) already understand these elements, there is no need for the author to include extensive explanation or detail. Such omissions could, in theory, present problems for narrative criticism, which desires to approach the literary text itself as its primary source of contextual data.

Cultural symbols, which derive their meaning from the real author’s social and historical context, present a similar problem, since “access to the meaning of these symbols is not gained through the narrative itself, for the implied author simply assumes the [implied] reader will


81 Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 19.

82 Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 74. Resseguie gives a similar list: class structures, cultural and social customs, and economic and political structures (Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 110).

83 In practice, many narrative critics recognize the importance of historical data external to the text to make sense of such symbols in the text.
understand them.”84 Powell writes that “if modern readers are to read the narrative as the implied reader they must at this point rely on insights gained from historical criticism.”85 Writing specifically about the Gospel of Mark, Kelly Iverson writes that “the social, historical, and cultural context of the first-century…world” is critical for understanding the narrative of that Gospel.86

As a narrative critical study, this project will strive to interact with the Gospel of Matthew in a way that does justice to the narrative character of that work. Comparisons with parallel texts will focus not on source or redactional issues, but on questions regarding how each author told these stories and integrated them into their own narrative, with the ultimate goal being to understand how Matthew is utilizing the story in his narrative to further his own goals. Special attention will be given to the evaluative point of view of the author (especially as it relates to the way slavery and the enslaved are depicted) and to how this point of view informs the presentation of enslaved characters (real and parabolic) and other metaphorical slave images.

Narrative Social-Science: Combining Methods

John Elliott wrote in his introduction to social-science criticism that with the maturation of narrative criticism it was now appropriate to begin to integrate these two methods.87 When

84 Powell, What is Narrative Criticism, 29.
85 Powell, What is Narrative Criticism, 29.
87 Elliott, Social-Scientific Criticism, 100. When Elliott speaks of the exegetical nature of social-science criticism, he speaks of interpreting the texts in a very narrative oriented way, writing “Here social-scientific criticism supplements the other methods of critical interpretation with the aim of elucidating the structure, content, strategy, and intended rhetorical effect of the text within its social context. The text is analyzed as a vehicle of communication whose genre, structure, content, themes, message, and aim are shaped by the cultural and social
Mark Allan Powell wrote his introduction to narrative criticism in the same series, he too noted the possible benefits of such integration. Narrative reading strategies could be used alongside other critical methods “in a supplementary fashion,” providing “necessary complements” to one another.\(^8\) Iverson makes a similar point, writing that even though the narrative is his primary concern, the world of the narrative cannot be regarded “as an autonomous story world that can be known in isolation from its socio-cultural context.”\(^9\) Outi Lehtipuu says that “A great chasm has been fixed between our world and the world of the story by time and cultural changes, and we must be cautious not to give anachronistic meanings to familiar sounding concepts found in ancient texts.”\(^10\) The models of social-science criticism provide tools to the narrative critic to help avoid such anachronisms.

Perhaps the most concise apology for the blending of these two methods comes from David Rhoads’ chapter on future prospects for narrative criticism in the edited volume *Characterization in the Gospel: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*. In it he argues that social-science criticism provides a number of benefits for the narrative critic. “The world of the story,” he writes, “represents one example of a social construction of reality. It is crucial, therefore, to

forces of the social system and the specific historical setting in which it is produced and to which it constitutes a specific response” (Elliott, *Social-Scientific Criticism*, 33). Emphasis added.

\(^{8}\) Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 98.

\(^{9}\) Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 4. See also Christopher Skinner, who argues that a “responsible reading strategy” balances concerns for such elements as the social backgrounds of a text with “an appreciation for literary elements” (Christopher W. Skinner, *John and Thomas — Gospels in Conflict?: Johannine Characterization and the Thomas Question* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009], 22).

use all the tools we have to understand the nature of that social construction.” 91 These tools come from the social sciences, which provide the cultural models “that help to organize and interpret the ancient cultural information in the narrative.” 92 Rhoads concludes

Narrative criticism and social-science criticism work well together. Social-science criticism helps to clarify the common assumptions made by author and hearers in the act of communication. At the same time, the detailed attention to the text offered by narrative criticism helps to give specificity and qualification to the general nature of the models [used by social-science critics] and applies social-science criticism to the narrative as a narrative. 93

This project is a social-scientific study utilizing a narrative critical reading strategy. Like Elliot, Powell, Rhoads, and any number of other scholars working in these areas, I see these two methods as complementary. The reading strategy provided by narrative critics allows us to ask broader questions about slavery in the Gospels than have previously been addressed, asking what role slavery plays in the Gospel as a whole rather than just in individual passages or groups of passages. Our exploration of Matthew’s portrayal of enslaved characters will help us to better understand Matthew’s usage of slavery as a metaphor throughout the Gospel. Social-scientific criticism, and more specifically the model for slavery based on Patterson’s definition, will provide the extratextual framework for understanding an ancient institution which, for the intended audience, required no explanation but which, for us, is unfamiliar.


92 Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism,” 278–79.

Excursus: On Matthew’s Provenance and Sources

I must briefly say something about the historical and literary origins of the Gospel of Matthew. While such details are not the main focus of the argument of this project, nevertheless they are important to define at the outset so that my later discussions may be placed in their proper context. While a full introduction to the Gospel and its origins is outside the scope of this chapter, I will summarize here the arguments I find most compelling concerning the issues of Matthew’s place of origin, date of authorship, and literary relationship to the other Synoptics.

**Origin**

While a number of competing hypotheses have been put forth for Matthew’s place of origin (Jerusalem, Caesarea Maritima, Phoenicia, Alexandria, Pella, Edessa), the consensus among scholars points towards a Syrian provenance, especially the city of Antioch-on-the-Orontes.\(^94\) External evidence for Antioch as the city of origin includes the witness of Papias and Irenaeus,\(^95\) and the use of Matthew by Ignatius.\(^96\) Internally, Luz notes the Matthean usage of distinctly Syrian/Phoenician terminology (in 2:23 and 7:26) and the “cameo” appearance of Syria in 4:24.\(^97\) Ultimately, Matthew’s Gospel “does not betray where it was written”\(^98\) and we can do

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\(^{95}\) Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:143.

\(^{96}\) Luz, *Matthew*, 1:57.


no better than go with “the best educated guess.”\textsuperscript{99} This project will side with the majority in accepting Syrian Antioch as the most likely place of origin.

\textbf{Date}

The \textit{terminus a quo} for Matthew’s Gospel is set for many scholars by the formation of Mark, understood as Matthew’s primary source, and often also by the destruction of Jerusalem (perhaps alluded to in 22:7). The \textit{terminus ad quem} is set by the \textit{Didache} and the letters of Ignatius, which seem to be familiar with Matthean redaction.\textsuperscript{100} Thus the majority of scholars date Matthew to the last quarter of the first century CE. Davies and Allison say certainly between 70 and 100 CE; likely between 80 and 95. Luz similarly says not long after 80. Again, I find no compelling reason to depart from this consensus and would date Matthew in the last two decades of the first century CE.

\textbf{Sources}

Scholars of the Synoptic Gospels have long noted that the parallels between the three works suggest a literary relationship between them, though the nature of that relationship is disputed (the so-called “Synoptic problem”). Pheme Perkins notes that “for over a century, most exegetes have agreed that some version of the ‘two-source’ theory is the most fruitful

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[99] Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 1:147.
\item[100] Luz writes that \textit{Didache} 8, 10.5, and 16 “permit us to say with almost complete certainty that the \textit{Didache} originated in a church that was influenced by Matthew.” On signs of Matthean redaction in Ignatius, he notes \textit{Smyrn}. 1.1 = Matt 3:15 and \textit{Phld}. 3.1 = Matt 15:13. He also suggests Polycarp, the Epistle of Barnabas, and 1 Clement may know Matthew (Luz, \textit{Matthew}, 1:58).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
interpretation of the data.”¹⁰¹ John Kloppenborg, a major proponent for this view, says “Because it offers the most economical and plausible accounting of the form and content of the Synoptic Gospels, it continues to be by far the most widely accepted solution to the Synoptic Problem.”¹⁰²

Recently Mark Goodacre is reviving interest in the Farrer Hypothesis, which argues that Luke used both Mark and Matthew as sources, thus eliminating the need for a hypothetical source (Q).¹⁰³ He writes

On the common ground of Markan priority, we have an idea of what Matthew and Luke look like when they are working from a third source. We know what kind of agreement to expect. And in this material, the triple tradition, Matthew and Luke are never as close to each other as they are in the double tradition, and this is true for sayings material as well as narrative.¹⁰⁴

Other evidence presented for the Farrer theory against Q is the similarity in structure of Matthew and Luke (independent of Mark and Q), agreement against Mark in the triple tradition, Matthean details retained by Lukan redaction, and Lukan familiarity with “special M” material.

Goodacre argues his case convincingly, and his stance will be taken up in this project. Mark is understood to be the prototype for both Matthew and Luke.¹⁰⁵ Matthew combined Mark with material from his own tradition (e.g., his infancy narrative, the Sermon on the Mount, etc.)

¹⁰¹ That is, Mark wrote first and then Matthew and Luke, independent of one another, revised and expanded Mark, working with a now-lost sayings source (called Q) and with their own special material. Pheme Perkins, *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 59.


¹⁰⁴ Goodacre, “Farrer Hypothesis,” 53.

¹⁰⁵ As Goodacre notes, “the evidence for the priority of Mark remains overwhelming” (Goodacre, “Farrer Hypothesis,” 66).
to compose his Gospel independent of Luke. Finally, Luke combined elements of both Matthew and Mark (as well as his own special material) to compose his Gospel.106

Outline of the Project

Chapter 2 is made up of a review of the scholarly literature surrounding slavery in the first-century world. This material is approached from three distinct but related directions. First, it looks at scholarly opinions on slavery in the first-century Roman world. Second, it discusses how scholars have understood slavery among the Jews in the same time period. Finally, it looks at how slavery has been discussed by scholars of the New Testament and early Christianity. This chapter serves both to give the reader the “lay of the land” as one approaches first-century slavery and also to defend the validity of using Patterson’s definition as our model for understanding slavery moving forward.

Chapters 3 and 4, taken together, explore how enslaved persons are represented as characters in Matthew’s Gospel. Chapter 3 focuses on enslaved characters who appear within the larger narrative of the Gospel itself. Matthew contains a narrative in which Jesus heals a man enslaved by a centurion. He also briefly mentions a group of enslaved persons present with Herod Antipas. Finally, he tells his audience about a number of individuals enslaved by the High Priest, one who is assaulted in the garden during Jesus’s arrest and two whose confrontations of Peter prompt his denials. This chapter will deal with how these enslaved characters are

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106 I understand that the Farrer Hypothesis represents a minority view (though that minority may be growing with the work of Goodacre). Therefore, whenever the Farrer Hypothesis is referred to throughout this project, I will also note how a “two-source” understanding of the material would impact the argument.
portrayed, what role each one plays in their particular passage, and what Matthew’s characterization of them can tell us about how he understood slavery as an institution.

Chapter 4 will turn to enslaved characters in Matthew’s narrative parables. As Glancy reminds us, many summaries of Jesus’s parables note how these texts reflect everyday realities of first-century life.107 It is interesting, then, for the current study that a great number of the parables include characters who are explicitly identified as “slaves.” As in the previous chapter, this chapter will explore how these enslaved persons are portrayed, what sorts of tasks they are doing (and aren’t doing), and what is being done to them. We will also attempt to discern whether these texts propagate the dominant, slaveholding ideology or work to subvert it, as some would claim.

After a brief excursus on the possible appearance of slave language in two of Matthew’s biblical quotations (Chapters 5), Chapter 6 moves from a discussion of enslaved characters to an exploration of the metaphorical use of slave language in Jesus’s teaching. It begins with a brief exploration of the source domains behind these metaphors, demonstrating how a Jewish traditional idea is influenced by the present Roman institution. The chapter then proceeds to use the characterization of slavery established in Chapters 3 and 4 as the starting point for understanding Matthew’s three slave metaphors: the believer as slave of God, of Christ, and of fellow believers. In each case we will show how the metaphor is properly understood only when the reality of ancient slavery is kept in the interpreter’s view.

Ultimately, this project makes the following related claims. First, it will demonstrate that Matthew’s portrayal of slavery and enslaved characters throughout is consistent with Patterson’s definition of that institution as violent and coercive by nature. Second, it will argue that this characterization of slavery is an essential element in understanding the teachings of Jesus as they are found in Matthew, particularly the slave metaphors. In doing so, it is my hope that this project will push back against “sanitized and distorted” understandings of Matthew’s slave texts which have arisen out of a mollified image of ancient slavery. It is also my hope that this project might allow the modern reader of Matthew to look through the author’s brutal and inhumane imagery to find the edifying message buried within.
CHAPTER 2
SLAVERY AND THE ENSLAVED IN MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Introduction

Keith Bradley begins his 1994 book, Slavery and Society at Rome, by providing the following four images of enslaved life from Roman antiquity. The first, a letter sent to M. Tullius Cicero by his brother Quintus in 53 BCE (Epistulae ad Familiares 16.6), begins,

My dear Marcus, as I hope to see you again and my boy and my Tulliola and your son, I am truly grateful for what you have done about Tiro, in judging his former condition to be below his deserts and preferring us to have him as a friend rather than a slave. Believe me, I jumped for joy when I read your letter and his. Thank you, and congratulations.

The Tiro mentioned in the letter was an enslaved member of the household whom Cicero had recently seen fit to set free, improving his station to freedman and citizen. He was, according to Bradley, “a cultured man of considerable literary capacity.” The manumission of Tiro and his subsequent elevation of status was, it would seem, a source of great joy for Quintus.

The second image comes from the eastern province of Pamphylia. The enslaved person in question here, a ten-year-old girl named Abaskantis, was not being freed but rather was being sold. The papyrus fragment (P. Turner 22) reads as follows:

In the consulship of L. Cuspius Rufinus and L. Statius Quadratus, at Side, before L. Claudius Auspicatus, demiurge and priest of the goddess Roma, on 26 Loos. Pamphilos,

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1 My sincerest thanks are owed to Keith Bradley for offering comments on an early draft of this chapter.

2 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 1–4. The four translations that follow are from Bradley.

3 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 1. For more on Tiro, see Susan Treggiari, Roman Freedmen During the Late Republic (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 259–63.
otherwise known as Kanopos, son of Aigyptos, from Alexandria, has purchased in the marketplace from Artemidoros, son of Aristokles, the slave girl Abaskantis, or by whatever other name she may be known, a ten-year-old Galatian, for the sum of 280 silver denarii. M. Aelius Gavianus stands surety for and guarantees the sale. The girl is healthy, in accordance with the Edict of the Aediles…is free of liability in all respects, is prone neither to wandering nor running away, and is free of epilepsy…

While the precise circumstances of this girl’s life, both before and after this sale, cannot be accurately reconstructed, the bill of sale tells us that she was taken from her native Galatia to the coastal city of Side and was sold there to a man who was a native Egyptian, perhaps to be taken back to Alexandria. The details of her life, beyond her place of origin and her overall health and fitness to serve her new master, are deemed irrelevant.

The third image comes from a commemorative inscription (ILS 1514) dedicated to Musicus Scurranus, an enslaved man serving the imperial household. It reads,

To the deserving Musicus Scurranus, slave of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, accountant of the Gallic Treasury in the province of Gallia Lugdunensis, from those of his underslaves (vicarii) who were with him when he died at Rome…

This Musicus Scurranus, although enslaved himself, seemed to enjoy a position of great influence and had a personal retinue of other enslaved persons at his disposal. The inscription continues to list the names and functions of sixteen of these enslaved individuals. “In many ways,” says Bradley, “Musicus Scurranus was a great success.”

Finally, in juxtaposition with the comfortable and successful life that may have been possible for enslaved persons in the imperial household (the familia Caesars), Bradley offers an

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4 These vicarii should not be imagined as being enslaved by Scurranus but are more appropriately described as individuals enslaved with Scurranus who have been placed at his disposal by their common master, Tiberius Caesar Augustus.

5 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 3.
image taken from the *Digest* of Justinian. As we have seen in the papyrus concerning Abaskantis above, the bill of sale noted that the girl was in good health. This was a requirement of Roman law; the seller must declare whether an enslaved person offered for sale was “defective” in any way. Consequently, the *Digest* offers this legal opinion from the jurist Ulpian (*Digest* 21.1.8).

The question arises whether one whose tongue has been cut out is healthy. The problem is dealt with by Ofilius in respect to a horse. His opinion is in the negative. Ulpian’s text highlights two aspects of Roman slavery. First, the legal issue in question demonstrates the level of violence that some portion of the enslaved population might expect from a particularly brutal master. Second, the fact that the legal decision regarding the enslaved person is settled by a similar ruling made “in respect to a horse” demonstrates a certain attitude toward the individual’s humanity (or lack thereof).

Bradley offers these examples to illustrate three important elements one must keep in mind when talking about slavery in Roman antiquity, two of which are relevant here. First, the institution of slavery was exceptionally complex. Within these examples, Bradley says, we have “manumission and sale, the achievement of material success and physical violence.” These features, though seemingly contradictory, were able to coexist within the Roman slave system. The same system that allowed Cicero to free Tiro also allowed the young Galatian girl to be taken far from her native home; the institution which allowed for Musicus Scurranus to enjoy great wealth and prestige also allowed other nameless enslaved persons to be punished in severe and humiliating ways. Bradley notes “The Roman slave system cannot be understood, therefore,
without at once acknowledging its enormous diversity and variability, and any attempt to define its general features must constantly allow for the unanticipated and the exceptional.”

Second, the variety among the sources from which Bradley draws his four images illustrates the diverse nature of the evidence that exists for Roman slavery. The images represent ideas concerning slavery that span approximately 400 years (from 200 BCE to 200 CE, what Bradley calls Rome’s “central period”) and that range geographically from Roman Italy to Egypt and Asia Minor. This serves as a reminder that, as one approaches such varied sources, one must allow for variation in the practice of slavery over the span of time and space.

The above images also come from a variety of sources—epistolary material, documentary papyri, funerary inscriptions, and legal texts. For our introductory purposes, two challenges presented by such sources should be briefly mentioned. (1) Among the extant evidence, there is virtually nothing that survives from antiquity that describes the institution of slavery from the point of view of the enslaved. When dealing with sources from antiquity that address the institution of slavery, Jennifer Glancy warns that one must “separate the priorities and perspectives of [the] elite authors from [those] of [the] slaves they mention.” Unlike modern slaveholding societies (such as the antebellum United States) antiquity does not preserve the voice of the enslaved. We have nothing from antiquity that we can compare to Frederick

7 Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, 4.

8 Although the funerary inscription noted above was written by enslaved individuals, it does not provide a description of the institution of slavery from a servile perspective.

Douglas’s writings, for instance.\textsuperscript{10} Instead, the texts from this period most often preserve the point of view of the elite (free) male: what modern historians would call “pro-slavery sources.”\textsuperscript{11} It is the perspective of the slaveholder, not the enslaved, that most often dominates these writings.

(2) We must say something about the difficulty of using literary sources in order to recreate the historical situation from which they emerged. The literary texts of antiquity were not created for the purpose of historiography in the modern sense and cannot, therefore, be considered wholly accurate portrayals of ancient slavery. J. Albert Harrill writes that “the behavior of slaves in Roman literature tells us more about slaveholders’ aspirations and imaginations than the perspectives of actual slaves.”\textsuperscript{12} In discussing the use of literary sources to reconstruct ancient Jewish slavery, Catherine Hezser similarly argues that such sources must primarily be understood as…revealing their authors’ and editors’ worldviews and ideologies, rather than being taken as historically reliable depictions of everyday life. What actually happened can only be assumed hypothetically, on the basis of certain recognizable patterns in the sources.\textsuperscript{13}

These texts do not necessarily present the institution of slavery as it actually was, but as each author consciously decided to portray it. These presentations of slavery and the enslaved may be grounded in reality but may also be idealistic or satirical depictions. In any case, the ideology

\textsuperscript{10} Frederick Douglas, a 19th century abolitionist, wrote about his own experience with enslavement in his autobiography, \textit{Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, an American Slave} (Dublin: Webb and Chapman, 1845).

\textsuperscript{11} Bradley, \textit{Slavery and Society}, 7.


most often revealed by these authors, as noted above, was pro-slavery. The literary texts describe the world through the eye of the master, not of the enslaved.14

While Bradley’s images all come from the secular Roman world, one could easily compile a similar list of texts that illustrate the difficulty of talking about attitudes toward slavery among first-century Christian or Jewish communities.15 Consider the following images of slavery, all taken from the New Testament:

A slave of a certain centurion who was valuable to him was ill and about to die. When [the centurion] heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and cure his slave (Luke 7:2–3).16

The slave’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will cut him in two and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 24:50–51).17

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).18

14 Bradley’s third point, that Roman slavery must be thought of primarily in social terms rather than legal or economic terms, will be addressed below.

15 To juxtapose “Jewish” and “Christian” is problematic. In the first case, the two are not mutually exclusive (i.e., one could identify both as Christian and Jewish; this seems to have been the case for a significant number of early Christians). Second, recent critical scholarship has demonstrated the inadequacy of thinking of “Christianity” and “Judaism” as distinct, monolithic entities in the early centuries of the Common Era. Finally, during the period in question, “Jewish” is better understood as a cultural designation than a religious one, more accurately compared to terms like “Roman” than “Christian.” For more on these issues and others, see Adam Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., The Ways the Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007). For the sake of simplicity, here and throughout, I use the term “Christian” to refer to individuals and communities that could be categorized as “Jesus-followers,” many of whom were of Jewish decent and who, in all likelihood, continued to self-identify in one way or another as Jewish.

16 Ἐκατοντάρχου δὲ τινὸς δοῦλος κακῶς ἔχων ἡμελεῖν τελειτᾶν, ὡς ἤν αὐτῷ ἐντιμος, ἀκούσας δὲ περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀπέστειλεν πρὸς αὐτὸν πρεσβυτέρους τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ἐρωτῶν αὐτὸν ὅπως ἔλθων διασώσῃ τὸν δοῦλον αὐτοῦ.

17 ἦξει ὁ κύριος τοῦ δοῦλου ἐκείνου ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἢ οὗ προσδοκᾷ καὶ ἐν ὧρᾳ ἢ οὗ γινόσκει, καὶ διχοτομήσει αὐτὸν καὶ τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ὑποκριτῶν θήσεται· ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὄδοντων.

18 οὐκ ἐν Ἰουδαίος οὐδὲ Ἕλλην, οὐκ ἐν δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἐνι ἄρσεν καὶ θήλῃ· πάντες γὰρ ἡμεῖς εἰς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.
Slaves be obedient to your human masters as to Christ, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, not only when being watched, so as to curry favor, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, willingly serving the Lord and not human beings (Eph 6:5–7).19

I present these texts primarily to illustrate Bradley’s first point, highlighted above: the complexity of the question of slavery. In these few texts we see one master, the centurion, looking out for the wellbeing of an enslaved individual (or for his own economic wellbeing?) and another master bringing down tremendously harsh punishment.20 In some of the epistolary material we have texts that seem to portray Christian association as egalitarian, a place where enslaved persons live as equals with those of higher social status. Other texts reinforce the place of the enslaved beneath the master by equating obedience to an earthly master with obedience to Christ. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find a definitive statement of the appropriate Christian response to the pervasive institution of slavery. Inclusion of later Christian material serves only to further complicate the picture.21

Looking at Jewish literature yields similarly complex results. A number of legal texts in the Hebrew Bible suggest that Jews who are enslaved by other Jews (the “Hebrew slaves” of the

19 Οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου ἐν ἀπλότητι τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ, μὴ κατ᾽ ὀφθαλμοδούλησιν ὡς ἀνθρωπόπαρσοι ἄλλ᾽ ὡς δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ ποιοῦντες τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐκ ψυχῆς μετ᾽ εὐνοίας δουλεύοντες, ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ ὦκ ἀνθρώποις.

20 This punishment meted out in this parable may, of course, be symbolic of something spiritual or theological for the author of the Gospel (a discussion that I will return to in chapter 4). However, the image here of an enslaved person being severely punished by a slaveholder is not surprising or out of place in a first-century text.

21 Consider, for example, John Chrysostom’s warning against Christians having sexual relations with individuals whom they enslave (a warning he expected would disturb his listeners) in Homiliae in epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses 5. Consider also the numerous slave collars found which bear Christian iconography, or the collar discovered which reads “I am the slave of the archdeacon Felix. Hold me so that I do not flee” (Jennifer Glancy, “Slavery and the Rise of Christianity,” in The Cambridge World History of Slavery, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge [New York, NY: Cambridge, 2011], 477; idem, Slavery in Early Christianity, 9).
biblical and rabbinic texts) should be released at regular intervals (See Exod 21:2; Lev 25:40; Deut 15:12). Other biblical texts would seem to suggest that this regular manumission did not commonly take place (Jer. 34:8–11; Neh. 5:1–13). Josephus reports that numerous Jews were reduced to slavery by the Seleucid kings (e.g. B.J. 12.3.3.144), and also records accounts of the Hasmonean and Herodian kings enslaving the peoples whom they conquered (e.g. John Hyrcanus enslaving the captured inhabitants of Sebaste, B.J. 1.2.6–7, 63–65). In reference to the Essenes, Josephus says that they did not participate in slavery at all (A.J. 18.21). In contrast to this we read in numerous passages that Rabbi Gamaliel not only accepted slavery but was a slave owner himself (m. Mishlei 9; Sukkah 20b:11; Berakhot 16b:6). In Ben Sira we read that enslaved persons require only “bread and discipline and work,” and that those who caused problems for their owners may also receive “racks and torture” (Ben Sira 33:25–27).

Scholars have long been aware of all of these complexities and have set themselves to the task of parsing out the variety that they see in the sources in order to present a clear and accurate picture of slavery as it was practiced around the start of the Common Era. While an exhaustive recounting of all of this scholarship would be implausible, it will be helpful to set our own study in context by surveying how the scholarly consensus on ancient slavery has developed over the last century and a half. We will survey the following three questions in turn. First, how have scholars of classical antiquity described the Roman slave system? Second, how have scholars

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22 Whether or not the biblical distinction between Hebrew slaves and Canaanite slaves is indicative of a historical reality will be explored under “Jewish Slavery” below.

23 Because of the scope of the questions being surveyed and the quantity of material produced in the relevant fields, this survey will be representative and not comprehensive.
described Jewish attitudes toward slavery and its practice? Finally, in light of these previous questions, how have scholars of early Christianity understood slavery, particularly as it appears in the New Testament texts?

We will be using 1900 as an approximate terminus post quem for this survey of scholarship. While scholarly work on the subject of slavery was certainly produced before this time, most of it has not had a direct impact on the current consensus on the subject in our fields of inquiry. Much of the modern work produced on slavery prior to 1900 was focused primarily on making arguments for or against abolitionism, which is not of interest for our study. By focusing our overview on scholarship from 1900 forward, we will be able to highlight those works which have played an important role in modern study and which have been the most relevant in shaping the current consensus.

**Roman Slavery**

Scholars of classical antiquity have defined slavery in two ways, often referred to in modern works as the “legal” and “social” definitions of slavery. Scholars of the first group saw ancient slavery as a benign institution, far less severe and coercive than modern slavery, that temporarily limited the freedoms of the enslaved but that ultimately conferred upon them a number of benefits. Scholars in the second group approached the ancient evidence with more skepticism and, as a result, saw ancient slavery as a violent and coercive institution. This “new consensus”

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on ancient slavery could be summed up in the words of Orlando Patterson, who defined slavery as “the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons.”

Legal Definitions of Slavery: the “Old Consensus”

In 1908, W. Buckland published *The Roman Law of Slavery* which attempts to piece together what the Roman legal code said about enslaved persons. He emphasizes from the beginning of his work that slavery persisted in antiquity even though the Romans understood it as being contrary to the natural law (*ius naturale*); the enslaved individual is on the one hand a person (*persona*), but on the other hand is a piece of property (*res*) subject to “all ordinary transactions.” The first part of this monumental and methodical work deals with the enslaved as both a thing (*res*) and as a human being (*persona*). The second part deals with different methods of enslavement and of manumission, focusing specifically on the legal statements about these methods and their ramifications. Buckland’s work makes few arguments about slavery, opting instead to present a sort of catalog of the Roman law code as it pertained to slavery. He does, however, seem to take the legal texts as descriptive of the realities of ancient life (rather than as

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25 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 13. As we will see, Patterson is by no means the only scholar to hold this view. His definition of slavery serves here as a concise statement of the consensus among those who hold the “social” definition.


27 Buckland notes that *persona* is a polyvalent term that is not without its difficulties when discussing how Romans thought about enslaved persons. Ultimately, he concludes that “Roman lawyers called a slave a person, and this means that, for them, ‘persona’ meant human being” (Buckland, *Roman Law*, 4).

28 Buckland, *Roman Law*, 1, 11.
prescriptive or idealized). This sort of reading of the legal texts will lead the scholars who follow Buckland to a particular portrayal of ancient slavery, as we shall see.

In 1924 two articles were published by EDUARD MEYER,29 whom Moses Finley calls the “most prestigious ancient historian in the Germanic university world in the generation after Mommsen.”30 Meyer sees ancient slavery as a “by-product of the peculiar political development of the city-state.”31 He sees Greek and Roman societies as capitalist systems whose political development prevented free, hired labor from meeting all of their capitalist needs.32 This situation brought about the need for an increased labor force, which was procured by enslaving war captives. Eventually slavery was replaced by serfdom as enslaved persons became scarce, free labor became prohibitively expensive, and tenancy was no longer profitable.

Meyer was credited by William Westermann in 1935 for laying the foundation “of our contemporary understanding of slavery in Greek and Roman history.”33 Two elements in particular of Meyer’s depiction of slavery would gain traction and be repeated by scholars over the next fifty years. First, he argues that, given favorable conditions, enslaved persons were


[^30]: Finley, Modern Ideology, 44.

[^31]: Finley, Modern Ideology, 46.

[^32]: This is Finley’s summary of Meyer (Finley, Modern Ideology, 46). By “political development” here Meyer is referring to the extension of citizen rights to the lower classes.

capable of achieving financial success. Second, he argues that slavery succeeded in bringing racial diversity to Greek and Roman societies.34

In 1928, R. H. BARROW’s work Slavery in the Roman Empire was first published (it was reprinted in 1968).35 In the introduction Barrow writes “Ancient society was founded on slavery,” and admits that for modern readers this statement brings up images of a cruel institution, eliciting in the mind of the reader “the jangle of chains…the crack of whips…the scream of victims.”36 While he agrees that, in the long run, slavery as an institution of humanity is rightly condemnable, he writes that “we must not off-hand condemn [slavery’s] past as utterly and entirely bad.”37 “The Romans wanted work done,” he writes, and “they impressed non-Romans to do it.”38

The question that Barrow attempts to answer in his book is “What was the nature of the servitude into which these non-Romans were impressed?” He finds that there was very little that separated the enslaved from the free.39 Slavery could be thought of in modern terms as an apprenticeship into an art or craft (albeit a compulsory one).40 This “apprenticeship” had the potential of offering the enslaved a measure of success, and would prepare them to live

34 See discussion in Finley, Modern Ideology, 46–47.
36 Barrow, Slavery, xiv.
37 Barrow, Slavery, xv.
38 Barrow, Slavery, xv.
39 Barrow, Slavery, 170.
40 Barrow, Slavery, 60.
successful lives as Roman citizens when they were inevitably freed.\textsuperscript{41} If the former-slave prospered as a freedman, writes Barrow, “he could sometimes thank the system of slavery.”\textsuperscript{42}

Shortly after Barrow’s book was published another work emerged that dealt not with the enslaved but with freedmen: A. M. Duff’s \textit{Freedmen in the Early Roman Empire}.\textsuperscript{43} Most relevant for our exploration here is Duff’s chapter on manumission. He begins by asserting that the Romans, unlike the Greeks, showed “[great] liberality in the freeing of their slaves,” to the point that manumission was a general expectation of those who were enslaved in urban settings.\textsuperscript{44} Among the reasons for freeing enslaved persons, he notes “disinterested altruism,” saying “frequently a master felt it a matter of common justice that a slave should be freed” on the basis of the enslaved person’s level of education or culture.\textsuperscript{45} He also notes that, by the first and especially the second centuries, Stoic teachings had instilled into the minds of the Roman elite “the doctrine of universal brotherhood,” which would often lead to manumission.\textsuperscript{46} Finally, he argues that the close bond felt between the master and particular enslaved individuals—nurses,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Barrow, \textit{Slavery}, 63.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Barrow, \textit{Slavery}, 171.
\item \textsuperscript{43} A. M. Duff, \textit{Freedmen in the Early Roman Empire} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1928). Another study of freedmen, that of Susan Treggiari (\textit{Roman Freedman During the Late Republic} [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969]) also favors the legal definition when dealing with questions of slavery. It will not be explored in detail here since it deals solely with the late Republican period.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Duff, \textit{Freedmen}, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Duff, \textit{Freedmen}, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Duff, \textit{Freedmen}, 19.
\end{itemize}
teachers, and those born in the master’s house to enslaved parents (venae)—often prompted the master to grant them freedom.⁴⁷

William Westermann studied slavery in the Ptolemaic period and a number of other aspects of slavery in Greece and Rome. His early work on the subject included the article on slavery in Pauly’s Réalencyclopâdie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft.⁴⁸ His life’s work was later compiled into the book The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity which was published in 1955, shortly after his death.⁴⁹ Regarding this book Joseph Vogt wrote “Here, at last, was a book in which all aspects of slavery in antiquity from Homer to Justinian were presented largely from the point of view of economic and social history, and of modern approaches to source-analysis.”⁵⁰ Regarding slavery in Roman imperial times Westermann argues that Roman legal texts provide evidence of an intentional move by the Romans to “improve the social and legal status of slaves.”⁵¹ He also argues, along with Barrow, that the distinction between enslaved and free was beginning to disappear and that the enslaved could expect to be treated with greater kindness than in earlier periods.⁵²

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⁵⁰ Vogt, Ancient Slavery, 182.
⁵¹ Byron, Recent Research, 24.
⁵² Westermann, Slave Systems, 114. John Crook’s 1967 work Law and Life of Rome (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967) argues, agreeing with Westermann, that by the first century CE the Romans had begun to enact legislation which was aimed at improving the lot of the enslaved (p. 56). Like many of the other scholars that fall into this category, he does not see a sharp divide between enslaved and free but rather sees “something much
Westermann also speaks directly to the question of Christian attitudes toward slavery during the Roman period. He finds evidence that Christians continued to “own and employ [slaves] in much the same degree and manner as their pagan contemporaries.” However, the status distinction between enslaved and free, limited already in the secular world, was of no consequence whatsoever within the Christian communities. Christian teaching, though it did not lead to the abolition of slavery, did, according to Westermann, lead to increasingly humane treatment of enslaved persons by masters within Christian communities.

In 1951, Joseph Vogt announced that the Mainz Academy of Science and Literature was beginning a large research program into ancient slavery. While Vogt’s previous works on antiquity had largely ignored slavery, in the decade following the announcement he published a number of articles and books on the subject. Regarding slavery among the Greeks, he writes that the institutional loss of humanity was “part of the sacrifice that had to be paid for [the] achievement” of the Greek polis and civilization. By the time of the Roman Empire, however,

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53 Westermann, Slave Systems, 117.

54 Westermann, Slave Systems, 117. For suggestions as to why Christian teaching did not lead to the abolition of slavery, see Westermann’s conclusion (Slave Systems, 161–62).

55 Finley, Modern Ideology, 55.

56 Several of Vogt’s articles have been compiled and published as Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). For other work done by the Mainz Academy on the subject, see Vogt’s bibliographic essay (Ancient Slavery, 211–17).

legal action had been taken to ameliorate the system and introduce more humane treatment.\(^{58}\)

While slavery itself should in no way be thought of as humane\(^ {59}\) it did promote relationships between masters and the enslaved that could be characterized by intimacy, trust, and friendship, especially in imperial times.\(^ {60}\)

Vogt also argues that, from its inception, Christianity opposed slavery. “It is true,” he writes, that Christians “[accepted] slavery as an institution.” However, while Christians continued to enslave people in a legal sense, “a new kind of evaluation of property and power had appeared” in their communities which made the social contrast between enslaved persons and free persons completely relative.\(^ {61}\) What is more, slavery is “ennobled” by its use as a symbol for the place of humanity in God’s kingdom. The only “slavery” that mattered was the service rendered to God by the believer.

This was the state of the consensus at the beginning of the 1970s.\(^ {62}\) While each of these scholars’ contributions were unique, there are a number of threads that they have in common. Each of them emphasizes the idea that, in the time of the Roman Empire, legal steps were being taken to improve the lot of the enslaved. Related to this is the idea, common among many of


\(^ {60}\) Vogt, *Ancient Slavery*, 105. Vogt says of these relationships that they brought about, in a small way, “a sort of self-purification of the whole polluted system” (*Ancient Slavery*, 121).


\(^ {62}\) More specifically, this was the state of the western consensus. This presentation has ignored, for the moment, the dispute between Marxist and non-Marxist historians regarding ancient slavery. Marxist theories of slavery will be briefly addressed below.
these scholars, that there was little practical distinction between enslaved and free. This was especially the case in Christian communities, where the distinction had all but disappeared. For these authors, slavery brought with it training in important skills, the possibility of success, and the likelihood of manumission. As an institution, it served as a mechanism for integrating foreigners into Roman society.

Social Definitions of Slavery: the “New Consensus”

The earliest challenges to the “legal” definitions of slavery come from before our period. Finley writes that such challenges “[go] back at least to 1848, when [KARL MARX’s] Communist Manifesto declared that ‘The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.’” Marxists scholars argued that ancient society was dependent on the slave mode of production. The masters and enslaved persons of antiquity were depicted as representative of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and as completely at odds. Revolts of the enslaved population were understood as proletarian uprisings and were said to demonstrate the discontent felt by the enslaved. Finley laments that scholarship on ancient slavery had become “a battleground


between Marxists and non-Marxists” and “a political issue rather than a historical phenomenon.”

It was MOSES FINLEY who offered the first non-Marxist challenge to the “legal” consensus with the publication of the first edition of The Ancient Economy in 1973. This volume, although dealing primarily with larger economic issues, devotes over thirty pages to “Masters and Slaves.” In this chapter, Finley raises the question of the enslaved individual’s experience of slavery. To understand this experience, he writes, one must consider “the deracination of the slave from both homeland and kin; the implication of the ubiquitous ‘boy’ as a form of address for male slaves of any age; [and] the impact on sexual mores.” While these issues were ultimately “outside the limits” of Finley’s larger discussion, his inclusion of them marks his work as very different from the scholarship that came before.

Much of Finley’s work on slavery is presented as a direct challenge to many of the scholars who shaped the “legal” consensus described above. In his 1980 work, Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology, he confronts the work of Meyer, Westermann (who was Finley’s teacher),


66 M. I. Finley, The Ancient Economy (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973). This volume does not represent Finley’s earliest published thoughts on slavery. In 1959 he published an article exploring the importance of slavery in ancient Greece (“Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labour?” 145–64) in which he questioned the prevailing view that the lack of serious slave revolts represented a general feeling of acceptance among the enslaved population, noting simply “There are many ways, other than revolt, in which slaves can protest” (p. 159). This idea would get further developed by Bradley three decades later. Finley also published a dissenting review of Westermann’s 1935 encyclopedia article “Sklaverei” in Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung 5 (1936): 441–42.

67 Finley, Ancient Economy, 82–83. As an example of what he calls “the impact on sexual mores” Finley notes the fictional freedman, Trimalchio, who describes his sexual exploitation by his master and mistress when he was enslaved and his subsequent exploitation of the individuals whom he enslaved (Petronius, Satyricon 69.3; 75.11).

68 Finley, Ancient Economy, 82–83.
and Vogt. In general, he finds that these scholars often made arguments about ancient slavery founded on exceptional cases, or on silence in the source material. He also emphasizes the fact that the literary sources employed by his predecessors “[represented] the views and hopes of the slaveowning class, not of the slaves themselves” and therefore can only provide evidence about “the ideology of the free.”

His conclusion on the issue of “Slavery and Humanity” illustrates the difference he sees between his own work and the conclusions drawn by the scholars who came before him; there must be “a sharp distinction between more or less humane treatment of individual slaves by individual masters and the inhumanity of slavery as an institution.”

Finley’s opposition to Meyer is particularly relevant, not because of any specific argument he makes against Meyer’s work but because of his answer to the question “How did [Meyer’s work] achieve the standing it so rapidly acquired?” On this question he writes,

> What Meyer provided, I suggest, was authoritative support and comfort, in a general way rather than in its chain of specific propositions, for already generally accepted views, or at least predispositions, for the ideology of professional ancient historians. And it was so welcome that they closed their eyes to the technical weaknesses.

This conclusion offers insight not only into the wide acceptance of Meyer by his contemporaries, but also into the continued acceptance of the older consensus understanding of slavery by

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70 Finley, *Modern Ideology*, 93–94.


scholars (especially biblical scholars) today. Finley’s suggestion that scholars willingly close their eyes to the difficulties of these older positions simply because they provide comfort or support for already held views must be seriously considered.

The scholarly view of Roman slavery as benign was also confronted by Keith Hopkins in 1978 in his work *Conquerors and Slaves.* Hopkins recognized that the majority of the accounts of Roman slavery focused on “those elements in Roman philosophy, literature and law which point to the humanitarian treatment of slaves, and to the willing loyalty of some slaves to their masters.” To contrast this, he says, the vicious and coercive nature of Roman slavery must also be emphasized. For instance, when speaking of manumission, Hopkins highlights the economic benefits to the master, not just the benefits enjoyed by the formerly enslaved, who often still continued to serve their former master in some way.

The early 1980’s saw the publication of two works that would become the cornerstone of the new consensus in classical scholarship concerning the nature of ancient slavery. The first of these important texts was *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* written by sociologist Orlando Patterson. The second, published two years later and without knowledge of Patterson’s

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76 Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 121.

77 Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 131.

78 Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
work, was *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* by historian Keith Bradley.\(^{79}\)

**Orlando Patterson’s** work, as the title suggests, is a sociological study that compares “genuine slave societies”—a term he borrowed from Finley\(^{80}\)—throughout history in order to define universal facets of slavery as an institution. In his brief introduction he sets out the constituent elements of slavery and offers a definition of slavery that we have already said succinctly summarizes the “social” consensus: “slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons.”\(^{81}\) Patterson’s definition of slavery presents an institution that is far from positive. On the contrary, it is “created and maintained by violence.”\(^{82}\) Enslaved persons are separated from family and ethnic ties to the extent that they “died” socially.\(^{83}\)

Patterson hesitated to utilize Roman legal material to reconstruct the realities of Roman slavery. He understands the Roman laws of ownership (*dominium*) as creating an intentional “legal fiction” which allowed the enslaved person to be classified as a thing (*res*) even though he

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80 Although Finley is sometimes overlooked in discussions of the social definitions of slavery, Patterson begins his work by recognizing the “intellectual debt” owed to Finley by “all of us who work on the comparative study of slavery.” Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, xii.

81 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 13.

82 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 3.

83 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5, 28.
was a human being. This fiction, being created by and maintained for the benefit of the slaveholding class, was recognized by Patterson as being problematic historically. His unwillingness to rely on legal texts sets his work apart from many of the earlier scholars.

In addition to his groundbreaking monograph, Patterson contributed an article to *Semeia* in 1998 entitled “Paul, Slavery and Freedom: Personal and Socio-Historical Reflections” in which he presents what he calls a “critical three-fold distinction...between slaves, the institution of slavery, and slave society” that must be kept in mind when discussing the attitudes presented by ancient authors. Slaves he defines as “those real, individual persons who are held in the condition of slavery where the institution exists.” Slavery, he says, “was a coercively maintained relation of total domination between persons in which the slave had no independent social or legal existence...[and] was conceived of as a deracinated, socially dead person.” Finally, slave society was “the social system based on the institution of slavery in which slaves and slavery came to play critical, and often indispensable roles.” Recognizing the distinction between these three levels—the personal, the institutional, and the systematic—is important if one is to understand how an ancient author is interacting with “slavery.”

Patterson argues that, when discussing moral judgments made by historical figures toward “slavery” one must first ascertain whether “slavery” in the text is operating on a personal,

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84 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 30–31.

85 Orlando Patterson, “Paul, Slavery and Freedom: Personal and Socio-Historical Reflections,” *Semeia* 83–84 (1998): 266. Here Patterson is dealing specifically with Paul, but his observations can apply to the other New Testament authors and more broadly to any ancient author.

institutional, or systematic level. “My basic argument,” he writes, “is that...there was wide
latitude in the moral space open to individuals in their personal attitudes toward slaves, but
virtually no room for moral or conceptual doubt about the institution of slavery or slave society
where it existed.” Thus, he argues, we should not be surprised that Christian authors (or
specifically Paul) did not call for the abolition of slavery, since this would involve a moral
judgment against the institution or system of slavery that the ancients took for granted. On the
other hand, there existed a “wide moral space” within which these authors might express their
attitudes toward enslaved individuals and their plight.

Keith Bradley begins Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire with the observation
that

The historiography of ancient slavery has been traditionally apologetic in one way or
another and it is not until recent times that the realization has begun to set in among
scholars that there is something distinctly unpalatable about slavery in antiquity. Indeed
in some quarters apologetic influences are still at work.

Like Finley, Hopkins, and Patterson, Bradley argues that “the Roman slavery system as a whole
was by nature oppressive and was maintained for the benefit of the privileged only.” He argues
against the prevailing idea from earlier scholarship that enslaved persons enjoyed relatively
secure family lives, that they could expect manumission, and that they were easily compelled to
complete the work set before them. He argues instead that slave owners encouraged family life

88 Patterson, “Paul, Slavery and Freedom,” 269.
89 Bradley, Slaves and Masters, 19.
among the enslaved as a means of manipulating their behavior. Similarly, manumission was promised (and often given) as a reward for faithful service in order to maintain compliance among the enslaved. When these methods failed, masters had the legal authority to resort to more violent forms of manipulation.

Bradley also addressed the idea, common to the “legal” consensus, that the infrequency of large-scale revolts in antiquity was evidence for a general contentment among the enslaved population. In 1989 he published *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World 140 B.C. – 70 B.C.* which describes the three major slave revolts as “historical accidents” as opposed to “revolutionary mass movements.” Additionally, he points to other various forms of resistance to slavery that were more common, including flight, sloth, petty sabotage, and even such extremes as suicide or murder.

Concerning the alleged role of Christianity in the amelioration of institutional slavery, Bradley wrote

> The stress contained in [the Christian] injunctions on servile obedience is remarkable for a religion which taught the spiritual equality of all mankind, and what this reflects is an unqualified acceptance of the existing social structures in which they found themselves by early Christians.

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91 Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World 140 B.C.–70 B.C.* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 126–27. Here Bradley is also arguing against the position, common in Marxist scholarship, that the uprisings that did occur in Roman Italy among the enslaved populace should be thought of as revolutionary uprisings by the oppressed proletariat.

92 Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion*, 18–45. See also a similar discussion in Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, 107–31.

93 Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 38.
For Bradley, the rise of Christianity “brought no substantial change” to the institution of slavery. Whatever Christian teaching might have to say about human equality, it produced “no impulse to abolish slavery.”

Throughout his work, Bradley argues that it is necessary to understand slavery primarily as a social institution. The social relationship that bound the enslaved to their masters was one of a number of “asymmetrical relationships” that tied individuals together in the Roman world. The younger Seneca, as an example, lists a number of these relationships: emperor and subject, father and son, teacher and pupil, officer and soldier (De Clementia 1.16.2). Similarly, Christian authors of the first two centuries understood the relationship between masters and the enslaved alongside other social relationships, especially the relationship between husband and wife, and between father and son. Scholars before Finley had defined slavery in legal terms (looking at the legal rights and position of the enslaved). Finley himself tended to define slavery using economic terms (thinking of the enslaved as property). This argument from Bradley represented a major shift in how slavery had been understood; it was primarily a relationship between persons.

In 2011, Cambridge University Press published the first volume of its Cambridge World History of Slavery which focused on slavery in the ancient Mediterranean world, edited by Keith


95 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 4. For more on such “asymmetrical relationships,” see Richard P. Saller, Personal Patronage under the early Empire (New York: Cambridge, 1982), 7–39.

96 See, as a prime example, the New Testament household codes (Eph 5:22–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1; 1 Pet 2:13–3:7). Tertullian sees the relationships between husband and wife, father and son, and master and enslaved as making up the basic structure of society (Apologeticus 3.4).
Bradley and Paul Cartledge. Its twenty-two chapters deal with various elements of slavery in Greco-Roman antiquity, all from the “social” perspective favored in the new consensus; slavery is called the “most extreme form of unfreedom” in which “the slave was conceptualized as a commodity, akin to livestock, and was owned by a master who had full capacity to alienate his human property,” and in which any “sense of personhood [was] denied.” The contributions in this volume have served to demonstrate the centrality of this violent and dominating institution in ancient Mediterranean life.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the authors who have driven historical scholarship toward the new consensus is a methodological one; it is a way of reading the texts of antiquity that recognize the inherent biases of their elite, typically pro-slavery authors. Rather than accepting the ancient texts at face-value, these scholars approach their interpretation with a measure of skepticism and/or suspicion. Harrill notes that, while a surface reading of an ancient slave text might allow for an egalitarian reading, closer more skeptical examination of


98 The one exception being Daniel Snell’s chapter, “Slavery in the ancient Near East.” The introduction says that this chapter serves as an “overview” after which the volume moves on to its “principal concern” (Bradley and Cartledge, History of Slavery, 1).

99 Bradley and Cartledge, History of Slavery, 2.

100 Merold Westphal makes a helpful distinction between “skepticism” and “suspicion,” writing “Skepticism is directed toward the elusiveness of things, while suspicion is directed toward the evasiveness of consciousness. Skepticism seeks to overcome the opacity of facts, while suspicion seeks to uncover the duplicity of persons” (Merold Westphal, Suspicion and Faith: The Religious Use of Modern Atheism [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 13).
such texts often supports readings that reinforce the hierarchical structures that hold the enslaved under the domination of their masters.\textsuperscript{101}

As an example, Harrill discusses a letter of Pliny the Younger (Letter 8.1) in which Pliny describes how he spares no expense in the care and treatment of the enslaved Encolpius, his \textit{lector}, who has become ill. The surface reading, he argues, might portray Pliny as a caring, fatherly figure who shows great concern for this enslaved individual. A closer reading, however, shows that Pliny’s true concerns are for himself and for his own literary work. He writes that the illness of Encolpius “will be…a great loss to me if this makes him unfit for his services to literature” (Pliny, Letters 8.1.2–3). Encolpius needs to be healthy for Pliny’s sake.\textsuperscript{102}

This new way of reading texts, which actively seeks to identify the biases and ideologies of the slaveholding elite authors, has had a tremendous impact on the way that historians understand slavery in the ancient world (as we have seen above). Such a methodology would also prove beneficial to biblical scholars, particularly as they deal with topics like slavery in the biblical texts.\textsuperscript{103} While some have begun to read the biblical slave passages with the skepticism of the historians (as we will see below), this hermeneutic of suspicion has many more insights to offer as it is more broadly applied to the New Testament texts.

\textsuperscript{101} Harrill, “Paul and Slavery,” 2:301–2.

\textsuperscript{102} Harrill, “Paul and Slavery,” 2:301–2.

\textsuperscript{103} Such a hermeneutic of suspicion already plays an important role in liberationist exegesis, particularly in feminist exegesis. See A. Katherine Grieb, “Feminist or Faithful? How Scripture Teaches a Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” \textit{STRev} 41, no. 3 (1998): 261.
Historians have continued to parse out the implications of this new understanding of slavery for life in the Roman world, building on the foundations laid by Finley, Patterson, and Bradley. This new consensus on a “social” definition for slavery, although allowing for the varied experiences of individual enslaved persons, recognizes the violent and coercive nature of Roman slavery as an institution. Slavery was maintained solely for the benefit of the slaveholders. The many “benefits” for the enslaved that had previously been identified were simply methods utilized by the slaveholder to maintain control; these benefits were by far outweighed by slavery’s dehumanizing elements. As Bradley concludes “Slavery represents the polar opposite of everything laudable in Greco-Roman civilization, an abomination for which no apology is possible and in which no redeeming features can be found.”

Jewish Slavery

Scholarship investigating the question of Jewish slavery has developed along lines similar to those explored above. Early scholars tended more toward a “legal” definition of slavery, taking the biblical texts about fair treatment and manumission of the enslaved as descriptive of standard practice among Jewish communities. These scholars tended to argue that slavery among the Jews was a more benevolent institution (or absent entirely). More recent scholarship has approached

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these same texts with a measure of skepticism, arguing that they represent social ideals rather than historical realities. For this latter group, slavery among the Jews, though perhaps less prevalent numerically than in Roman Italy, was no less coercive in nature.

Jewish Slavery as Uniquely Benevolent

In the Hebrew Bible we see enslaved Jews\textsuperscript{106} depicted as temporary bondsmen who are given their freedom in the Sabbatical Year (see Exod 21:2–3; Lev 25:40–41; Deut 15:12). Scholars in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries assumed on the basis of these texts that it was impossible for Jews to be chattel slaves of other Jews. They also argued that, after the Babylonian exile, enslavement of Jews by Jews was no longer practiced and that Jewish slaveholders treated the non-Jewish persons whom they enslaved humanely.\textsuperscript{107} Many of these studies were written, according to Catherine Hezser, “in a German-Jewish context in which Jews were eager to assimilate into a predominantly Christian society.”\textsuperscript{108} Much of the scholarship on slavery in this period was focused on the issue of abolitionism. Within this context, argues Hezser, the work of these Jewish scholars should be read as apologetic rather than purely

\begin{itemize}
  \item Here and elsewhere in this section, we are referring to individuals who are enslaved by Jewish masters. Thus here, “enslaved Jews” serves as a sort of shorthand for “Jewish persons enslaved by other Jewish persons.”
  \item Hezser, “Slavery and the Jews,” 438.
\end{itemize}
historical, attempting to show that Jewish moral values were equal to or even superior to those of their Christian neighbors.\textsuperscript{109}

In 1937, \textsc{Salo Wittmayer Baron} published the first volume of \textit{A Social and Religious History of the Jews}.\textsuperscript{110} Like earlier scholars, Baron argues that Jewish slavery was disappearing in the Second Temple Period, citing “the antipathy of the nationalist and democratic Pharisees to the enslavement of a Jew even by a coreligionist.”\textsuperscript{111} The rabbis, he says, argued that Jewish slaveholders were compelled to provide for any Jewish person whom they enslaved a standard of living equal to their own, thus the popular proverb “Whosoever buys a Hebrew slave acquires a master unto himself.”\textsuperscript{112} Although Baron recognizes the possibility that these statements may represent rabbinic “idealism…rather than daily practice,” he ultimately concludes that “the existence of a large class of Hebrew slaves [was] highly improbable.”\textsuperscript{113}

The early 1960s saw the publication of two important works on slavery among the Jews in the Second Temple Period, one by \textsc{Solomon Zeitlin}\textsuperscript{114} and the other by \textsc{Ephraim Urbach}.\textsuperscript{115}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{111} Baron, \textit{History of the Jews}, 267.
\textsuperscript{112} Baron, \textit{History of the Jews}, 267. See Qiddushin 20a.
\textsuperscript{113} Baron, \textit{History of the Jews}, 268. It is worth noting that Baron says almost nothing about the presence or numbers of Gentiles enslaved by Jews in his short section dealing with the subject.
\end{footnotes}
Zeitlin notes that ancient society was dependent on slavery. The Jewish sages, like the Stoic philosophers did not advocate for abolition, rather they taught that enslaved persons were human beings and should be treated with a measure of dignity and humanity.\footnote{Zeitlin, “Slavery,” 185.} He agrees with previous scholars that slavery was abolished among the Jews in the post-exilic period and even extends this abolition to include the elimination of debt-bondage.\footnote{Zeitlin, “Slavery,” 194. For the continuance of this practice in Syria and Egypt see Zeitlin, “Slavery,” 197.} He also argues that the sages “favored the manumission of gentile slaves.”\footnote{Zeitlin, “Slavery,” 217.} Urbach likewise recognizes that slavery persisted among the Jewish communities, and the rabbinic texts continue to distinguish between “Hebrew and Canaanite slaves.” For Urbach, however, references in these texts to “Hebrew slaves” are a reflection of the pre-Maccabean era, after which Jews no longer enslaved other Jews.\footnote{Urbach, “Laws Regarding Slavery,” 87–88.}

Joachim Jeremias’ work \textit{Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus} was published in English translation in 1969.\footnote{Joachim Jeremias, \textit{Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into the Economic and Social Conditions During the New Testament Period}, trans. F. H. and C. H. Cave (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).} His treatment of slavery in first-century Palestine deals mostly with the phenomenon of Jewish enslavement of fellow Jews. He writes that previous arguments which stated that it was impossible for Jews to enslave other Jews were speculative, and that both the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinic texts seem to take such slavery for granted.\footnote{Jeremias, \textit{Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus}, 110–11.} Though this sort of slavery existed in Jesus’s time, he says, it was rare and the number Jews enslaved by other Jews
in Palestine would have been quite low. Additionally, Jeremias argues that for these few enslaved Jews “slavery was not considered disreputable” and they could expect humane treatment, exemption from more degrading tasks, and freedom offered after six years of service.

The biblical distinction between the “Hebrew slave” and the “Canaanite slave” plays an important role in the scholarship on Jewish slavery. JOSEPH VOGT sees the Jewish conduct toward enslaved Jews, especially their preferential treatment and the practice of regular manumission, as exceptional in the ancient world. GREGORY CHIRICHIGNO explains the distinction between Hebrew and Canaanite slaves as essentially the distinction between debt-bondage and chattel slavery. ANTHONY PHILLIPS makes a similar suggestion, arguing that the “Hebrew Slave” of Exod 21:2 should be understood to be an enslaved, free-born male Israelite. He writes “These indigenous debt-slaves, unlike the foreign slaves drawn from prisoners of war, are not to lose their freedom for all time.” Their bondage was “an unfortunate fact of current economic life…[but] was deplored and a limit [was] set on its duration.”

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122 Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, 312.

123 Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, 312–14, 348. Jeremias contrasts the experience of enslaved Jews with that of enslaved Gentiles, whom he says had very little chance of ever obtaining freedom (p. 335) and whose social position was “abysmal” (p. 351).

124 Vogt, Ancient Slavery, 40–41.


126 Anthony Phillips, Essays on Biblical Law, JSOTSup 344 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 109. He argues that the other provisions made with respect to the enslaved (Exod 21:20–21, 26–27, 32) apply to both enslaved men and women, regardless of origin.
SAMUEL ADAMS’ work, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea*, mentions only this sort of debt-slavery. 127

PAUL FLESHER contributes an interesting perspective to this discussion. On the one hand, he describes the distinction between Hebrew and Canaanite slaves in terms similar to those scholars who we’ve noted previously.

Hebrew servants are Israelites who have become indentured servants. They are not permanent slaves. Despite the tie to their master, they stand independent of him. Conversely, foreign slaves are mere chattels. Legally, Scripture grants them a few more rights than other forms of property, but not as many as dependent persons. 128

On the other hand, Flesher points out that the distinction between Hebrew and Canaanite slaves is rare in the Mishnah (it is found in just six of the 129 passages dealing with enslaved persons and slavery as an institution), only appearing when commenting on scriptural passages that themselves deal explicitly with these two categories. 129 Additionally, it should be pointed out, Flesher’s work does not intend to present these texts as revealing historical realities. Rather he argues that the rabbinic texts are describing a fictitious, idealized Israelite society. 130

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127 Samuel L. Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 77–80. Chattel slavery is mentioned only to distinguish it from debt-slavery, and all references to slavery that follow seem to be speaking of the latter variety.


129 Flesher, *Oxen, Women, or Citizens*, 36.

130 A society that, although idealized, still includes free Jewish persons enslaving both Jews and Gentiles.
Peter Garnsey briefly addresses Jewish views on slavery in his 1996 work *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine.* He writes, in agreement with the scholars already mentioned, that “the ancient Israelites practiced a dual system of slavery” in which only the enslavement of foreigners was considered a permanent condition while the reduction of a fellow Israelite to slavery was “considered regrettable.” Jewish slavery resembled indentured servitude; enslaved Jews were able to maintain family ties and some measure of independence. The relationship of the enslaved person to the master was “basically contractual.”

Jewish Slavery as Unexceptional

Dale Martin’s essay “Slavery and the Ancient Jewish Family” sets out to make “the unremarkable point that Jewishness itself had little if any relevance for the structures of slavery among the Jews.” He argues, against the prevailing view, that slavery among the Jewish people of the Greco-Roman period was not significantly different than slavery as practiced by others. The three major differences between slavery among the Jews and slavery among the Romans were “peculiarities of Roman social structures,” not the result of Jewish teachings.

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131 Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). It should be noted that Garnsey has appeared in our discussion of Roman slavery as a proponent of the “social” definition of slavery.


135 Martin, “Slavery and Family,” 128–29. The three differences noted by Martin are as follows: those enslaved by Jews did not receive anything akin to citizenship upon manumission, enslaved persons manumitted by Jewish slaveholders did not owe their former owner any sort of *operae*, and finally slavery in Palestine may not have contributed to the agricultural workforce in as meaningful a way as it did in Roman Italy. (Martin is less confident in the evidence on the final point.)
After noting the difficulties in reconstructing the realities of slavery from scriptural and rabbinic sources (which are often used to argue that slavery played a limited role in Jewish communities), Martin argues that “we have firm evidence from other sources that slavery was indeed an important part of the household structures of Jewish families in Judea and elsewhere in the first century.” He goes on to present inscriptional and papyrological evidence, ranging from the third century BCE until the third century CE, that Jews were both enslaved and enslavers. This evidence suggests “that slavery among Jewish families differed little if at all from slavery among those non-Jewish families surrounding them.”

TAL ILAN’s book Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine, published in 1995, contains a small but significant discussion of enslaved women (she uses the term “maidservants”) among the Jewish communities of the Second Temple period. She writes that it is commonly assumed that enslaved persons (both male and female) owned by Jews during the Second Temple period were Gentiles, “but this claim seems more apologetic than based in fact.” On the contrary, the authors and editors of the Jewish sources from this period assumed, at least theoretically, “that Jews could hold other Jewish slaves.”

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139 Ilan, Jewish Women, 207–8.
140 Ilan, Jewish Women, 205.
A central focus of Ilan’s contribution is her emphasis on the vulnerability of enslaved women to sexual exploitation. She argues that Jewish writings on “the problem of the maidservant” tend to reflect an issue that is “universal” where the enslavement of women is concerned: “their lack of freedom turned them not only into instruments of labor but also into sexual objects for their owners’ use.” And while the ethical writings of the period criticized such practices, the central concern of the halakhah was to protect the interests of the owner and not the enslaved. Such a portrayal of Jewish slavery is a direct contradiction to the view of previous scholars that Jewish slavery was uniquely benevolent.

In 2005, Catherine Hezser provided a detailed examination of slavery in ancient Judaism. She argues that the literary sources often used to downplay the role of slavery among the Jewish communities are reflective of “their authors’ and editors’ worldviews and ideologies” and should not be assumed to present historical realities. She goes on to argue that “there is no doubt that slavery existed as an institutionalized system in Roman Palestine... just as it did in

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141 Ilan, Jewish Women, 207.

142 Ilan offers as an example of such criticism the passage in Ben Sira in which sons are warned against having relations with their maidservants (41.22) and the saying, attributed to Hillel, who allegedly said “the more maidservants, the more lewdness” (m. Abot 2.7).

143 For example, Ilan notes that Sif. Qedoshim 9.13, 92a permits a father and son to have sexual intercourse with the same woman so long as that woman is enslaved (Ilan, Jewish Women, 206).


145 Hezser, “Slavery and the Jews,” 439. This is the same point made by Finley, Patterson, and Bradley above with regards to Roman slavery.
Roman Italy, even if mass slavery was a particularly Roman phenomenon.” 146 What the sources seem to indicate is that slavery was “an established part of the socio-economic structure of the land of Israel from biblical times onward.” 147 The biblical injunctions to regularly release enslaved Jews, Hezser argues, are idealized and were likely never enforced. Thus, there was little difference between enslaved persons who were Jewish and those who were not, and Jewish manumission practices seem to have closely resembled Roman practices. 148 Although there were minor differences, slavery in Jewish and in Greco-Roman society were, in practice, largely the same.

To say that the views of Martin, Ilan, and Hezser represent a new consensus among scholars of Jewish antiquity would be an overstatement. What we can say is that these scholars have begun to approach the literary evidence with an appropriate amount of skepticism, recognizing that these texts were produced by the slaveholding class and that they may or may not have reflected the lived reality of their times. It is fair, I think, to say that they have taken some of the methodological habits of Finley, Patterson, and Bradley and applied them to the study of Jewish slavery. In doing so they have concluded that Jewish slavery was not as distinct from Roman slavery as is often argued.

146 Hezser, Jewish Slavery, 9.
147 Hezser, Jewish Slavery, 320.
148 Hezser, Jewish Slavery, 321.
Slavery in New Testament Studies

New Testament scholars have shown great interest in Roman and Jewish notions of slavery since both of these cultural contexts can inform the way we understand the early Christian traditions, especially the New Testament documents. Since a comprehensive survey of this issue would prove unwieldy, we will offer a representative overview which highlights those authors whose works have had the greatest impact on the field. This overview will proceed in four sections. The first two will demonstrate a line of development within New Testament studies, similar to that which has already been seen in the study of Roman and Jewish slavery, that begins with a benign, “legal” understanding of slavery and then moves toward a more coercive, “social” understanding. The other two sections will offer a broad sketch of how these two understandings of slavery have impacted the way that scholars have interpreted Christian texts that deal with slavery and the enslaved, first in Paul and then in the Synoptic Gospels.

Slavery as Benign in New Testament Studies

In 1875, J. B. Lightfoot wrote a commentary on Colossians and Philemon which provided a depiction of first-century slavery which was based on ancient literary works.149 Byron credits Lightfoot with beginning “a new fashion of commenting” which was interested in historical context and exegesis rather than being ideologically driven.150 Lightfoot argues that Colossians “declares the absolute equality of the freeman and the slave in the sight of God,” and that within this text “a principle is boldly enunciated which must in the end prove fatal to

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slavery.¹⁵¹ Lightfoot’s conclusion that the distinction between enslaved and free was inconsequential, at least among the Christian community, will be repeated by scholars like Westermann and Vogt, as we have already seen.

The picture of ancient slavery as a benign institution pervaded New Testament scholarship, as it did classical and historical scholarship, through most of the 20th century. ADOLF VON HARNACK argues that enslaved persons were full members of Christian communities and were seen as equal to their freeborn counterparts.¹⁵² GUSTAV DEISSMANN sees Paul’s use of slave language in terms of the Roman practice of “sacral manumission.” The concept of “redemption” in Paul is also understood in this context. Early Christians caught this reference in the apostle’s writings and, adapting the Roman ritual, began manumitting the enslaved within the church (manumissio in ecclesia).¹⁵³ EDGAR GOODSPEED, arguing against popular historian W. H. van Loon, says that Paul showed a “definite concern for slaves” as evidenced by his own self designation as a slave, by his concern for the enslaved Onesimus, and by his directive in

¹⁵¹ Lightfoot, Colossians and Philemon, 322.


Colossians that masters treat the individuals whom they enslaved fairly.\textsuperscript{154} DEREK TIDBALL writes that “by the time of Paul [slavery] was not a severe and cruel institution.” Legislation was making slavery more humane and even beneficial for those who were enslaved. Because of these factors, the question of slavery was an “insignificant” one for the early Christian communities.\textsuperscript{155}

One of the most influential contributions to the scholarship on slavery within New Testament studies came from S. SCOTT BARTCHY, who published \textit{ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ: First-Century Slavery and 1 Corinthians 7:21} in 1973.\textsuperscript{156} He begins his excursus on Roman slavery by noting the challenge presented by “the lack of any serious, full-scale history of slavery in the Greco-Roman world.”\textsuperscript{157} Bryon calls Bartchy’s work “the first comprehensive examination of Greco-Roman slavery in relation to the [New Testament],” noting how his reliance on such scholars as Barrow, Vogt, and Crook lead him to depict ancient slavery as “decidedly benign.”\textsuperscript{158}

While admitting that slavery was “by no means an ideal situation,” Bartchy argues that ancient slavery was less severe than modern readers imagine.\textsuperscript{159} The first century of the Common Era was marked by an improvement in the lives of the enslaved population, owed to “legal action

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{155} Tidball, \textit{Social Context}, 114–15.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Bartchy, \textit{ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ}, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Bryon, \textit{Recent Research}, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{159} Bartchy, \textit{ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ}, 46.
\end{itemize}
and public opinion [which] supported better treatment of slaves.” Among the “benefits” an enslaved person might enjoy, Bartchy notes a sort of “job security” which wasn’t enjoyed by the free poor, an expectation of manumission by age 30, and the possibility for upward social mobility. The infrequency of large scale slave revolts is offered as evidence for a general feeling of contentment among the enslaved. The alleged “benefits” of the enslaved life led a number of people to sell themselves willingly into slavery. Concerning Jewish slavery, Bartchy writes that enslaved persons were treated so well that Jewish individuals desiring to sell themselves into slavery were unable to find Jewish purchasers.

Bartchy’s evaluation of Roman slavery was further embedded into the field with the publication of his article on Greco-Roman slavery in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, written in 1989 and published in 1992. Though nearly two decades had passed since the publication of his dissertation, and those two decades saw important works on Roman slavery published by Finley, Patterson, Bradley, and others, Bartchy’s assessment of Roman slavery had not

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161 Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, 75.
162 Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, 83.
166 Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ*, 52.
changed. Of particular note is his continued insistence that most people enslaved in urban and domestic settings could expect to be manumitted by the age of 30, and his discussion of free individuals selling themselves into slavery in order to improve their social position.

In 1990, Dale Martin published an influential work that addressed the issue of slavery, particularly the use of slavery as a metaphor in the Pauline corpus. At first, Martin appears to oppose the understanding of previous scholars that slavery was a benign institution, claiming instead that it was ambiguous, neither good nor bad. What was really important, he argues, was not an enslaved person’s status but the identity their master. Throughout his work, Martin highlights the role of the “managerial slave” and emphasizes the opportunities such persons had for upward social mobility. Although he claims that slavery should not be thought of as benevolent, his entire presentation of the institution focuses solely on its positive aspects. This presentation, ultimately served to perpetuate the portrayal of slavery as benign.

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168 Bradley’s *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire* is included in the bibliography but is cited only in reference to slave revolts, where Bartch is making the point that enslaved persons in the Roman empire wouldn’t have constituted a distinct social class (Bartch, “Slavery,” *ABD* 6:66).


171 Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 35.

172 Richard Horsley notes how Martin’s understanding of slavery is influenced by scholars like Barrow rather than the more recent works of Patterson and Bradley (Horsley, “Slave Systems,” 20–21). Patterson does not appear in Martin’s bibliography, and Bradley is mentioned only once in a footnote where Martin expresses disagreement with the way that Bradley portrays slavery (Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 181 n1).
“It is beautiful to die instead of being degraded as a slave.”\textsuperscript{173} With these words, J. Albert Harrill begins \textit{The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity},\textsuperscript{174} the book that Byron calls the first “significant challenge offered by a New Testament scholar to Bartchy’s depiction of slavery in the first century.”\textsuperscript{175} Unlike Bartchy and the other scholars who accept a more benign view of ancient slavery, Harrill, informed by scholars like Finley, Patterson, and Bradley,\textsuperscript{176} argues that slavery meant “dishonor” and a “humiliation worse than death.”\textsuperscript{177} His understanding of slavery uses both the “social death” hermeneutic of Patterson and the “chattel” or “dependent labor” hermeneutic of Finley.\textsuperscript{178}

Harrill criticizes Bartchy’s use of Finley, particularly Finley’s work on ancient Greek slavery, to describe slavery in the Pauline context. He writes

Finley describes slavery in fourth-century B.C.E. Athens and Sparta, not the first-century C.E. Roman province of Achaia of Paul’s day. Bartchy wants to argue that slavery permeated Roman society more than Greek, yet he footnotes secondary literature that describes the institution in the classical, not the Roman periods.

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Occidi est pulchrum, ignominiose ubi servias}. Publilius Syrus, \textit{Sententiae} 489.


\textsuperscript{175} Byron, \textit{Recent Research}, 31.

\textsuperscript{176} Harrill, \textit{Manumission}, 14–17.

\textsuperscript{177} Harrill, \textit{Manumission}, 1.

\textsuperscript{178} Harrill, \textit{Manumission}, 67.
He offers a similar critique of Bartchy’s interaction with sources for Jewish slavery, writing that in using rabbinic material as a point of comparison with the Pauline texts Bartchy “is not comparing contemporary sources.”

Harrill’s work is especially critical of Bartchy’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians which he says is framed by modern abolitionist attitudes that “[obscure] both the historical institution of ancient slavery and the rhetorical intent of 1 Cor 7:21.” He disagrees with Bartchy’s assertion that the enslaved were content with their lot. According to Harrill, Bartchy’s focus on manumission as evidence for humane treatment ignores the fact that enslaved persons who were freed were replaced by others who were taken into bondage “often by brutal violence.” He also disagrees with Bartchy’s claim that enslaved persons born in their master’s house received more humane treatment, looking by comparison at New World slavery where no scholar argues that such individuals received preferential treatment. In his criticism of Bartchy’s explanation of the slave revolts Harrill offers a succinct summary critique of Bartchy’s whole picture of Roman slavery, saying that he “uncritically accepts the ancient slaveholder’s ideology.”

Ultimately, Harrill’s work argues that the New Testament authors perpetuate prevailing Hellenistic and Roman stereotypes of the enslaved. In 2006 he published Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions in which he tries to illustrate the value of

179 Harrill, Manumission, 99.
180 Harrill, Manumission, 94.
181 Harrill, Manumission, 95.
182 Harrill, Manumission, 95.
183 Harrill, Manumission, 97.
exploring how an ancient Roman audience and its slaveholding culture would have heard the early Christian passages about slaves.”\textsuperscript{184} He describes the book as an attempt to move New Testament scholarship “beyond tired, old clichés about the Bible and slavery that repeat unexamined presuppositions born of the modern abolitionist era.”\textsuperscript{185} A careful study of the New Testament slave passages, he writes, will reveal that many of the enslaved characters are “drawn from the ideologies that supported [the Roman slave system],”\textsuperscript{186} a system which was by definition violent and coercive.\textsuperscript{187}

In 1998 a special issue of \textit{Semeia} was published, edited by \textsc{Allen Dwight Callahan}, \textsc{Richard A. Horsley}, and \textsc{Abraham Smith}, which explored slavery and its place in the study of the New Testament, with a particular interest in the impact of Patterson’s work on the field.\textsuperscript{188} In the introduction to the volume they describe slavery as “a species of social murder” which “reduces human life to a travesty of itself, [sacrificing] human beings on the altar of violent desires.”\textsuperscript{189} Although differences between the two institutions might be demonstrated, they write


\textsuperscript{187} I should also mention here Harrill’s chapter on “Paul and Slavery” in Sampley’s \textit{Paul in the Greco-Roman World} (2:301–45) which provides one of the best summaries of Roman slavery written by a New Testament scholar to date. Of particular note to the interested reader is his extensive bibliography, which is helpfully divided between sources pertaining to slavery in antiquity and those dealing with slavery in the Pauline works.

\textsuperscript{188} Patterson’s work, noted above, differentiating the personal, institutional, and systematic elements of slavery appears in this volume.

that both ancient and modern slavery “applied the sanction of law and custom to kidnapping, rape, torture, and murder.”

Callahan and the others write that scholarly work on slavery is divided into that which was done before Patterson and after. Those who wrote before followed classics scholars who argued that ancient slavery was “somehow better, more humane,” and ultimately benign. New Testament scholars writing after Patterson had either ignored his work or “attempted to blunt its implications.” The assumptions of New Testament scholars “continue to construct slavery” in ways that discount “its natal alienation and brutality.”

Arguing against the portrayal of the “upwardly mobile slave” in Martin’s work, the authors point to the truly precarious position of the individuals enslaved in the imperial house during transitions in power. While these enslaved members of the imperial family (the familia Caesaris), the ultimate examples of servile social mobility, certainly enjoyed some power and prestige, they were “always marked for destruction” when a new administration arose. They write “Vespasian crucified Claudius’ favorite Asiaticus, and Icelus, Galba’s chief executive, was

\[\text{190 Callahan, Horsley, and Smith, “Introduction,” 2.}\]
\[\text{191 Callahan, Horsley, and Smith, “Introduction,” 2–3. For scholars who ignored Patterson, the authors list Norman R. Petersen, Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul’s Narrative World (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Barich, “Slavery”; and Martin, Slavery as Salvation. For those who blunt his implications, they list Harrill, Manumission; and I. A. H. Combes, Metaphor of Slavery.}\]
\[\text{192 Callahan, Horsley, and Smith, “Introduction,” 3.}\]
crucified in turn by Otho.”\(^{193}\) Regardless of the high positions they attained as a part of their service, these individuals were still enslaved and thus their bodies were still vulnerable.\(^{194}\)

Against Bartchy’s claim that manumission at the age of 30 was the norm and was a humane gesture, they write

The legal evidence, however, shows not that the slave must be manumitted by age thirty, but rather that he should not be manumitted before his thirtieth birthday—not a prerogative but a prohibition with a view to constraining manumission not liberalizing it.\(^{195}\)

This legislation, preventing masters from freeing enslaved persons until near the end of the enslaved person’s life, claim the authors, was not an indicator of humane treatment for the enslaved but was a matter of convenience for the slaveholder.

Jennifer Glancy has made a number of contributions to our understanding of slavery and its place in the early Christian traditions. Notable among these are her books *Slavery in Early Christianity* and *Slavery as Moral Problem: In the Early Church and Today*.\(^{196}\) Like the others in this category, she depicts slavery as coercive: “to be a slave in the Greco-Roman world


\(^{194}\) Harrill offers more examples of such vulnerability from Suetonius’s *Life of Augustus*, which says that, although the emperor held a number of enslaved persons in high regard, he still punishes them severely. The enslaved Cosmos is put in chains. His freedman Polus (called his “favorite”) was forced to commit suicide. His secretary Thallus had his legs broken for accepting a bribe. His pedagogue Gaius was thrown in a river with weights around his neck (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 67). Harrill concludes “Subject to corporal punishment, limited in power, and existing solely at the whim of the master, servile honor was not aristocratic Roman dignitas” (Harrill, “Paul and Slavery,” 2:305).


was a harsh fate.” Glancy, *Moral Problem*, 7.


in Jesus’ sayings.”202 She finds that Jewish laws and Roman laws regarding slavery were remarkably similar in most respects, with the important distinction that Jewish law had harsher penalties for a slaveholder who caused the death of someone they enslaved.203 She sees in Jewish material, as in the Roman sources, an injunction against overly cruel treatment, but these are often found alongside advice to slaveholders to keep the enslaved in line by force.204

In 2013, S. SCOTT BARTCHY revisited first-century slavery in two short but important articles: one a chapter on slavery in the Roman world in Joel Green and Lee Martin McDonald’s *The World of the New Testament*, and the other a response to the work of Keith Bradley in the journal *Biblical Interpretation*.205 In the first of these works Bartchy recognizes the important shift represented by the works of Finley, Bradley, and Glancy who note that seemingly benevolent imperial legislation had little practical effect on improving the daily life of the enslaved.206 Of particular importance is the emphasis of these works on the “slaveholders’ total physical domination of their slaves…[and their] sexual use of their own slaves,”207 elements that


204 Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 7–8. Glancy offers an example from Ben Sira 33:25–33. She also refers to Josephus’ account of the Roman enslavement of Sepphoris as evidence to show that first-century Galileans would have had a “mundane and ominous” view of slavery (pp. 9–10).


206 Bartchy, “Roman World,” 175. Other scholars highlighted in the bibliography of this work include Byron, Harrill, Horsley, Joshel, and Patterson, all of whom depict slavery as violent and coercive, in agreement with the current historical consensus.

207 Bartchy, “Roman World,” 175–76.
played a limited role in Bartchy’s earlier depictions of Roman slavery as benign. While Bartchy persists in his belief that those enslaved in urban and domestic settings could expect manumission by 30 and that slavery among the Jews was uniquely benign, his shift toward a more coercive understanding of slavery is particularly noteworthy.\footnote{208}

Excursus: Slavery in Pauline Scholarship\footnote{209}

Discussions of slavery and the enslaved have entered New Testament studies most prominently in Pauline scholarship. Although these studies are technically outside the bounds of our project, in an effort to give as complete an overview of existing scholarship as possible, we will look briefly now at how Pauline scholarship has addressed the issue of slavery. We will first look at the scholarship that understands Paul to be socially conservative and will see the various ways that his statements on slavery are interpreted through that lens. We will then briefly look at scholars who find in Paul someone who is socially progressive and whose work calls for the abolition of slavery. Finally, we will see the different ways that scholars understand Paul’s statements about slavery as philosophical, rather than social.

Scholarship that describes Paul as a social conservative could be divided into several groups.\footnote{210} One such group argues that a call for abolition from the apostle would lead to the destruction of secular society (which was wholly dependent on slavery for its survival) or at least

\footnote{208}{For manumission, see Bartchy, “Roman World,” 175. For debt-slavery among the Jews, see Bartchy, “Roman World,” 173.}

\footnote{209}{For the sake of simplicity, here and throughout, I use the term “Pauline” to refer both to the undisputed letters of Paul and also to those letters whose authorship is disputed but which claim to be written by Paul.}

\footnote{210}{These groups, as we will see, are somewhat artificial and the lines that divide them are not impermeable. Their purpose is not to divide scholars with conflicting views. Rather, I use them to help summarize some of the major themes that appear in the scholarship. As such, scholars may appear in multiple categories.}
to the destruction of the fledgling Christian community. Wilhelm Bousset argued that abolitionist teachings would have led to slave revolt on a large scale and would have destroyed Christianity.\footnote{Wilhelm Bousset, \textit{Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments}, 3 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929).} Ernest Scott similarly suggests, on the basis of Pauline silence on the subject, that a challenge to slavery would destabilize social order.\footnote{Ernest Findlay Scott, \textit{The Literature of the New Testament} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).} Scott is not unique in basing his argument for a conservative Paul on the apostle’s silence on the matter of slavery.\footnote{See also Lightfoot, \textit{Colossians and Philemon}; Marvin R. Vincent, \textit{Philippians and Philemon}, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 165; Paul R. Coleman-Norton, “Roman Law of Slavery,” 155–77.}


A number of scholars who understand Paul as socially conservative explain his stance on slavery in terms of his belief in the imminent return of Christ. Albert Schweitzer, for instance,
argues in his book *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* that the coming of Christ rendered questions of social status in the present world meaningless.\textsuperscript{216} Latta Thomas argued more recently that everything Paul says about slavery should be understood as practical advice for dealing with slavery while believers await the *Parousia*.\textsuperscript{217} Other scholars who have advanced similar arguments include J. L. Houlden, Raymond Brown, and Bart Ehrman.\textsuperscript{218}

Recently, John Barclay has argued that Paul is largely silent on the issue of slavery because he doesn’t know how to deal with it. The churches planted by Paul relied on the patronage of wealthy (i.e., slave-owning) households and requiring manumission among the Christian communities would bring these patrons to financial ruin. Because of this awkward situation, Barclay says Paul can only give limited and ambiguous advice on the subject.\textsuperscript{219} Sheila Briggs has similarly argued that Paul largely avoids discussions of the “messy topic” of slavery.\textsuperscript{220}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{217} Latta Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1987), 27.
\end{itemize}
A final group of scholars sees Paul as a social conservative who accepts and even reinforces the institution of slavery. Scholars like Harrill and Glancy, discussed at length above, would fall into this category.\textsuperscript{221} Earlier scholars like Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Käsemann also argue that Paul has no interest in changing the institutions of his social world.\textsuperscript{222} Margaret Davies and Sheila Briggs both see Paul endorsing and reinforcing the slave institution and the power of the master over the enslaved.\textsuperscript{223} Rather than thinking of Christianity as egalitarian or liberating, many scholars in this group argue that the Pauline teachings “helped to rivet the shackles rather more firmly on [the slave’s] feet.”\textsuperscript{224}

On the other end of the spectrum are those scholars who think that Paul’s message was actually socially progressive and was opposed to the institution of slavery. Richard Horsley finds in the undisputed Pauline material that the apostle is against the institution of slavery.

\textsuperscript{221} Harrill, for instance, notes “[Paul’s] outlook [on slavery], as deduced from his letters, hardly differed from that in the wider Greco-Roman culture” (Harrill, “Paul and Slavery,” 2:315).


\textsuperscript{223} Margaret Davies, “Work and Slavery in the New Testament,” in \textit{The Bible in Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium}, ed. John W. Rogerson, Margaret Davies, and M. Daniel Carroll R., JSOTSup 207 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 313–47; Sheila Briggs, “Can an Enslaved God Liberate? Hermeneutical Reflections on Philippians 2:6–11,” in \textit{Interpretations for Liberation}, eds. Katie Geneva and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, \textit{Semeia} 47 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989), 137–53. Grouping Bultmann and Käsemann together with the other scholars in this category (Harrill, Glancy, Davies, and Briggs) may be somewhat misleading. While all of these authors argue that Paul accepts the institution of slavery, Bultmann and Käsemann were writing before the change in historical consensus about the nature of ancient slavery. The social system which they see Paul accepting, therefore, is quite different than the violent and coercive system of slavery as the other scholars here listed understand it.

\textsuperscript{224} Ste. Croix, “Early Christian Attitudes,” 20; See also idem, \textit{Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour} (London: Routledge, 1988), 29–30. Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto similarly considers whether or not Judaism and Christianity in the first century should be thought of as paths to freedom for the enslaved, ultimately responding with a resounding “no” (\textit{Sklaverei und Freilassung in der griechisch-römischen Welt}, Olms Studienbücher Antike 15 [Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2009]).
Paul’s ideals, however, are not ultimately implemented in the Christian communities (as evidenced by a return to the pro-slavery assertions of the deutero-Pauline works) and have no effect on society at large (due to the small size of the nascent Christian movement).\textsuperscript{225} CLARICE MARTIN comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that Paul himself was anti-slavery but that succeeding generations misunderstood or, worse, deliberately altered Paul’s teachings.\textsuperscript{226}

Rather than reading the Pauline slavery texts as social, a number of scholars prefer to read them as philosophical statements. Some within this group understand Paul to be saying that the enslaved and their masters are equal within the Christian community (and that their different social positions are inconsequential). Others argue that Paul uses the terms “slave” and “free” much like the Stoics do. For these scholars, Paul is interested in the inward freedom that comes from moral living, not with social institutions.

ERNEST SCOTT falls into the first group, arguing that Paul’s message puts enslaved persons and masters on equal footing within the Christian community.\textsuperscript{227} In the same vein, JUSTIN MEGGITT argues that, rather than requiring manumission, Paul’s baptismal formula makes enslaved persons and masters equal before God and within the church.\textsuperscript{228}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{227} Scott, \textit{Literature of the New Testament}, 177.
\item\textsuperscript{228} Justin J. Meggitt, \textit{Paul, Property and Survival} (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 181–82.
\end{itemize}
argues that Paul is socially moderate. While he himself was anti-slavery, he understood the dangers of taking an abolitionist stance. Instead, his writings focus on changing the nature of the relationship between the enslaved and their masters within the community.\textsuperscript{229}

The second group of scholars who understand Paul more philosophically see his teaching mirroring that of the Stoics; the enslaved person who lives a morally pure life is really free while the free person living in bondage to their passions is really enslaved. Scholars in this group include ADOLF VON HARNACK, ERNST TROELTSCH, and WAYNE ROLLINS.\textsuperscript{230} For these authors, Paul is concerned with the inward freedom of the enslaved person, not with any outward social change. WILL DEMING also falls into this group, noting that Paul even utilizes the diatribe, a literary form utilized in philosophical writings, to introduce his Stoicized version of the Christian message.\textsuperscript{231}

It has also been suggested that Paul’s interests were neither social nor philosophical, but simply practical. KENNETH RUSSELL, like others who put forward philosophical views, does not understand Paul to be making social statements either for or against slavery in his writings. Rather, he understands Paul as offering practical advice on how the enslaved person could live a


good, Christian life. Paul’s instructions to enslaved persons in 1 Cor 7 and the household codes in the later Pauline material were written to show enslaved individuals how to be a good Christian by being a “good slave.”

As this cursory summary has shown, the topics of slavery and the enslaved have been of great interest to scholars of Paul and the Pauline literature throughout the 20th century. What was Paul’s attitude toward slavery in the world around him? What was his attitude toward slavery within the Christian communities he founded? Were his instructions attempts to alter or to maintain the social structures he saw? Or was he only interested in more philosophical notions of slavery and freedom? These and other questions have been considered by Pauline scholars and have been answered in various (and often conflicting) ways.

Slavery in Synoptic Scholarship

While slavery in the Pauline material has been a topic of intense discussion, slavery in the Synoptic texts has received comparatively little consideration. To illustrate the lack of attention paid to the subject in Synoptic studies, I will briefly survey the major commentaries on these Gospels published in the last 25 years (that is, the commentaries that could plausibly have benefited from the “new consensus” scholarship of historians like Finley, Patterson, and Bradley, and of biblical scholars like Harrill and Glancy). This survey will show a recognition by some of the importance of slavery within the Gospel texts, but a failure across the board in offering any extended depiction of slavery in the ancient world. The result of this, as we will see, are

portrayals of slavery that are inadequate, at times even contradictory, and which do not integrate the most recent historical scholarship on the subject.

A number of commentaries on the Gospel of Mark have been published in the past 25 years in major commentary series: Adela Yarbro Collins (Hermeneia), John R. Donahue (Sacra Pagina), James R. Edwards (Pillar), R. T. France (NIGTC), and Joel Marcus (Anchor Bible). It should not be surprising, since enslaved characters and other images of slavery show up relatively infrequently in Mark’s Gospel (compared to Matthew and Luke), that these commentaries have very little to say on the subject. None of them contain any extended discussion on slavery in the ancient world, often settling for occasional broad statements on the institution. For instance, in discussing Jesus’s teaching on being “slave of all” in Mark 10:44, Edwards says only that enslaved individuals in the ancient world were “last and least of all.”

Joel Marcus is unique among these commentaries in the fact that his bibliography on slavery is far more robust than the others. Marcus cites such scholars as Finley, Garnsey and Saller, Patterson, and Harrill, all of whom argue for the “social” understanding of ancient slavery. In his discussion of Mark 10:44 he notes that Jesus’s teaching associates slavery not only with the bottom tier of society, but with death (citing Patterson’s “social death”


234 Edwards, Mark, 326.

235 To be fair, Marcus also cites a number of scholars who argue for the older consensus, “legal” view such as Deissmann, Jeremias, Martin, and Rengstorf.
Of the commentaries here considered, Marcus is exceptional in his application of the new consensus on slavery to the Markan material, even if only in a minor way.

Matthew’s Gospel contains considerably more material on slavery and the enslaved than Mark does, much of it concentrated in the parable material. The commentaries most relevant for the present introductory survey are as follows: CRAIG A. EVANS (New Cambridge), R. T. FRANCE (NICNT), CRAIG S. KEENER, ULRICH LUZ (Hermeneia), JOHN NOLLAND (NIGTC), RUDOLF SCHNACKENBURG, CHARLES H. TALBERT (Paideia), and DAVID L. TURNER (BECNT). Although Matthew’s text provides ample opportunity, these authors (like the commentators on Mark) also refrain from offering any extended discussion of slavery in the ancient world.

Two habits of note should be mentioned in discussing these commentaries. The first is their general reliance on older works, particularly Jeremias and Deissmann, for their understanding of the ancient world in general, and ancient slavery more particularly. Again, most of their bibliographies are devoid of sources that deal extensively with slavery. Keener is the exception to this rule, but the sources that he cites—Buckland and Barrow—were written in 1908 and 1928 respectively and should be considered outdated.

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236 Marcus, Mark, 755.


238 Keener does also cite Finley, but in the context of the economy and not slavery.
The second habit arises from those few commentators who do interact with the more recent scholarship of slavery. While it is commendable that they are drawing these important new works into their commentaries, they often end up discounting their conclusions and opt for more traditional (and outdated) interpretations of the slave texts. An example of this habit may be seen in the way that Turner and Nolland interact with Jennifer Glancy’s article on enslaved characters in the Matthean parables. Both authors recognize Glancy’s authority on the topic of slavery, but then both ultimately ignore her conclusions in favor of more traditional understandings of their texts. For Turner, the context is the parable of the talents (25:14–30), where he finds it beyond belief that an enslaved person would be given such a large sum of money. For Nolland, it is the parable of the “wicked slave” being “cut in two” (24:25–51). Nolland cites Glancy, along with Finley and Bradley, both of whom would agree with Glancy regarding the master’s absolute authority over the enslaved character when it came to punishment, yet he still finds this parable pushing believability to the extreme. The “new consensus” is finally introduced into the commentaries, but to be refuted rather than integrated.


242 Whatever the reasoning behind Matthew’s violent imagery in this passage, the point that Glancy makes here (and that Nolland seems to reject) is that such a harsh punishment of an enslaved person by a master would be completely believable to an ancient audience.

243 We see the preference for the old consensus elsewhere in Nolland’s commentary, for example, where he talks of the “deep loyalty and warm affection” that enslaved persons often felt toward their masters. Nolland, *Matthew*, 304.
A number of the commentaries on Luke from the major series were published before the consensus on ancient slavery began to change. There are, however, three recent works that we might consider for this introduction: FRANÇOIS BOVON (Hermeneia), JAMES R. EDWARDS (Pillar), and JOEL B. GREEN (NICNT). Like many of the works previously referenced, these commentaries cite few if any modern works on slavery and tend toward an older consensus understanding of slavery in the ancient world.

Like the works on Mark and Matthew, the commentaries on Luke lack extended treatment of slavery in the ancient world. This is actually somewhat surprising, since Green emphasizes the point that the master-slave analogy is a “regular fixture” for Luke and serves as a basis for the Gospel’s teachings on “kinship, faithfulness, and status-seeking.” The prominence of this “household analogy” in Luke would seem to call for a description of the historical institution that served as the basis for the analogy. None of our commentators provide such a description.

Instead, the depiction of slavery that one gets when reading these commentaries is varied to the point of being chaotic. Edwards talks about Jewish slavery using the older models that portray it as benign, and talks of servile vocabulary that depicts servants “endearingly as a


child.” On the other hand, he says that enslaved persons were “routinely subjected to…abuse.” Green’s portrayal of slavery is founded largely on a work by Yvon Thébert, which is itself highly influenced by Marxist scholarship on slavery and which therefore describes slavery in coercive terms. On the other hand, he also follows Martin in placing a great deal of importance on the identity of the master when asking questions of an enslaved person’s social status. Bovon tends to opt for “servant” instead of “slave” in translation, and in speaking of the “slave” or “servant” of the high priest he says parenthetically that δοῦλος “can be used in a flattering way.” While these portrayals of slavery may highlight the diversity of the experience of enslaved persons in antiquity, they run the risk of being so blatantly contradictory as to say nothing about the institution at all.

This cursory overview of the most recent commentaries obviously does not provide a comprehensive look at everything that has been done on slavery in the Synoptic Gospels in the last 25 years. A number of helpful studies on individual pericopae or on slavery in specific portions of the Gospels (particularly the parables) have been published in recent years. The work of Glancy on Matthew’s parables has already been mentioned. I could also mention the works by

250 He writes of the enslaved that, “the status of the head of the family was extended to all who shared with him a relationship of kinship” (Green, Luke, 92 n47).
251 Though he does so with “hesitation” (Bovon, Luke, 2:612 n68).
252 Bovon, Luke, 3:217. Here he doesn’t settle on one translation over the other.
Mary Ann Beavis, Elizabeth Dowling, and Mitzi Smith on slavery in the parables. Authors writing recently about slavery in the Gospels beyond the parables include Ronald Charles and Christy Cobb. These and other similar works represent important progress in the field and will be interacted with in more detail in following chapters. The purpose of this overview was to demonstrate the general “reluctance” (to use Richard Horsley’s term) in the broader field of New Testament studies to accept and integrate the “new consensus” understanding of ancient slavery into our understanding of the Gospels as a whole.

**A Path Forward**

This project brings modern scholarly works on slavery in ancient Roman and Jewish contexts to the study of one of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, in a more complete way. The works of Finley, Patterson, Bradley, and the other scholars representing the “new consensus” will be seriously considered for what they tell us about the Roman background of the Gospel texts. In keeping with the social-science methodology adopted for this work, Patterson’s definition will serve as our model for understanding ancient slavery in general. The works of Hezser and Martin on slavery among the Jews will also be integrated into this study as I attempt to take seriously the multi-cultural context of the Ancient Near Eastern world from which Matthew’s Gospel arose. Scholars like Harrill and Glancy, who have already begun this work, will be acknowledged and

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built upon as we apply their work to all of Matthew’s slave texts. Allowing these critical works to lay the foundation for our understanding of slavery as it appears in this Gospel will set us up to hear these texts as their first audience would have heard them. It will give us a window into their world that may allow us, in some small way, to see the same images that they saw as they were experiencing these texts for the first time.

As we have already noted in our introduction, Bradley warns that this picture will likely not be edifying. Certainly, it would be easier to continue reading these texts in light of the “old consensus” on ancient slavery, secure in the knowledge that the “servants” we see in these texts didn’t have it that bad and that they were happy with their lot in life. This picture may be more palatable, but unfortunately critical scholarship has revealed it to be a fantasy. However uncomfortable it is to view ancient slavery as violent and coercive, however difficult it is to reconcile with the biblical texts, modern biblical scholars must engage such work as Finley’s, Patterson’s, and Bradley’s or risk simply repeating “tired, old clichés” that render the terrors of ancient slavery “so [obscure] as to be invisible.”

Adopting from these scholars a “hermeneutic of suspicion,” this project will approach Matthew’s text (particularly the references to slavery and the enslaved) with a measure of skepticism. It begins with the recognition that the Gospel texts, like many other texts from antiquity, were produced by privileged, free men and that the ideologies they embrace and promote will often (though perhaps not always) correspond to those of the men who produced it.

them. In regard to slavery, in both Roman and Jewish contexts, the dominant ideology involves an institution characterized by violence, coercion, and the absolute domination of the enslaved by the slaveholder. This image of ancient slavery is summarized well by Patterson, who defines slavery as “the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons.” This definition will serve as the model in light of which we will attempt to understand the text of Matthew, its enslaved characters and its slave metaphors.

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256 It is not my assertion that the New Testament texts cannot or will not challenge any of the dominant assumptions or ideologies of the world to which they were written. Rather, I propose that the reader should assume that the author accepts the dominant ideologies of their world unless the text itself suggests otherwise.

257 Patterson, Slavery and Social Death, 13.
CHAPTER 3
SLAVERY AND THE ENSLAVED IN MATTHEW’S NARRATIVE

Introduction

The Roman world was populated by enslaved persons. It was only a few decades before Matthew was written that the younger Seneca wrote to the emperor Nero about a proposal put before the senate that the enslaved be distinguished from freemen by their clothing. “It then became apparent,” he wrote “how great the imminent danger if our slaves began to count us.”¹ The proportion of enslaved persons to free in Rome was so great that the senate, if Seneca is to be believed, considered it dangerous information for the enslaved to have. Certainly the enslaved population in Roman Italy itself was larger than elsewhere in the Mediterranean world—perhaps as high as 25 percent of the total population.² Yet slavery remained an important institution in the provinces outside of Italy as well (as documentary evidence from Egypt shows) and recent estimates suggest that enslaved persons made up approximately 10 percent of the total imperial population (with higher concentrations in urban centers like Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch).³

The way these enslaved individuals are portrayed in ancient texts is complicated, as we have already seen. Sandra Joshel notes that Roman authors oscillate between expressing love for

¹ deinde apparuit, quantum periculum immineret, si servi nostri numerare nos coepissent (Seneca the Younger, De Clementia 1.24.1).


the enslaved, venting hatred or fear toward them, and dismissing or ignoring them altogether. In the writings of such authors, she says, “slaves receive whippings or rewards, serve or betray masters, [and] stand as moral paradigms” but often enslaved persons are all but invisible in these works, “[blending] into scenery of house, city and fields.”

They appear less as literary characters and more as a part of the literary setting (if indeed they appear at all). In this way these enslaved individuals might be thought of as “functional characters,” with the narrative emphasizing not who does something but rather what is done, or simply as “agents” who lack individuality and subjectivity.

As an example of this “blending in,” consider the poem from Horace which recounts the hardships of a man who, when walking through Rome, was latched onto by a talkative and irritating acquaintance.

I was going, by chance, along the Via Sacra, as is my custom,
Meditating upon some unknown trifle, fully intent upon it.
A certain man, known to me only by name, ran up and
Seizing my hand, said “How are you, you sweetest of things?” (Horace, Satires 1.9.1–4)

The conversation goes back and forth between these two men for a while and we feel the angst of the narrator as he tries unsuccessfully to escape.

Wanting desperately to get away [from him]
I would walk sometimes more quickly, then sometimes I would stop,

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5 Outi Lehtipuu, “Characterization and Persuasion,” 75.


7 Ibam forte Via Sacra, sicut meus est mos,
nescio quid meditans nugarum, totus in illis:
accurrat quidam notus mihi nomine tantum:
arreptaque manu, 'quid agis, dulcissime rerum?'
And I would speak I know not what in the ear of my slave. (Horace, *Satires* 1.9.8–10)\(^8\)

Here for the first time (and also, coincidentally, the last) we hear that the narrator is accompanied by an enslaved person. This individual has presumably been present with him the whole time, but he appears only when the narrator needs to speak with him in an attempt break off his other conversation. Elsewhere in the poem he is completely invisible. So ubiquitous was the institution of slavery in the first century that enslaved individuals such as this one tended to “blend in” to their literary surroundings; they appear only when the action calls for them and may disappear just as quickly.

As another example of this same phenomenon, consider the story of Jesus’s arrest in Matthew 26. In 26:47 we read that Judas arrives in Gethsemane with “a large crowd from the chief priests and elders of the people [armed] with swords and clubs.”\(^9\) Judas identifies Jesus to this crowd with a kiss and then, as they move forward to seize him, we read that one of those present with Jesus strikes a man enslaved by the high priest, cutting off his ear (26:51). Matthew, it seems, has slipped this enslaved man into the “crowd,” unseen by the audience until he was

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\(^8\) *Misere discedere quaerens
dicere nescio quid puero…*

\(^9\) ὥξιος πολίς μετὰ μαχαιρῶν καὶ ξύλων ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχιερέων καὶ πρεσβυτέρων τοῦ λαοῦ.
assaulted. Again, as in Horace, the enslaved person only appears as needed and disappears just as quickly.

In Matthew’s Gospel, we are confronted with a text whose narrative presents very few explicitly enslaved characters: the paralyzed man, enslaved by a centurion, who is in need of healing (8:5–13), several individuals enslaved by Herod Antipas who hear his concerns about the identity of Jesus (14:1–2), and the men and women enslaved by the high priest who figure into the passion narrative (26:47–56, 69–75). It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from the paucity of references that Matthew imagines a world populated by very few enslaved persons. Instead we should consider the likely possibility that Matthew, like other authors of his time, highlights the free actors in his narrative and chooses to bring in enslaved characters on a selective basis.

10 ὀξλος is a common term in Matthew, appearing 49 times. The appearance of the man enslaved by the high priest in one of these crowds prompts the question “How many of the other crowds also contained enslaved persons that have remained unseen and unheard?” As fascinating as this question is, there is little that can be done to retrieve such individuals. Thus our focus must remain on those few enslaved individuals who are identified as such in the narrative.

Matthew says nothing more about the enslaved man after his ear is cut off. This could be compared to Luke’s version of events, where the man’s ear is healed by Jesus (Luke 22:51), or John’s version of the story, in which the man is given a name (Malchus; John 18:10) and a family (John 18:26).

12 In the first two of these passages (8:5–13; 14:1–2), the enslaved persons are described using the polyvalent term παῖς which could also be translated “child.” As I discuss each story below, I will explain why I take the term as a reference to status in these pericopae. The term παῖς also appears to describe characters in the narrative at three other points in Matthew. In 2:16, Herod gives orders that “all the children in Bethlehem and its environs” (πάντας τοὺς παιδέας τοὺς ἐν Βηθλεέμ καὶ ἐν πάσι τοῖς ὀρίοις) should be killed. In this context, the clarification that these are παιδες who are “two years old and younger” (ἀπὸ δυτικοῦ καὶ κατωτέρου) suggests that the term is used here as an indication of age and not status. In 17:18, the word παῖς is used to describe a character who in 17:15 was called a υἱός, suggesting that παῖς here is an indicator of descent rather than status. In 21:15, during Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the παιδες in the temple court shout “Hosanna to the son of David.” In response to this event, Jesus quotes a Psalm likening these παιδες to νηπίοι and θηλαζόντοι ("children" and "infants"). Again, this context would suggest that παῖς is used here as an indication of the age of the characters rather than of their status. For this reason, these three stories will not be considered in our study of Matthew’s servile language.

13 Matthew’s parables, the topic of the next chapter, demonstrate quite the opposite—there enslaved characters are a regular fixture.
This chapter will focus on those characters, noted above, who are explicitly described using “slave” language, examining the way that Matthew portrays them as characters and the roles which they play in their narratives. What do these characters do? What is done to them? What do they say (if they are permitted to speak at all)? What is said about them? Is Matthew’s portrayal of these characters consistent with our model for ancient slavery based on Patterson’s definition? If so, what elements are emphasized? If not, where does it deviate?

**The Man Enslaved by the Centurion (8:5–13)**

The first enslaved character to whom Matthew introduces his audience is a man enslaved by a centurion in Capernaum. This man is paralyzed, suffering greatly, and his master approaches Jesus to ask for healing. After a brief dialogue between master and Lord, which includes an interesting note about the former’s assumptions about the place of an enslaved person, Jesus performs the healing at a distance with a word. Matthew’s text reads as follows:

[5] And when he entered into Capernaum a centurion approached him calling out to him and saying “Lord, my slave is laying in my house paralyzed, being terribly tormented.”


[7] And responding the centurion said, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter beneath my roof, but only say the word and my slave will be healed.

[8] For I too am a man under authority, having soldiers beneath me, and I say to this one ‘Go’ and he goes, and to another ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave ‘Do this thing’ and he does [it].”

[9] And hearing [this] Jesus was amazed and said to those following [him], “Truly I say to you, I have not found such faith in anyone in Israel.

[10] And I say to you that many will come from east and west and will recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the darkness outside. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

[11] And Jesus said to the centurion, “Go. Let it be done for you as you have believed.” And his slave was healed at that [very] hour.

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14 Εἰπελθόντος δὲ αὐτοῦ εἰς Καφαρναοῦμ προσήλθεν αὐτὸ ἐκατόνταρχος παρακάλὼν αὐτὸν καὶ λέγων· Κύριε, ὃ παῖς μου βέβληται ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ παραλυτικός, δεινὸς βασανιζόμενος. καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· Ἐγὼ ἔλθων θεραπεύσω αὐτὸν. καὶ ἀποκρίθης ὁ ἐκατόνταρχος ἔρχεται Κύριε, οὐκ εἰμί ἰκανὸς ἵνα μου ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην εἰσέλθῃ· ἄλλο μόνον εἰπέ λόγον, καὶ ἰσημερίαται ὁ παῖς μου· καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ ἀνθρωπός εἰμι ὑπὸ ἐξοσιάν, ἔχων ὑπ’ ἐμαυτῶν στρατιώτας, καὶ λέγω τούτῳ· Πορεύθητι, καὶ πορεύεται, καὶ ἄλλῳ· Ἐρχοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ εἰς τῆς ἐξοσιάς· ἐξελθὼν λέγων· Αὕτης ἐξουσία ὑμῖν, παρ’ οὐδενὶ τοσαύτην πίστιν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ εὑρόν. λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι πολλοὶ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν ἔχουσιν καὶ
Matthew’s παῖς as “Slave”

We must begin our discussion of this text with a defense of its inclusion in this study at all. In 8:6 (and again in vss. 8 and 13) the character in need of healing is called a παῖς, a polyvalent term which, depending on context, could refer to a person of enslaved status (without reference to age or descent) or to a child (without reference to status). If in this text Matthew means for us to understand the παῖς as the child/son of the centurion (and Matthew does use παῖς in this way elsewhere), then this text would belong elsewhere in our study.

Ulrich Luz follows Bultmann in preferring the gloss “son” in this passage, offering three reasons to support his conclusion. First, he notes there is a more explicit term for slave in v. 9 (δοῦλος), which prevents us from understanding the παῖς as an enslaved individual. Second, Matthew has already used παῖς to refer to (presumably) free characters in 2:16 (the children slaughtered at the order of Herod). Finally, παῖς clearly means “son” in a healing story in 17:14–21 (a story Luz refers to as “related”).

The argument Luz makes here is a part of his larger argument that, in Matthew, παῖς should always be understood as “child” or “son” rather than as “slave.” He writes that the Greek term “usually means child, much less often servant,” a preference he sees throughout the New Testament.

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15 See entries in BDAG, GE, L&N, and LSJ, all of which distinguish between the usage of παῖς as a designation of age (“youth”), of descent (“child”), and of status (“slave”).

16 See 2:16; 17:18; 21:15.

17 Luz, Matthew, 2:10 n17. Luz does not specify what he means by “related” but the similarities between these narratives are clear. Both are stories of miraculous healing. In both cases, someone else brings the request for the infirmed individual. Also, both notably end with a very similar phrase (8:13, ἴάθη ὁ παῖς ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ ἑκείνῃ; 17:18, ἐθεραπεύθη ὁ παῖς ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἑκείνης).
Testament and especially in Matthew.\textsuperscript{18} With one exception, to which I will return below, Luz understands every παῖς in Matthew as a “child,” arguing that Matthew even redacted the παιδές καὶ…παιδίσκας that he finds in Q to συνδούλους in 24:49 so that παῖς will not appear in his Gospel as a servile term. Again, in defense of this reading of παῖς, Luz quotes Jeremias, who writes that Jewish authors of the Hellenistic period were “inclined to understand the παῖς θεοῦ as God’s child” rather than as “God’s slave.”\textsuperscript{19}

Luz’s arguments for preferring this translation are problematic for a number of reasons. The first of these is his insistence that Matthew only use the term παῖς in a single way (i.e., to mean “child”). Παῖς is a term with a semantic range that allows it to be used in multiple ways by a single author and thus it may be rendered faithfully by multiple English terms, depending on the context. The “exception” that Luz notes in 14:2 proves this very fact. In that passage, παιδές must be understood as “slaves” (and this is, in fact, how Luz translates it in that context).\textsuperscript{20} If Matthew can insert the word παῖς here where it must mean “slave,” then it stands to reason that he can use the same word in the same way elsewhere in his Gospel.\textsuperscript{21}

Second, I am not convinced by his argument that the presence of the word δοῦλος in this narrative prevents us from reading παῖς as slave. Luz suggests that Matthew could not or would not use two synonymous words for “slave” in a single story; he would rather choose one term or

\textsuperscript{18} Luz, Matthew, 2:193. Though it is not explicitly stated, it is likely that Luz comes to this conclusion by considering not only παῖς but also the related diminutive παιδίον, which appears 18 times in Matthew (52 times in the New Testament as a whole) and always refers to a “child” (see L&N).

\textsuperscript{19} Luz, Matthew, 2:193 n30. Emphasis added by Luz. The original passage from Jeremias, which reads somewhat differently than Luz’s quoted version of it, is found in Joachim Jeremias, “παῖς θεοῦ,” TDNT 5:684.

\textsuperscript{20} Luz, Matthew, 2:305.

\textsuperscript{21} We will return to the use of παῖς in 14:2 below when we discuss that pericope in more detail.
the other. However, Luz goes on to say that Matthew does this very thing in the “related” story of 17:14–21 (where we find both παῖς and υἱός referring to a son) and that this is proof that these two terms may be used synonymously. If παῖς and δοῦλος cannot both mean “slave” because they both appear in the same narrative, as Luz argues, then, by this same logic, παῖς and υἱός cannot both refer to a “son.”

Third, Luz argues that Matthew’s συνδούλους at 24:49 (where the Lukan parallel has παῖδες καὶ...παιδίσκας) shows that Matthew wants to intentionally limit his usage of the word παῖς to children and not enslaved persons (something that the “exception” of 14:2 has already proven wrong). Even if Luke’s version preserves an older tradition to which Matthew had access, Matthew’s redaction shows that he considers δοῦλοι and παῖδες to be synonymous. Luz’s proposal that Matthew makes the change specifically to avoid using παῖδες as a servile term is not verifiable from the evidence we have, and in fact seems to contradict Matthew’s usage of παῖς in 14:2. One could argue just as convincingly that Matthew’s redaction is simply an effort to condense the wordy phrase παῖδες καὶ...παιδίσκας.

Finally, Luz’s appeal to Jeremias presents a number of problems. As noted above, in defense of his own preference for translating παῖς as child rather than slave, he quotes Jeremias as saying that Hellenistic Judaism “is inclined to understand the παῖς θεοῦ as God’s child.”

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22 It is worth noting at this point that the present pericope also contains another word for “son” (υἱοί in 8:12). Following Luz’s logic, this would serve as evidence that παῖς cannot mean “son” in this passage either.

23 Although Luz translates παῖς at 17:18 as “boy” (Matthew, 2:405), he writes earlier that, in this context, it “clearly means son,” (Matthew, 2:10).

24 It is also entirely possible that Matthew was not aware of the Lukan phrase at all.

However, in this particular context, Jeremias is specifically speaking about the interpretation of the παῖς θεοῦ of Isaiah. The relevant passage in Jeremias reads “Hellenistic Judaism inclines to construe the παῖς θεοῦ of Deutero-Isaiah as ‘child of God.’”26 Regarding the use of παῖς θεοῦ more generally in the period after 100 BCE, Jeremias says the majority of the extant texts “[describe] the relation of the individual or the people to God less commonly in the figure of childhood than in that of servanthood,” and again “In the relevant period after 100 B.C. παῖς θεοῦ occurs more frequently in the sense of ‘servant of God.’”27 Thus, an appeal to Jeremias would seem to argue precisely against what Luz is trying to say. At least in the context of the παῖς θεοῦ, the literary evidence suggests that Hellenistic Jews (like Matthew) tended to think of the παῖς as a slave, not as a child.

The usage of the term παῖς in the Septuagint supports this idea. A number of scholars point out that παῖς is “most commonly used” in the LXX as a gloss for ‘ebed, the Hebrew term for slave.28 This perhaps understates the overwhelming fact that 90% of the times that παῖς is used to translate a Hebrew word in the LXX, that word is ‘ebed.29 The next most common word

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26 Jeremias, “παῖς θεοῦ,” TDNT 5:684. Emphasis added. Emphasized words are missing from Luz’s quotation of this passage.


28 See, for example, Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:21. On “slave” as the primary meaning of ‘ebed, see entry in BDB.

29 Of these 371 times that παῖς appears to translate a Hebrew term, 335 of them are translating a form of ‘ebed. It should be noted that the word παῖς appears 383 times in the LXX, but only 371 reflect a translation of a Hebrew term, with the other 12 appearing in passages without direct Hebrew parallels. See, for instance, Judges 16:26 where Samson asks a young man or servant (na’ar) to place his hands on the pillars holding up a house. Where the Hebrew ends abruptly after the request, the LXX adds δὲ παῖς ἐποίησεν οὕτως (“and the young man / servant did so”).
for which παῖς appears as a translation is *na’ar*, but this only 24 times (6% of the time). For our present argument, it is notable that παῖς is used as a translation for bēn (“son”) only twice (0.5% of the time), both times in the book of Proverbs. This leaves the distinct impression that the Septuagint translators understood παῖς primarily as a servile term. The only word more commonly used to translate ’ebed is δοῦλος.32

The larger body of scholars argues, contrary to Luz, that Matthew’s παῖς should be understood as an enslaved character. Such an argument has recently been put forward by scholars such as Davies and Allison, Harrington, Morris, Keener, Nolland, and France.33 These scholars point out that παῖς clearly means “son” only once in the New Testament corpus (in John 4:51); in all other cases it means “boy” or “slave.” Most convincing for me is the evidence from the Lukan parallel, which refers to the infirmed character explicitly as a δοῦλος (Luke 7:2). If we take Luke to be Matthew’s earliest commentator, we can see this emendation as a clarifying change. If we instead think the two authors wrote independently but relied on a common

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30 Lexically, *na’ar* is very similar to παῖς in its semantic breadth, covering such concepts as “child/youth” and “servant/slide.” See BDB.

31 See Prov 4:1; 20:7. For point of reference, the word bēn occurs 4,933 times in the Hebrew Bible. The other Hebrew words for which παῖς appears in the LXX as a gloss are as follows: ’îš (“man”; Gen 39:14; 2 Sam 15:22), mal’ak (“messenger”; 1 Sam 25:42), ’am (“people”; 2 Sam 15:17), yeled (“child”; 2 Kgs 2:24; Eccl 4:13), ’ēd (“witness”; Prov 19:28), ḥayil (“strength”; Jer 52:8). In Gen 47:21, the LXX has τὸν λαὸν κατεδουλώσατο αὐτῷ εἰς παῖδας (“He enslaved the people to him as slaves”) for the Hebrew *w’et-ha’am he’ebir ’ōtô le’arîm (“And he moved the people into the cities”), which it seems to read as a euphemism for enslavement.

32 Of the 807 occurrences of ’ebed, it is translated with δοῦλος (or another word using the δουλ- root) 344 times and with παῖς 335 times. Thus, for the translators of the LXX it would seem that these two Greek words were understood as roughly synonymous. The next most common glosses are θεράπων (45 times) and οἰκέτης (35 times).

Matthew’s use of παιδίον in 14:2 shows that he may choose to use παῖς to refer to enslaved characters, despite arguments to the contrary. This usage is consistent with the use of the term in the LXX, where παῖς is almost always a gloss for ‘ǝbed. Luke’s parallel passage suggests that the character in question was understood to be enslaved in the early tradition and/or by the early communities who recorded these stories. For these reasons I join with the scholarly

34 A few scholars have argued for a pederastic reading of this passage, in which the παῖς is neither the child of the centurion nor necessarily his slave but is taken as the junior partner in a male-male sexual relationship (Christopher Zeichmann, “Rethinking the Gay Centurion,” The Bible & Critical Theory 11, no. 1 [2015]: 36). The standard argument for this position points to the semantic range of παῖς (which may refer to a same-sex lover) as well as the presence of other words for “slave” and “son” in the pericope. Also relevant for these discussions are the presence of ἐντυμος in Luke 7:2, which is taken to potentially indicate an emotional bond, and the historical evidence for such same-sex relationships in the Roman military (Zeichmann, “Rethinking,” 36). Zeichmann notes, “this reading is consistently overlooked in NT scholarship; no serialized commentaries even address the interpretation and Jennings and Liew’s 2004 article in the Journal of Biblical Literature (“Mistaken Identities but Model Faith,” JBL 123, no. 3 [2004]: 476–494) remains the only work in a major biblical studies journal to advocate the LGBT reading” (Zeichmann, “Rethinking,” 37).

I am unconvinced by the argument that Matthew uses παῖς here to refer to the “boy-love” of the centurion. First, as we have argued previously, the presence of another word for “slave” or “son” in this passage does not preclude the use of παῖς to mean “slave” or “son.” An author may use two synonymous terms for the same entity in a single pericope. Second, as we will argue below, Luke’s use of ἐντυμος does not necessarily indicate an emotional bond but may rather be a reference to the centurion’s financial investment in this enslaved person. It is also problematic in my opinion to appeal to Luke to demonstrate the centurion’s feelings toward the παῖς without also noting Luke’s explicit use of δούλος to describe this character. Finally, Jennings and Liew (“Mistaken Identities,” 476–494) argue that Matthew’s παῖς should not be taken as synonymous with δούλος by comparing the author’s usage of the two terms. However, since they purposely bracket out the three uses of παῖς in the centurion pericope as well as two other “questionable cases” (12:18; 14:2), their argument rests on just three of the author’s eight uses of that specific term and instead relies heavily on the use of its diminutive form (which in our period lacks any connection to status). Thus, they note 10 occurrences of παῖς language in Matthew 2, all of which “refer to or [are] used in connection with Jesus as a small boy,” and 11 additional uses of παῖς language elsewhere in the Gospel which refer to children. This usage, they argue, demonstrates clearly that παῖς and δούλος are not synonyms in Matthew. Of these 21 combined occurrences of παῖς language, however, only three are actually the word παῖς while the other 18 are forms of the diminutive παιδίον. It is my contention that, while παιδίον never appears in Matthew to refer to persons of enslaved status, παῖς is used in precisely this way both here and in the two “questionable cases” noted above.

Ultimately, the translation of παῖς as “slave” is not a critical part of the argument of this section. Even if we understand the centurion’s παῖς as his child or as his “boy-love,” the passage still makes a clear statement regarding how enslaved persons are expected to behave by those who enslave them (in 8:9, where δούλος, a term which definitively refers to enslaved persons, is used).
majority in taking the παίζ of this pericope to be an enslaved character and thus relevant for the current study.

Against παίζ as a Term of Endearment

Scholars who identify this individual as being enslaved\textsuperscript{35} often argue (whether explicitly or not) that the relationship between the centurion and this enslaved person was a positive one and that the use of παίζ rather than δοῦλος demonstrates a certain level of fondness or familial affection. Nolland uses the word “lad” in his translation in order to “[catch] something of the affectionate family link sometimes established with household servants/slaves.”\textsuperscript{36} Keener says that “this slave was probably the centurion’s entire ‘family’” and states definitively that “his interest in the servant’s welfare is certainly not merely economic.”\textsuperscript{37}

I find these statements about the “affectionate” relationship between the centurion and this enslaved man to be suspect. The implicit argument for this understanding of παίζ goes like this: (1) the term παίζ can be used to designate an enslaved person or a child; (2) parents regard their children with affection; (3) therefore, ancient slave owners thought of the people they enslaved with the same fondness or affection one would feel toward their children. However, more recent historical work on slavery has recognized in terms like παίζ a diminutive force that is not affectionate but is instead demeaning; the enslaved person conceptualized as a παίζ is

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{35} It should be noted that, although many scholars understand this character as enslaved, most seem to prefer the term “servant” to “slave.”

\textsuperscript{36} Nolland, Matthew, 354.

\textsuperscript{37} Keener, Matthew, 266. This argument is based on data for the base pay expected by centurions compared to that of the average soldier.
\end{footnotes}
incapable of becoming a mature, functioning adult and is doomed to remain a “boy” all his life.\textsuperscript{38}

The use of the English term “boy” by slave-holding Americans in the antebellum United States provides a useful, if not uncomfortable, parallel.

This is not to say that the word παίς in Matthew (or in the broader Roman world) must necessarily be understood as derogatory when used to refer to the enslaved. What I am arguing instead is that it should not be assumed to be a term of endearment. Such an assumption has colored the way this story and the world it portrays have been understood. Luz notes that older interpretations have wrongly found in this story “an expression of solidarity between masters and slaves.”\textsuperscript{39} The understanding of παίς as an endearing term has helped to propagate such a reading, leading to an interpretation of slavery, at least as it is presented in this story, as benign (in keeping with older models). That interpretation, however, is based entirely on a misunderstanding of the term παίς and not on anything that is said in the story itself. It is to the specific features of the story that we will now turn.

Identifying the Centurion and Reading the Audience

It is not the enslaved man to whom we are first introduced in this narrative but rather his enslaver: a centurion in Capernaum. Details about this character are difficult to discern. He is clearly a soldier (perhaps a veteran) and a slaveholder. He is a man who understands authority structures and who, according to Jesus, has great faith. Any further information about the character must be filled in by the audience and interpreters.

\textsuperscript{38} See Harrill, who gives as an example of the dishonoring of the enslaved “the common address of male slaves of any age as ‘boy’ (Greek παίς, pais; Latin puer), denigrating them as infantile adults” (Harrill, “Paul and Slavery,” 2:305).

\textsuperscript{39} Luz, Matthew, 2:10 n17.
It is widely accepted that the centurion should be understood as a Gentile. Harrington says that the man is certainly a Gentile, though probably not Roman, and that he may be either stationed at a garrison in Capernaum or perhaps retired.\textsuperscript{40} Nolland argues that the centurion’s statement about unworthiness makes the most sense coming from a Gentile.\textsuperscript{41} France says that this is one of two stories in Matthew (the other being 15:21–28) which “explore the paradox of a Gentile’s expectation of help from a Jewish healer.”\textsuperscript{42}

Attempts to narrow down more clearly who this centurion was have gone in two directions. One group of scholars, focused on the historical setting of the story during the ministry of Jesus, argue that this centurion was likely a soldier in the service of Herod Antipas. Evans points out that Galilee was not a Roman province until 44 CE, making it likely that this man is a part of Antipas’s “provincial militia.”\textsuperscript{43} Luz notes the importance of Capernaum as a border town and appeals to Josephus for evidence that Antipas had his own troops.\textsuperscript{44} Schnackenburg locates one of Antipas’s garrisons in or near Capernaum and suggests that it probably consisted mainly of Syrian mercenaries.\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[40] Harrington, \textit{Matthew}, 113.
\item[41] Nolland, \textit{Matthew}, 355.
\item[42] France, \textit{Matthew}, 309. France notes a number of parallels between the two stories, writing that in both “Jesus’ initial reluctance to respond is overcome by the faith of the suppliant, which refuses to be put off and which in each case draws Jesus’ admiring comment. Significantly, these are also the only two stories in Matthew involving a healing from a distance.”
\item[43] Evans, \textit{Matthew}, 187. For another commentator who takes the centurion as a soldier under Antipas, see Morris, \textit{Matthew}, 192.
\item[44] Luz, \textit{Matthew}, 2:9–10 n16.
\item[45] Schnackenburg, \textit{Matthew}, 82.
\end{footnotes}
A second group of scholars argues that Matthew intends for this soldier to be identified as a Roman centurion, the sort of soldier with which his audience would be the most familiar. Keener reads the soldier in this way, using Roman rules about the family life and payment of Roman officers to interpret different elements of the story.46 Davies and Allison, writing about the strangeness of the scene presented in this narrative, say “The scene is an odd one. A Roman is asking for help from a Jew, a commander is playing the part of a supplicant.”47 Concerning Jesus’s surprisingly favorable reaction to this Roman commander, they write that it is actually typical for the New Testament. “Roman centurions not only merit respect but are also pious. This is somewhat surprising given the hostility many first-century Jews felt towards the invincible Roman army.”48

This last point is expanded upon by Keener in a way that is worth noting. He writes

When Matthew is writing (especially if somewhere in the decade following 70), his Jewish readers in the vicinity of Syria or Palestine would be tempted to hate Romans passionately, especially Roman soldiers, and perhaps especially their basic officers…Many in Matthew’s audience undoubtedly had relatives or knew of close relatives of friends who had died in the siege of Jerusalem or whom the Romans had enslaved after Jerusalem’s fall.49

Here Keener raises the important question of how Matthew’s intended audience would have heard this text. What was their experience with Roman soldiers and their officers (and the individuals whom they enslaved) and how might that impact the way that this text was received?

46 Keener, Matthew, 266.

47 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:18. Emphasis added.

48 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:19. For another commentator who takes the centurion as Roman, see Turner, Matthew, 232.

49 Keener, 264–265.
And, if we can assume that Matthew was aware of the experiences and biases of his intended audience, how might the Antiochene experience of the Roman soldiery impact the way that we understand what Matthew wrote?

Antioch’s position on the navigable Orontes River and at the intersection of several major trade routes gave it incredible economic import. Its location near rebellion-prone Judea and the eastern nation of Parthia (with whom Rome had a troubled relationship) made it strategically significant as well.\footnote{Warren Carter, \textit{Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations} (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 40.} For this reason, Rome stationed four legions—approximately 20,000 soldiers—in Antioch (a city of roughly 150,000).\footnote{Carter, \textit{Matthew and Empire}, 40–41.} Legio III Gallica, Legio IV Scythica, Legio VI Ferrata, Legio X Fretensis, Legio XII Fulminata, and Legio XVI Flavia Firma were each garrisoned in Syria at some point between 23 and 138 CE (that is, from the beginning of Tiberius’ reign to the end of Hadrian’s).\footnote{H. M. D. Parker, \textit{The Roman Legions}, rev. ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1958), 118–168. For an overview of the Roman legions stationed in Syria from the reign of Tiberius through the reign of Hadrian, see appendix B.} These soldiers were an ever-present reminder of Rome’s control of the region, as were the hardships arising from levies, taxation, and the requisitioning of “animals for transportation, of labor, and of lodging for soldiers” that came with the army’s presence.\footnote{Carter, \textit{Matthew and Empire}, 41. Carter also notes that, when these taxations and levies were raised to support campaigns against Galilee and Judea, it caused strife between Antioch’s Syrian and Jewish populations (Carter, \textit{Matthew and Empire}, 40, 42). For Matthew and his audience’s familiarity with the requisitioning of labor, see 5:41 (καὶ ὅστις σε ἐγγαρεύσει μίλιον ἔν, ὅπερε μετ’ αὐτὸδ δύο).}

The relationship between these soldiers and Antioch’s Jewish population must have been fraught with difficulties since these legions “played an active role in Judean crises through the
Century.” 54 Josephus recounts the mobilization of the Syrian legions against Judea in 40 CE, again around 50 CE, and again from 66 CE until the destruction of the last holdouts at Masada in 73 CE. Vespasian and Titus, who commanded the Syrian legions against Judea (and who both would later become emperor), visited Antioch on a number of occasions during and after their campaigns against Judea. Josephus writes that in 71 CE, when Titus was broadcasting his victory over Jerusalem, he “presented costly spectacles in all the cities of Syria through which he went, making use of [his] Jewish captives in the exhibition of their own destruction.” 55 Imperial coinage circulating in the region at the time, with imprints like JUDEA CAPTA and JUDEA DEVICTA, 56 served as a constant reminder to the Syrian Jews of the subjugation of their people. 57

When Matthew’s original Antiochian audience heard that a centurion approached Jesus, no doubt they could formulate a very clear picture of such a person. When they were told “a centurion had a slave,” it was likely not difficult for them to imagine. One major mechanism for enslaving people in the Roman world was capture in war. Bradley refers to the enslavement of defeated enemies as “one of the principal mechanisms by which Rome provided itself with slaves.” These war captives, taken from all corners of the Empire, were not necessarily shipped to Rome. They may instead be sold to the “itinerant dealers” who followed the legions, or they

54 Carter, Matthew and Empire, 40.

55 καὶ δὴ ὅπειρα τῆς Συρίας ἐν πάσαις θεωρίαις τε συντελόν πολυτελεῖς καὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων τοὺς αἰχμαλώτους εἰς ἔπιδειξιν τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἀπολέσας ἀποχρόμενος (Josephus, B.J. 7.96).

56 “Judea Captured” and “Judea Conquered.”

57 Carter, Matthew and Empire, 44.
might be “distributed to the troops as a form of payment or bonus.”\textsuperscript{58} As an example, consider Livy’s description of the sack of Fidenae in Rome’s war with the Etruscans,\textsuperscript{59} in which he writes:

The following day lots were drawn by the cavalry and the centurions for single captives, or two for those [soldiers] of exceptional valor, while the others were sold at auction. The triumphant dictator led his army to Rome, victorious and rich in plunder.\textsuperscript{60}

For the sale of enslaved persons by the legionary commanders, see Cicero’s letter to Atticus, written in 51 BCE after his victory at Pindemissum as governor of Cilicia: “To [the soldiers] I relinquished the plunder, with the exception of the slaves…As I am writing there is about 120,000 sesterces on the platform.”\textsuperscript{61}

In her book on slavery among the Jews, Catherine Hezser writes “Enslavements of Jews by Romans seem to have happened particularly often during the first and second Jewish revolts [that is, between 66–136 CE]…In Bellum [Josephus] states that ‘the total number of prisoners taken throughout the entire war amounted to ninety-seven thousand’ ([B.J.] 6.9.3, 420),” most of whom would be sold into slavery.\textsuperscript{62} As noted above, these enslaved individuals were not

\textsuperscript{58} Bradley, \textit{Slavery and Society}, 32–33.

\textsuperscript{59} The reported battle took place in 526 BCE, but Livy’s description of the aftermath, written near the end of the first century BCE, may reflect early imperial military practice.

\textsuperscript{60} Postero die singulis captivis ab equite ac centurionibus sorte ductis, et quorum eximia virtus fuerat, binis, aliis sub corona venundatis exercitum victorem opulentumque praedia triumphans dictator Romam reduxit (Livy, \textit{Ab Urbe Condita}, 4.34.4). Scheidel notes that the exact meaning of the standard term for this sort of immediate sale after capture, \textit{sub corona vendere} (translated above as “sold at auction”), was “unclear by the second century BC” (Scheidel, “Slave Supply,” 294). For another example of a commander distributing enslaved captives to their soldiers, see Suetonius, \textit{Divus Julius} 26.

\textsuperscript{61} Quibus exceptis <captivis> reliquam praedam concessimus…cum haec scribem, in tribunali res erat ad HS CXX (Cicero, \textit{Letters to Atticus}, 5.20.4). Of particular note is the way Cicero dehumanizes these captives by numbering not the persons but rather the sum of money their sale was likely to produce.

\textsuperscript{62} Hezser, \textit{Jewish Slavery}, 230. Hezser notes that even if Josephus has exaggerated his numbers, the number of enslaved must have been in the tens of thousands. It is perhaps worth noting that one of those individuals captured and enslaved by the Romans was Josephus himself.
necessarily sent to Rome itself. Some would be sent to slave markets in non-Jewish Palestine, in Egypt, and in Syria, while others may have been distributed to the soldiers who fought in these conflicts as payment.

Of the six legions noted above, four of them took part in the First Jewish War (66–73 CE) (one had not yet been created; the other remained garrisoned in Syria in full force during the conflict). IV Scythica and VI Ferrata both sent contingents to support Cestius Gallus and XII Fulminata in their fight against the Jewish rebels at the outset of the conflict in 66 CE. XII Fulminata and X Fretensis both fought under Titus in the siege of Jerusalem (X Fretensis also fought at Masada). Of the legions garrisoned near Antioch at the time Matthew was written (III Gallica, IV Scythica, and VI Ferrata; perhaps also XII Fulminata), only III Gallica did not directly participate in the First Jewish War. What’s more, the influx of enslaved Jewish persons into the regions around Judaea after the war make it very likely, I think, that Matthew’s Antiochian audience would imagine the man enslaved by the centurion as a war captive, and perhaps a (fellow?) Jew.

This background would seem to set up in the audience a predisposition to think of the centurion with hostility and to think of the enslaved man with sympathy. Indeed, if Keener is correct in his claim that many in Matthew’s audience would have acquaintances who were killed or enslaved by the Romans during the recent conflicts in Judea then it is hard to imagine them

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64 XII Fulminata returned to Syria after the Jewish war but was transferred to Cappadocia in the last decades of the first century, perhaps before Matthew was written (J. Brian Campbell, “Legio,” BNP, accessed online).
viewing these two characters any other way. Yet as we move through this text it is the centurion (the outsider, the oppressor, the slaveholder), and not the enslaved individual, who is presented by Matthew as the sympathetic character. He comes to Jesus with a request for healing, responding with humble persistence when Jesus expresses a reluctance to help. His apparent grasp of Jesus’s authority and his faith in Jesus’s ability to bring about healing even from a distance are praised by Jesus and are set up by the author as qualities to be imitated.

The Role of the Enslaved: Submission to Authority

When compared to the centurion, the enslaved man is a relatively minor character in this narrative. His illness prompts his master to seek out Jesus and the report of his miraculous healing draws the story to a close. This is the extent of his involvement in the pericope as a simple agent.

Commentators often see an indication of affection in the centurion’s appeal for the man he has enslaved. Keener writes that the centurion shows an “interest in the servant’s welfare” that is “not merely economic,” and that this enslaved man “was probably the centurion’s entire ‘family.’” Nolland too talks about the “affectionate family link” between the master and the enslaved. While that is a possibility, there is nothing in the text of Matthew to indicate the centurion’s motives in coming to Jesus. As Gundry points out, Matthew’s text lacks the clause ὃς ἦν αὐτῷ ἐντιμος (found in the Lukan parallel in Luke 7:2), which may be read as an expression of affection. Indeed Matthew’s text gives no indication as to what motivates the centurion to

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65 Keener, Matthew, 266.
66 Nolland, Matthew, 354.
67 Robert H. Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 142. I say that this clause may be read as an indication of affection.
come to Jesus with this request for the enslaved man. Is it genuine concern for the man’s wellbeing that brings the centurion to Jesus? Is the request more self-motivated, since an enslaved person who is “laying in the house paralyzed” cannot adequately serve his master? The text is ambiguous on this point.

The text is explicit on one point: how the centurion imagines his relationship with an enslaved person should be characterized. In his response to Jesus’s hesitation to come and heal, the centurion says, “I too am a man under authority, with soldiers subject to me, and I say to one ‘Go’ and he goes, and to anther ‘Come here,’ and he comes, and to my slave ‘Do this,’ and he does it” (8:9).68 Many commentaries are content to ignore the move from “soldiers” to “slave” in the centurion’s statement.69 Morris notes the shift, but only to say that is has “no great significance.”70 While it may not represent a significant shift in the substance of what the centurion is saying, it does represent a significant and relevant assumption of his time. It is a statement of the most basic belief of the slave-holding class; when an enslaved person is given a command, it should be obeyed without question. The task of the enslaved person is to do what he is told. It is this sort of “domination” of will that Patterson claims characterizes slavery. From the master’s perspective, the enslaved person has no will of their own. Rather the will of the master

because ἐντιμὸς can also mean “valuable” in a financial sense, thus the Lukian centurion may be expressing a financial concern rather than true concern for the life of a valued individual. Consider the Vulgate translation which renders ἐντιμὸς as pretiosus (“expensive”/“costly”; from pretium, “price”) rather than honoratus (“honored”/“esteemed”).

68 καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ ἀνθρωπός εἰμι ὑπὸ ἐξουσίαν, ἔχων ὑπ’ ἐμαυτῶν στρατιώτας, καὶ λέγω τούτῳ· Πορεύθητι, καὶ πορεύεται, καὶ ἄλλῳ· Ἐρχομαι, καὶ ἔρχεται, καὶ τῷ δούλῳ μου· Ποίησον τοῦτο, καὶ ποιεῖ.

69 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:24; Luz, Matthew, 2:10; Harrington, Matthew, 114; Keener, Matthew, 267–68; Nolland, Matthew, 355–56; France, Matthew, 314–15; Schnackenburg, Matthew, 82; Turner, Matthew, 232.

70 Morris, Matthew, 194.
is imposed upon them. The enslaved should not act of their own accord but should simply do what the master tells them to do. Harrill writes “Mastery over slaves was an absolute, personalized form of power, known in Latin as auctoritas, which involved a series of specific modes of domination to make the subordinate not only comply with individual orders but also to anticipate the master’s wishes.” In this particular narrative, the enslaved person is expected to obey orders. We will see in the parables the expectation of anticipation which Harrill describes.

The expectation of obedience is not only repeated by the evangelist, it is met with amazement and praise from Jesus. His own authority to heal is compared to the centurion’s authority to command his soldiers and to dominate those he enslaves. Jesus responds by telling those who were following him that he has not seen this sort of faith in Israel (8:10) and then by healing the enslaved man according to the centurion’s request. It is worth noting that, even here, the enslaved man is presented in a secondary way. The healing is carried out for the centurion’s benefit, not for the benefit of the infirmed man (8:13, “let it be done for you”). Matthew’s presentation of this story accepts as true the basic assumption of the ancient slaveholding class: enslaved persons exist to serve their masters.

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71 This could, perhaps, give us an indication of the centurion’s motivation in coming to Jesus. If the enslaved person is imagined as one who does what he is told to do, what could be worse for the master than an enslaved individual who suffers from paralysis? The man enslaved by the centurion was laying at home, unable to carry out orders. Could this be what brings the centurion to Jesus? Like other interpretations, this is speculative at best but has as much or more support from the text as other proposed interpretations.

72 Harrill, “Paul and Slavery,” 2:315. See also Harrill, “The Metaphor of Slavery in the Writings of Tertullian,” Studia Patristica 42 (2003): 387, where he writes that the “distinctly Roman form of domination known as auctoritas…recognizes the subjectivity of subordinates and sees that true authority consists not just in obeying individual commands, but in the subordinate’s compliance to the personal power of the master, even anticipating the master’s will.”

73 Keeping in mind, as was previously noted, Matthew’s audience may likely imagine those enslaved by this centurion as Jewish war captives.
While the enslaved man is visible in this story, he is only barely so. He appears in order to set up the story with his infirmity and his healing brings the story to a close. He is not permitted to speak. He is unable to act. Combining these elements of the story with the centurion’s description of the enslaved and their lot in life (i.e., to obey orders as they are given) we have a portrayal of ancient slavery that conforms to Patterson’s model of domination. The enslaved person is secondary in this narrative in every possible way. His miraculous healing is ultimately a service to the master, who will once again have the use of an enslaved individual who can do what he is told to do.

**Those Enslaved by Herod the Tetrarch (14:1–2)**

Matthew introduces another enslaved character (or group of characters) in 14:1–2. In this brief text, Herod Antipas expresses curiosity regarding the identity of Jesus. It serves as an introduction to the story of the execution of John the Baptist at Antipas’s command. Matthew’s text reads as follows:

> [1] At that time Herod the Tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, [2] and he said to his slaves “This is John the Baptist; he was raised from the dead, and for this reason the powers are at work in him.”

Matthew’s version of events is markedly shorter than the Markan report, which shall be provided here for comparison.

> [14] And King Herod heard, for his [i.e. Jesus’s] name was becoming well known, and they were saying “John the Baptist had been raised from the dead, and for this reason the powers are at work in him.” [15] And others were saying “He is Elijah,” and others were

74 In this way, the enslaved man is as much a part of the literary setting as he is a true “character.”

75 Ἐν ἡκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἤκουσεν Ἡρῴδης ὁ τετράρχης τὴν ἀκοήν Ἰησοῦ, καὶ εἶπεν τοῖς παισίν αὐτοῦ· Οὗτος ἐστιν Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτιστής· αὐτὸς ἤγερθη ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ διὰ τούτῳ αἱ δυνάμεις ἐνέργειας ἐν αὐτῷ.
saying “[He is] a prophet like one of the prophets.” [16] Hearing [this] Herod said, “The one whom I beheaded, John, this one was raised” (Mark 6:14–16).76

It is immediately apparent that Matthew has condensed Mark’s story substantially.77 The note about Jesus’s name becoming well known and the various opinions about him are summarized simply as τὴν ἰκανὴν Ἡσυχῶ (“the news about Jesus”). The identification of John as “the one whom I beheaded” is taken out78 in favor of the detail about “the powers” being at work.79

The most notable of Matthew’s changes for our purposes is his addition of τοῖς παισίν αὐτῶ to the Markan text. In Mark, Herod considers the reports he has heard and wonders aloud, presumably to himself, about Jesus’s identity. Matthew has, without explanation, added a group of silent interlocutors—“his slaves.”

Herod the Tetrarch and His παιδες

The “Herod” in question in this story would be Herod Antipas, appropriately identified by Matthew as a τετραάρχης,80 ruler of Galilee and Perea from 4 BCE until 39 CE.81 He was the

76 Καὶ ἤκουσεν ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἡρῴδης, φανερὸν γὰρ ἐγένετο τὸ ὅνομα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔλεγον ὅτι Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτίζων ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐνεργοῦσιν αἱ δυνάμεις ἐν αὐτῷ· ἄλλοι δὲ ἔλεγον ὅτι Ἡλίας ἐστίν· ἄλλοι δὲ ἔλεγον ὅτι προφήτης ὡς εἰς τὸν προφήτην. ἰκανός δὲ ὁ Ἡρῴδης ἔλεγεν· Ὁν ἐγὼ ἀπεκεφάλισα Ἰωάννην, οὗτος ἦγερθη.

77 Matthew’s text contains 34 words compared to Mark’s 54.

78 This detail is retained in some manuscripts (D, a,b, ff1, h, vgmas), likely an editorial attempt to conform Matthew’s text to Mark’s.

79 Other editorial changes by Matthew are his addition of the transitional phrase Ἐν ἐκάνον τοῦ καυροῦ at the beginning of the story, and his correction of Herod’s title (from Mark’s βασιλεὺς to the more accurate τετραάρχης).

80 As opposed to Mark, who calls this character βασιλεὺς.

81 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:466.
son of Herod the Great\textsuperscript{82} and his fourth wife, the Samaritan woman Malthace.\textsuperscript{83} Antipas was first married to the daughter of the Nabataean king Aretas IV Philopatris but divorced her in favor of Herodias, daughter of his half-brother Aristobulus IV and former wife of his half-brother Herod Philip.\textsuperscript{84} Antipas was exiled to western Europe after he unsuccessfully petitioned the emperor Caligula for the royal title “king” which his nephew and brother-in-law Agrippa had been awarded.

Antipas was thus succeeded by his nephew, Agrippa. None of our sources tell us whether or not he had any children of his own. We know nothing about children by his Nabataean wife (indeed, we do not even know her name). Josephus tells us that Herodias followed him into exile but says nothing about children (either sent into exile or executed to ensure a smooth transition of power).\textsuperscript{85} The only “child” associated with Antipas in the New Testament is Salome, who is called not the child of Herod but “the daughter of Herodias.”\textsuperscript{86}

This brings us once again to the question of how best to translate παῖς. It seems unlikely, based on the other surviving historical data we have, that Matthew is providing us with evidence here that Antipas had multiple, otherwise unknown offspring. It is equally unlikely that Matthew intends for us to imagine this Herod speaking with a group of young children. It seems most

\textsuperscript{82} The Herod of Matthew’s infancy narrative.

\textsuperscript{83} David C. Braund, “Herod Antipas,” \textit{ABD} 3:160. See also Josephus, \textit{A.J.} 17.20.

\textsuperscript{84} The name “Herod Philip” is a modern reconstruction based on two sources. In Matthew, Antipas’s half-brother is called only Philip (14:3). Josephus, on the other hand, refers to Herodias’s first husband simply as “Herod” (\textit{A.J.} 18.5.1).


\textsuperscript{86} ἡ θυγάτιρ τῆς Ἡροδίας (14:6). Josephus specifies that Salome was the child of Herodias and her first husband (Josephus, \textit{A.J.} 18.5.4).
plausible that when Matthew refers to the παῖδες of Herod in this passage, he is instead referring to the enslaved attendants and retainers that often accompanied and served kings and other wealthy persons in the ancient world. Sandra Joshel writes that “without proper servants, a person of substance or someone with aspirations to social standing could not live nobly,” and that for such enslaved persons, simply “being on hand…was part of their work.” She also notes that, during the reign of Augustus, individuals sent into exile “could only take twenty servants—a number meant to be punitive.” That a person of Antipas’s status should be surrounded by enslaved attendants is historically quite likely.

The Septuagint frequently attests to such a usage of παῖς. Davies and Allison note that παῖς is used of a ruler’s “attendants or courtiers” in Gen 41:10, 37–8 (the servants of Pharaoh), 1 Kgdms 16:15–17 (the servants of Saul), Jer 43:31 (the servants of Jehoiakim), Jer 44:2 (the servants of Zedekiah), and 1 Macc 1:6, 8 (the Diadochi). Their list is by no means exhaustive. One could add to this list the servants of David (2 Kdgms 10:2–4), of Solomon (3 Kgdms 10:5, 8), and those attending to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:4, 7), among others.

87 It is telling that even Luz, who insists that Matthew never uses the word παῖς to refer to enslaved characters, opts to translated παιδία here as “slaves” (Luz, Matthew, 2:305). For other commentators who opt for the translation “servants” here, see William F. Albright and C. S. Mann, Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 175; Evans, Matthew, 290; Schnackenburg, Matthew, 138; Gundry, Matthew, 285; Nolland, Matthew, 579; Morris, Matthew, 368; France, Matthew, 551; and Harrington, Matthew, 214. The παιδες here are also referred to as “attendants” (Turner, Matthew, 363; Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:467), and “courtiers” (Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:467; Schnackenburg, Matthew, 140).

88 Joshel, Slavery, 184.

89 Joshel, Slavery, 186.

90 Joshel, Slavery, 184.

91 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:467. Jeremiah references reflect LXX numbering. In MT, see Jer 36:31 and 37:2. In all cases except 1 Maccabees (which has no Hebrew archetype), παῖς serves as a translation for 'ebed in the Hebrew. Diadochi is the term used for the rival generals of Alexander the Great who fought for control of his empire after his death in 323 BCE.
A closer look at these occurrences of παῖς demonstrates a further difficulty in understanding this term. Although in each of these cases παῖς can (and should) be translated as servant/slave, the individuals to whom the word refers are quite diverse. In 2 Kgdms 10, the παιδες of David are messengers who are harshly mistreated by those who receive them. In 1 Macc 1, the individuals designated as παιδες are not literal “slaves” but are soldiers—important generals, in fact. The παιδες of Solomon seen by the Queen of Sheba in 3 Kgdms 10 are notably seated and are listed alongside those who are standing to serve (λειτουργός, as a translation of the Hebrew מְשָׁרָת). This has led translators to understand these παιδες as royal officials and the λειτουργοί as servants, though it may be better to understand both groups as serving, albeit in different capacities. Daniel presents a particularly interesting case. In Dan 2:2 the reader is introduced to a group of magicians (ἐπαθιδοῦς), enchanters (μάγους), sorcerers (φαρμάκους), and Chaldeans (χαλδαῖος) whom the king summons to interpret his dream. In v. 4 and again in v. 7 these individuals call themselves the king’s slaves. In this instance, παῖς is probably meant to indicate the place of these men vis-à-vis their sovereign (i.e., individuals who are bound to serve him) and not their actual social status.

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92 A similar depiction of enslaved messengers who are vulnerable to violence will be seen in Matthew’s parables.

93 For a similar use of παῖς to refer to fighting men in a king’s service, see 2 Kgdms 2:12, 13, 15, 17, 30, 31 and 4 Kgdms 6:8, 11, 12. Again, in each of these instances παῖς serves as a translation for ‘ebed.

94 See translations in the ESV (officials…servants), NIV (officials…servants), NRSV (officials…servants). Similarly, NABre (ministers…waiters). Uniquely, the NASB takes both roles as servile (servants…waiters). This seems to be a faithful rendering of the Hebrew (where the difference between šarat and ‘ebed is the difference between ministerial service and menial service; see BDB) and is also an appropriate way to read the Greek.

95 That is, these men were bound to serve the king, as are all people in his kingdom, but they were not necessarily of enslaved status.
Thus, even though Matthew’s text and its context make it clear that παῖδες in 14:2 should be translated as “slaves” rather than “children” or “youths,” we cannot be certain what sort of individuals our author intended for his audience to imagine. Mark imagines this same Herod surrounded by “his courtiers, military officers, and the most prominent people of Galilee.”

Does Matthew imagine the παῖδες of 14:2 as such high-status individuals? Or are they persons of enslaved status? The LXX evidence would suggest that both are possibilities, but Matthew gives us little if anything to indicate that one option should be preferred over the other. For the purposes of our exploration of the narrative, however, these characters will be read as enslaved since the author refers to them using a servile term.

The Role of the Enslaved: Unnecessary Interlocutors

One could justifiably ask why Matthew thinks it necessary to insert these enslaved characters at all. It is one of the few editorial additions made to a Markan passage that is otherwise substantially shortened, but the reasoning behind the addition is not readily apparent. Indeed, a number of scholars writing on this pericope ignore Herod’s παῖδες altogether since they seem to contribute nothing to the narrative. When Davies and Allison list the “most significant” changes which Matthew made to Mark’s account, the insertion of τοῖς παισίν αὐτοῦ is not among them.

The commentators who do mention these persons enslaved by Herod in this passage argue that they were inserted by the author to provide the tetrarch with interlocutors. Holland

96 τοῖς μεγιστᾶσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῖς χάλιχρους καὶ τοῖς πρώτοις τῆς Γαλιλαίας (Mark 6:21).
97 See Keener, Matthew, 398; Harrington, Matthew, 214–16; France, Matthew, 553; Albright and Mann, Matthew, 175–6; Turner, Matthew, 363; Evans, Matthew, 291; Talbert, Matthew, 182; Luz, Matthew, 2:306.
98 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:464.
writes succinctly “Where the other Gospels provide no audience, Matthew identifies the logical hearers for Herod’s words: the servants who attended him.”\textsuperscript{99} Morris and Gundry make similar observations.\textsuperscript{100} Their point is clear enough. In the Markan and Lukan accounts, Herod is talking to himself (Mark 6:16; Luke 9:9). In Matthew, he speaks to “his slaves.”

The question remains “What role do these enslaved individuals play in the narrative?” Again, Matthew gives us very little to work with. These individuals are apparently added to the narrative by Matthew but don’t seem to add anything of substance to the narrative by their presence. As simple agents, they move the story forward simply by being present to hear Herod’s concerns (though they offer no insights or response). It would be a stretch to call such agents “interlocutors” since there is no dialogue in this passage, only Herod speaking and these enslaved persons standing by to hear him.

It is not surprising that we find enslaved individuals portrayed in such a passive way. Harrill writes that ancient authors often imagine the enslaved “as a mere extension of the master’s self.”\textsuperscript{101} As extensions of the master, wholly subordinate to his or her will, enslaved persons are able to act as “managers and business agents…[engaging] in commerce on behalf of elite owners,” going where a master does not wish to go and carrying out tasks as a stand-in for the master.\textsuperscript{102} In these cases, we see the enslaved portrayed as passive vessels through which the master might enact their will. Harrill notes that when Pliny the Younger voices “concern” for his

\textsuperscript{99} Nolland, \textit{Matthew}, 579.

\textsuperscript{100} Morris, \textit{Matthew}, 369 n4; Gundry, \textit{Matthew}, 285.

\textsuperscript{101} Harrill, “Paul and Slavery,” 2:302.

\textsuperscript{102} Joshel, \textit{Slavery}, 165.
ill lector, the enslaved Encolpius, he actually “voices his own desires as though they belong to
the slave.”

This is appropriate if one believes, as the ancient slave-holding class seems to, that the
enslaved should not exercise their own individual will but should rather “subordinate
[themselves] to the master’s will.”

Those living in slavery in the Roman world, Bradley argues, must have always been conscious of the tension between their independent personhood on the one hand and the total domination of their will by the master on the other. He writes

To greater or lesser degree, slavery presented all Roman slaves with an unavoidable dilemma—the dilemma of reconciling their active human potential with a social categorization that in theory denied them all possibility of exercising independent judgement and freedom of the will.

From the slave-holders perspective, however, the dilemma was how to restrain the active will of enslaved individuals and to keep them subordinated to the master.

In light of such attitudes, one could understand Matthew’s Herod as, in essence, talking to himself as he does in the Markan and Lukan parallels. Although Matthew has added the enslaved persons to this passage, they serve no real function as characters. They hear Herod’s concern but offer no response. The story is not meaningfully changed by their presence; indeed, Luke has no problem following Mark and omitting them. They are merely an extension of their master, serving here as the recipient of Herod’s otherwise aimless dialogue.

Any conclusions about the enslaved characters in this narrative must remain tentative because of the lack of evidence. The passage offers very little and we are left to conjecture. The

103 Harrill, “Paul and Slavery,” 2:301.
104 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 176.
105 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 178.
106 The dynamics of this relationship is detailed at length in Bradley, Slaves and Masters.
reading offered here highlights the domination of the will of the enslaved in antiquity, subordinating them to the point that they are denied personhood and become a mere extension of their master. In this way it conforms to Patterson’s model of slavery as domination. However, it must be readily admitted that this reading is more speculative than conclusive.

Those Enslaved by the High Priest

The arrest of Jesus brings the reader into contact with three more enslaved characters. First, in 26:51 we encounter a man enslaved by the high priest who comes with the arresting party and whose ear is cut off by one of Jesus’s companions. Then, in 26:69, 71 Peter is confronted by two enslaved women who accuse him of being with Jesus. Ronald Charles highlights the uniqueness of these enslaved persons among the others present in Matthew’s Gospel; unlike the enslaved persons discussed previously, these individuals are “present and/or tangible in the narrative.”

The two enslaved women of this chapter are the only slaves in Matthew’s narrative who are permitted to speak, and the physical presence of the δοῦλος in the garden is highlighted by the assault on his body.

Identifying the Enslaved Man in Gethsemane (26:47–54)

[47] And while he was still speaking—behold! —Judas, one of the twelve, came and with him a large crowd from the chief priests and elders of the people [armed] with swords and clubs. [48] (Now, his betrayer had given a sign to them, saying “He is the one whom I will kiss. Arrest him.”) [49] And immediately upon coming to Jesus he said “Greetings, Rabbi,” and he kissed him. [50] And Jesus said to him “Friend, [do] what you are here for.” Then, coming forward, they laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. [51] And—behold!—one of those with Jesus extending his hand drew out his sword, striking the slave of the high priest and cutting off his ear. [52] Then Jesus said to him “Return your sword to its place, for all who take up the sword will die by the sword. [53] Do you think I am not able to call my father, and he will at once put at my disposal as many as twelve legions of angels?

How else will the scriptures be fulfilled [which say] that it must happen in this way?108

There has been a surprising amount written about the potential identity of the individual whom Matthew simply calls τὸν δούλον τοῦ ἁρχιερέως. Luz states, most correctly, that Matthew shows no interest in who this enslaved person is,109 but this has not prevented scholars from speculating. Norbert Krieger wrote a short piece in 1957 suggesting that “the slave of the high priest” was not of slave status at all but was actually Judas.110 Krieger argues that, for the disciples of Jesus who recorded the Gospel stories, Judas served as a guide for those arresting Jesus (Acts 1:16) and had “presented and sold himself to the High Priest as a ‘servant of obedience’ (Rom 6:16).”111 “For this reason,” he writes “the servants of the Lord have branded his traitor as the servant of the High Priest.”112 Regarding the traditional name, Μάλχος, Krieger says that the fourth evangelist “invented [it] freely” and has, because of his “tremendous authority…[blurred] the original tradition in the consciousness of the church.”113

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108 Kαι ἔτι αὐτὸν λαλοῦντος ἰδοὺ Ἰουδᾶς εἶς τὸν δώδεκα ἠλθεν καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἄχλος πολὺς μετὰ μαχαιρῶν καὶ ἔιλων ἀπὸ τῶν ἁρχιερέων καὶ πρεσβυτέρων τοῦ λαοῦ. ο ὥ τε παραδόοις αὐτῶν ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς σημείων λέγων· Ὁν ἂν φύλεσθε αὐτὸς ἔστην· κρατήσατε αὐτὸν. καὶ εὐθέως προσελθόν τῷ Ἰησοῦ εἶπεν· Ἀλληλες, ῥαββι· καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν. ὃς ἂν Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Ἑατίρε, ἐφ’ ῥά πάρει. τότε προσελθὼντες ἐπέβαλον τὰς μαχαιρὰς ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ ἐκράτησαν αὐτόν. καὶ ἰδοὺ εἰς τὸν μετὰ Ἰησοῦ ἐκτείνας τὴν μαχαίραν μαχαίραν αὐτοῦ καὶ πατάξας τὸν δούλον τοῦ ἁρχιερέως ἀφεῖλεν αὐτὸ τὸ ὅπλον. τότε λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ἀπόστρεψον τὴν μάχαιράν σου εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, πάντες γὰρ οἱ λαβόντες μάχαιραν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀπολοῦνται· ἢ δοκεῖς ὅτι οὐ δύναμαι παρακάλεσαι τὸν πατέρα μου, καὶ παραστῆσαι μοι ἅρτο πλείω δώδεκα λεγόνας ἠγγέλων; πῶς οὖν πληρωθῶσιν αἱ γραφαι ὅτι οὗτος δεὶ γενέσθαι;

109 Luz, Matthew, 3:419.


113 “frei erfunden… es seiner gewaltigen Autorität gelungen, die ursprüngliche Tradition im Bewusstsein der Gemeinde zu verwischen” (Krieger, “Der Knecht,” 73).
Benedict Viviano offers another interpretation, arguing that the δοῦλος of this passage should not be thought of as a “lowly domestic” but rather as the segan hacohanim—the prefect of the priests, the chief assistant or deputy of the high priest.\textsuperscript{114} This is the same individual, Viviano states, who is referred to in Luke as the στρατηγὸς τοῦ ἱεροῦ (Luke 22:4, 52), though he does not explain how he arrives at this conclusion, saying only that “the same usage prevails in Josephus.”\textsuperscript{115}

Further, Viviano argues that cutting off this man’s ear was intended to disqualify him from priestly service.\textsuperscript{116} Daube made a similar point several years earlier. He wrote that, though Rostovtzeff and Lohmeyer after him were right to look for significance in the incident of the enslaved man’s disfigurement, they went to the wrong sources for analogies (Egyptian for Rostovtzeff; Assyrian and Babylonian for Lohmeyer).\textsuperscript{117} Daube presents as more appropriate analogs two stories: in Tosephta Parah 3.8, where Johana ben Zaccai cuts off a Sadducean High Priest’s ear “in order to make him unfit for the cultic service he was about to perform,”\textsuperscript{118} and in Josephus, who says that in 40 BCE Antigonus removed the ear of his uncle Hyrcanus II “in order to deprive him forever of his High Priesthood.”\textsuperscript{119} Of the assault in the Gospels, Viviano writes


\textsuperscript{115} Viviano, “Servant’s Ear,” 73. Viviano gives a reference to Josephus, \textit{B.J.} 6.5.3, which speaks of a στρατηγὸς overseeing the temple, though this individual is not called δοῦλος τοῦ ἁγιασμός at any point. It is also notable that στρατηγὸς τοῦ ἱεροῦ is always plural in Luke (Luke 22:4, 52) and so cannot be the unique designation for a single, “chief assistant” as Viviano claims. For its use in the singular, see the above citation from Josephus, as well as Acts 4:1; 5:24, 26.


\textsuperscript{117} D. Daube, “Three Notes Having to Do with Johanan ben Zakkai,” \textit{JTS} 11, no. 1 (1960): 61.

\textsuperscript{118} Daube, “Three Notes,” 59.

\textsuperscript{119} Daube, “Three Notes,” 61. In one text, the ear is cut off (\textit{A.J.} 14.13.10) while in another, Antigonus bites it off (\textit{B.J.} 1.13.10).
It was a well-chosen insult, the wound was of a type which, had it been inflicted on the servant’s master, would have forced him from office. And there can be nobody who didn’t understand… One could not lay hands on the master, and there is, of course, no question of his having become unfit. But at least he was not so far out of reach as to escape altogether: he would be seriously and suggestively disgraced by having his servant mutilated in this particular manner.\textsuperscript{120}

Keener doubts that this is the case, arguing instead that “the disciple was probably aiming for a more substantive target (like the man’s neck) and missed because he had no practice striking what rapidly became a moving target.”\textsuperscript{121}

France and Morris both point out that this enslaved person is designated not simply as δοῦλον but as τὸν δοῦλον (with the article). France suggests that this could indicate that the enslaved man should be thought of as the leader of the arresting party.\textsuperscript{122} Morris notes that “all four Gospels say that this was the slave, not a slave, of the high priest, but with our ignorance of the high priest’s household we cannot tell whether this is significant or not.”\textsuperscript{123} It is unclear what Morris hopes to draw from this but his assumption that the presence of the Greek article requires that we understand this as “the slave” (perhaps the only slave?) is, in the end, unhelpful.\textsuperscript{124}


\textsuperscript{121} Keener, Matthew, 643. Morris writes similarly that “Peter struck a lusty blow in the general direction of the enemy but managed to inflict only minor damage” (Morris, Matthew, 675). France also expresses doubt that the intention of the injury was to disqualify the enslaved man (or, symbolically, the high priest) from temple service (France, Matthew, 1013 n21).

\textsuperscript{122} France, Matthew, 1013. A similar suggestion may be found in Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:511. Luz notes that interpreters have made the enslaved man “an especially brave fighter or even a leader of the enemy hoard” (Luz, Matthew, 3:419).

\textsuperscript{123} Morris, Matthew, 675 n97.

\textsuperscript{124} The presence of the article in Greek does not require the presence of a definite article in English any more than its absence in Greek requires an indefinite article.
These arguments for the identity of the δοῦλος seem to stretch what is actually found in the text and appear at a certain level to be attempts to avoid the obvious conclusion that this δοῦλος is, in fact, a person enslaved by the High Priest. Ultimately, in agreement with Luz, I think the most we can reasonably say here is that Matthew is not interested in the identity of this enslaved man beyond the stated fact that he belongs to the High Priest. While this idea (i.e., the idea of a Jewish religious leader enslaving someone) may seem strange or even scandalous to the modern reader, it is unlikely that it would have bothered the Gospel’s original audience. Jospehus, writing about the disagreements between the high priests and the rest of the priesthood during the reign of Nero, says

Such great shamelessness and recklessness seized the High Priests that they even dared to send *slaves* to the threshing floor to carry off the tithes meant for the priests. And it resulted that the poorer of the priests died because of the deficiency (*A.J. 20.8.8*).125

In the Talmudic tradition we read in b. Pesachim 57a the following:

Woe is me due to the servants of the High Priests of the house of Yishmael ben Piakhi; woe is me due to their fists. The power of these households stemmed from the fact that their fathers were High Priests, and their sons were the Temple treasurers, and their sons-in-law were Temple overseers. And their servants strike the people with clubs, and otherwise act inappropriately.126

We know from various early sources (both in Hebrew and in Greek) that the High Priests could and did enslave people. The injured man of our story was one of them.

125 τοσαυτὴ δὲ τοὺς ἄργους κατέλαβεν ἀναιδεία καὶ τόλμα, ὡστε καὶ πέμπειν δοῦλος ἑτόλμων ἐπὶ τὰς ἀλωνας τοὺς λημωμένους τὰς τοῖς ἱερεῖσιν ὁφελομένας δεκάτας, καὶ συνεβαινεν τοὺς ἀπορουμένους τῶν ἱερέων ὑπ’ ἐνδείας τελευτάν.

126 Translation from the William Davidson Talmud, accessed online through sefaria.org.
The Role of the Enslaved: The *Locus* of Violence

What is more interesting to me in this passage is not the identity of the enslaved man, but what happens to him. We read that an unnamed individual who is with Jesus strikes off the enslaved person’s ear with a sword. In commenting on this passage, Davies and Allison write that the “disciple is unaccountably not arrested.” Indeed if this δοῦλος were actually Judas or the *segan hacoahanim* or some other important person, perhaps “the leader of the arresting party” then it would be surprising that the armed crowd didn’t take the offender into custody along with Jesus. Instead, the offender faces no consequences simply because the individual assaulted was no one of consequence. The injured man is not Judas, nor a priest, nor any other free individual. As Nolland puts it, “The scale of the opposition is paltry… Only one person is hurt, and that one person [only] a slave.” Thus the violence inflicted upon him (as the narrative is told) is not presented as problematic.

Interpreters have rightly shown a progression in the way the story of this enslaved person is told from one Gospel to the next. Davies and Allison write that in Mark “Jesus fails to respond verbally to the cutting off of the slave’s ear: the event has no commentary and no obvious meaning. In Matthew…the commentary becomes the whole point.” Ronald Charles has recently highlighted the different reactions in the four Gospels to the violence done to this individual. Mark’s story is characterized by indifference; “nothing is said or done about the

cutting of the slave’s ear.”

In Matthew, Jesus responds by teaching that violence begets violence, words often taken to imply pacifism. However, Charles rightfully points out that “in Matthew, there is still a general indifference toward the actual situation of the slave bleeding.” Jesus’s teaching about non-violence is directed at the disciple and at the armed crowd who has come to arrest him, not to the enslaved man who has recently been the victim of violence. This figure provided an appropriate occasion for the lesson, but the message of peace does not heal the damage already done to his vulnerable body.

Here we may see another basic assumption of the Roman institution of slavery; the bodies of the enslaved are always vulnerable to violence. Various indignities were carried out against enslaved persons in the ancient world, first by slave dealers, and then by the individuals who purchased them, whose prerogative to abuse the enslaved physically was practically limitless. Any injury an enslaved person might receive from a third party entitled the master to redress because of “damage suffered by their property” but would not call for legal action equivalent to the assault of a free person. As Bradley writes, “any Roman slave, as a

131 Charles, Silencing of Slaves, 119.

132 See Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:511.

133 Charles, Silencing of Slaves, 119. Charles goes on to say that Luke’s story advocates for a compassionate response to violence as his Jesus heals the enslaved man, while John’s story teaches that “violence against a known slave who belongs to a powerful owner should not be pursued because his master is powerful” (Charles, Silencing of Slaves, 119).

134 Recall Patterson, “Slavery is…violent domination…” (Slavery and Social Death, 13).


136 Bradley, Slaves and Masters, 118.

137 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 49.
matter of course, could become the object of physical abuse or injury at any time.”

Although Galen wrote against striking the enslaved in anger, he goes on to say “[The master] could have waited a little while…and inflicted as many blows as they wished with a rod or whip and accomplished the same deed with a level head.”

Bradley summarizes Galen’s discussion, saying,

Galen continued with remarks on how common it was for slaves to be punched with the fists, to be kicked, to have their eyes put out, on how he himself had once seen a man stab a slave in the eye with a reed pen in a fit of anger, and on how his own mother had been so quick to lose her temper that it had been her habit to bite her maidservants.

His point, writes Bradley, is that “there was nothing untoward in abusing a slave, only in doing so in an uncalculated and undisciplined fashion.” The assumption of the slave-holding class was that the enslaved were acceptable targets of abuse.

We can see echoes of this assumption also in Matthew’s Gospel. Consider the enslaved characters in the Parable of the Tenants (who are beaten and even killed) and the “unfaithful slave” who, in the parable in Matthew 24, is literally cut in two (διχοτομέω, 24:51). The violence inflicted on the enslaved in these parabolic cases is not presented as exceptional, nor is it emphasized in our scene in Gethsemane. The violence against this individual is largely passed over as mundane. Though Matthew’s text attempts to problematize the cycle of violence, it

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138 Bradley, Slaves and Masters, 4.


140 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 28–29.

141 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 28.

142 The enslaved persons described in the parables will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.
exhibits an indifference toward those who are forced by a violent institution to suffer abuse regularly.

Identifying the Enslaved Women in the Courtyard (26:69–75)

Matthew leaves the man enslaved by the High Priest bleeding in Gethsemane as the attention of the reader is taken up immediately by Jesus’s arrest. The disciples scatter and Jesus is brought before the High Priest. Only Peter follows, taking a seat in the courtyard outside to await the outcome of the trial (26:58). It is here that we meet the final enslaved characters of Matthew’s narrative: two women who question Peter in the courtyard of the High Priest’s home.

[69] Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a slave woman came to him, saying “You were also with Jesus of Galilee.” [70] But he denied it before everyone, saying “I do not know what you are saying.” [71] Another [slave woman] saw him as he went out into the gateway and said to those who were there “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” [72] And again he denied it with an oath, [saying] “I do not know the man.” [73] After a while those standing there approached and said to Peter “Truly you too are one of them, for your speech gives you away.” [74] Then he began to curse and swear oaths, [saying] “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed. [75] And Peter remembered the words of Jesus when he said, “Before the rooster crows you will deny me three times.” And going outside he wept bitterly. 143

While Jesus is being questioned by Caiaphas and the rest of the Sanhedrin, Peter is interrogated by two enslaved women (παιδίσκη). As we noted in our discussion of παῖς above, the diminutive nature of παιδίσκη should not be thought of as affectionate, nor does it necessarily indicate age (as we see in Morris, “not a mature woman but a girl”144). Conversely, the

143 Ὅ δὲ Πέτρος ἐκάθητο ἐξω ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ· καὶ προσῆλθεν αὐτῷ μία παιδίσκη λέγουσα· Καὶ σὺ ἦσα μετὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Γαλιλαίου· ὃς ἦν προσαγωγὴν πάντων λέγων· Ὅλοκληρον τοὺς φυλακῶν καὶ λέγων· ἐξελθόντα δὲ εἰς τὸν πυλῶνα εἶδεν αὐτὸν ἄλλη· λέγειν τοῖς ἑκατέρους· Οὔτος ἦν μετὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζαρηνοῦ· καὶ πάλιν ἦν ἐξελθόντα πρὸς τὸν Πέτρον· Ἀληθῶς καὶ σὺ ἦς αὐτῶν ἐξωτερικῶς· καὶ γὰρ ἡ λαλία σου δὴλὸν ἐν σοι· τότε ἤξεσθε καταπαθήσεις καὶ ἐμφάνισεν ὅτι Ὅλος ὁ λόγος τοῦ Πέτρου· καὶ εὐθείᾳ· ἡ λέξις ἐξελθόντα· καὶ ἐμφάνισε· ὁ Πέτρος τοῦ τῆς ἐξελθόντας· Ἰησοῦ εἰρηκότος· ὅτι Πρὶν ἐξελθόντα· φωνήσει τρίς· ἀπαρνήσει με, καὶ ἐξελθόντα ἐξω ἐκλαύσεις πικρῶς.

144 Morris, Matthew, 688.
diminutive παιδίσκη (much like παῖς) may be pejorative and represents a prejudice of the free that presumes an inherent lack of maturity on the part of the enslaved. Nolland helpfully observes that the diminutive force of παιδίσκη is a mark of social status rather than age. France suggests that, in this context, the diminutive “probably carries a dismissive connotation—only a servant girl.”

The Matthean telling of this common pericope has two notable features that set it apart from its Markan exemplar. First, it is interesting to note that Matthew does not tell his audience to whom these enslaved women belong. In Mark we are told that Peter is sitting in “the High Priest’s courtyard” (τὴν αὐλὴν τοῦ ἀρχιερέως, Mark 14:54) and that he is questioned by “one of the slave women of the High Priest” (μία τῶν παιδίσκων τοῦ ἀρχιερέως, Mark 14:66). Matthew brings Peter to the same courtyard (τῆς αὐλῆς τοῦ ἀρχιερέως, 26:58) but interestingly introduces Peter’s accuser only as μία παιδίσκη. One could infer by her location within the High Priest’s home that she was a part of his household, but this is not explicitly the case and Matthew, it seems, intentionally avoids a direct association between this woman and Caiaphas.

A second distinction between the Markan and Matthean versions of this story is the number of women involved. Mark is aware of a number of enslaved women in the household of the High Priest but is concerned with only one of them (μία τῶν παιδίσκων τοῦ ἀρχιερέως, Mark 14:66). This single enslaved woman accuses Peter directly (Mark 14:67) and then, after his

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145 Translations of παιδίσκη as “servant girl” or similar terms which indicate the presumed youth or immaturity of the servile subject unintentionally reflect the values of the privileged and slave-holding elite (in antiquity and today). For this reason, I have chosen in this passage and elsewhere to translate παιδίσκη as “slave woman.” Charles has argued for a similar translation in Silencing of Slaves, 126 n25.

146 Nolland, Matthew, 1139.

147 France, Matthew, 1032–33. Emphasis original.
denial, brings her accusation to the larger crowd who is standing by (Mark 14:69). Matthew, on the other hand, has divided the two accusations between two distinct enslaved women, the first introduced in 26:69 (μία παιδίσκη) and the second in 26:71 (called only ἄλλη). 148

The most notable quality of these enslaved characters, shared across all four Gospels, is that they are allowed to speak, and not only to speak but to bring an accusation against one of Jesus’ disciples. In Matthew, the two accusations leveled against Peter by the enslaved women have to do with Peter being with Jesus (καὶ σὺ ἤσθα μετὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Γαλιλαίου, 26:69; οὗτος ἦν μετὰ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου, 26:71). Nolland notes that our author offers no clues “to suggest the basis on which [the enslaved women made their] claim.” 149 Perhaps they were invisibly present with the crowd that had come to arrest Jesus (26:47), or the crowd who a few days earlier had witnessed Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem (21:1–11). Perhaps they were present when Jesus was in the temple overturning tables (21:12–17) or debating with the chief priests and elders (21:23–27). 150 Ultimately, Matthew does not tell us how the women have come to their knowledge. We have only their accusation that Peter was “with Jesus.” 151

148 ἄλλη could simply mean “another woman” without necessitating that the second woman was also a παιδίσκη. However, in this context the presence of μία in 26:69 suggests that Matthew intended his audience to understand “one slave woman” and “another [slave woman]” (see France, Matthew, 1032). In addition, ἄλλος is most often used to denote “another of the same kind,” as opposed to ἕτερος, which indicates “another of a different kind.” For commentators who argue that the woman of 26:71 is “another slave woman,” see Nolland, Matthew, 1140; Harrington, Matthew, 378; Morris, Matthew, 688; Keener, Matthew, 654; Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3.546. France has simply “another girl,” (France, Matthew, 1033) and Luz, similarly, “another woman” (Luz, Matthew, 3.455).

149 Nolland, Matthew, 1139.

150 Such possibilities are offered by France, Matthew, 1032; Nolland, Matthew, 1139.

151 This phrase bears some importance in chapter 26 where “it portends nothing good” (Luz, Matthew, 3.454). Davies and Allison highlight Matthew’s redactional use of μετὰ in this chapter, writing “Those physically “with” Jesus are in another sense not “with” him at all. The disciples are in Gethsemane, but they fall asleep and so leave Jesus alone; and in 26:69ff Peter, although he has followed Jesus to the courtyard, denies that he has been with him. In effect he denies his discipleship” (Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3.547).
The Role of the Enslaved: Lowliness in Contrast to Power

The narrative role of these enslaved women is evident in the parallel nature of their questioning of Peter here and the questioning of Jesus by the Sanhedrin in 26:57–68. Nolland has pointed out that 26:58 is meant to prepare the audience to take Peter’s questioning by the enslaved women as a “negative counterpart” to Jesus’s interrogation before the High Priest. These two events, he says, “are to be seen as taking place at the same time.”152 A number of other interpreters have pointed to this same parallel. For Luz, Peter is a “negative contrast to Jesus.”153 For Keener, “Peter’s denial contrasts starkly with Jesus’ faithful confession.”154 For Harrington, “Matthew picks up the story of Peter…in order to contrast Jesus’ heroic fidelity and Peter’s cowardice.”155 For Evans, “The embarrassing story of Peter’s denial provides…a stark contrast between the courageous figure of Jesus…and the cowardly figure of Peter.”156 On this point, I claim to offer no novel insight.

The word προσῆλθεν in 26:69 serves as an echo that will remind the attentive listener of 26:60, where the same word is used twice (προσελθόντων, προσελθόντες) to describe those who came forward to accuse Jesus before the Sanhedrin. The same word is also used in 26:73 (προσελθέτως) when the bystanders come to Peter with the accusation prompting his third denial. So, just as Jesus is facing false claims before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, Peter is

152 Nolland, Matthew, 1137.
153 Luz, Matthew, 3:455.
154 Keener, Matthew, 654.
155 Harrington, Matthew, 380.
156 Evans, Matthew, 444.
facing true accusations before the enslaved women and unnamed bystanders. And, whereas Jesus will be shown to be faithful, Peter will fail.

More specifically, the narrative function of the enslaved women in these parallel stories is to highlight the contrast between Jesus and Peter: Jesus’s faithfulness before a powerful figure (Caiaphas) with Peter’s failure before a powerless one (the παιδίσκη). Evans notes that Jesus “stands before Israel’s most powerful men” and is faithful, while Peter “quails before a servant-girl, Israel’s least powerful person.”

For many interpreters, the contrast between the politically powerful Sanhedrin and the powerless enslaved women is an important part of these parallel scenes and their presentations of Jesus and Peter respectively. The terminology used by commentators to describe these enslaved women is telling: “one of minimal social status,” “anonymous…merely a slave.” Morris notes that this challenger is “as gentle as could be imagined… Not a man but a woman, not a mature woman but a girl, not a free woman but a slave.”

In order for Matthew’s Jesus-Peter contrast to resonate with the audience in the way that commentators suggest, Matthew’s audience has to accept the basic slave-holding assumption that enslaved persons occupy the lowest social position—a place of absolute powerlessness. Jesus

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157 Evans, Matthew, 444.
158 See Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:545; Luz, Matthew, 3:455; Keener, Matthew, 654–5; Morris, Matthew, 688; Turner, Matthew, 227.
159 Keener, Matthew, 654.
160 Luz, Matthew, 3:455.
161 Morris, Matthew, 688. Again, the insistence that this παιδίσκη be understood as a young woman or child is to buy into ancient slave-holding ideology about the enslaved and their inherent lack of maturity. However, Morris’s point is still valid. Culturally, this woman was as powerless a figure as one could imagine.
must prove faithful before the most powerful while Peter is seen to fail before the least. Any
elevation of the status of the παιδίσκη would weaken the stark contrast rightly identified by so
many interpreters. This may seem to go without saying, and the above cited interpretations
offered by scholars hinge on this assumption as a crucial point. However, as our previous chapter
has shown, many older historians (and many biblical scholars who rely on older historical
models for understanding slavery) would dispute this point. Arguments for the benign and even
benevolent features of ancient slavery, and arguments that the enslaved were in many ways
“better off” than the free poor, would undermine what we see Matthew doing in this narrative.
Here we see Matthew using the character of the παιδίσκη as a counterpoint to the high priest: on
the one hand, a man with absolute power, and on the other hand a woman with absolutely none.

We should also briefly note the purpose behind the distinctly Matthean elements noted
above: the removal of any reference to their ownership by the High Priest and the multiplication
of the enslaved women. On the first point, it is possible that the reference to the powerful owner
was removed in order to facilitate the contrast between Jesus and Peter. Keener has suggested
“though the high priest’s servants wielded considerable power, a ‘slave girl’ would have quite
little.”\textsuperscript{162} It is doubtful that by “high priest’s servants” Keener is thinking about Mark’s version
of this narrative which identifies the enslaved woman as belonging to the High Priest, however
the point is still valid. Any person, male or female, enslaved by an influential person might
exercise some authority in their master’s name. By removing the reference to the elite master,
Matthew has ensured that these enslaved women will indeed hold the lowest societal position.

\textsuperscript{162} Keener, \textit{Matthew}, 654.
The question of Matthew’s purpose in duplicating the enslaved woman is a more difficult one. On the one hand, it may simply be an example of Matthew’s penchant for doubling (two demoniacs, 8:28–34; two blind men, 9:27–31 and 20:29–21:27; two donkeys, 21:2). On the other hand, Charles suggests that Matthew’s change is intended to rehabilitate the memory of Peter. Unlike in Mark, Matthew’s Peter does not lose his cool under “the intense gaze and examination of a [single, bold] female slave. [He] appears more composed in this text.” He goes on to write

If the scene in Mark is intense, with Peter standing one-on-one with the scrutinizing and accusatory slave maid, the scenes in Matthew seem to increasingly detach Peter from the slave figure(s) and place him as an individual facing an angry mob.

For Charles, dividing Mark’s single enslaved woman into two seems to move the focus away from her as the accuser in a position of power and towards the gathered bystanders. It is the first step in a process of erasure through which the bold enslaved woman of Mark eventually “disappears without a trace, losing her piercing gaze and her identity, although still retaining her voice.” This “process” extends through Luke (where one of Matthew’s two enslaved women becomes a man) and John (where the gathered crowd brings the second accusation, and the third is brought by an enslaved man who was present in the garden). While this process may have begun in Matthew’s redaction, it is far from finished and the enslaved women still play a prominent role in this Gospel’s contrasting portrayal of Jesus and Peter.

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Conclusion

Matthew’s narrative, like many other literary works of the time, spends very little time focused on enslaved characters. While the world that he and his audience inhabit is pervaded by the institution of slavery, the world of the text tends to focus more on the free actors, with the enslaved characters appearing only occasionally. In this chapter we have seen that Matthew’s portrayal of these few enslaved characters conforms to the model for slavery established by Patterson’s definition.

The story of the centurion’s request (8:5–13) contains an enslaved individual who is barely present, functioning as much as an element of the setting as he does a character in the narrative. Though the enslaved man is not permitted by the narrative to speak or act, the pericope gives us a glimpse of Matthew’s attitude toward slavery when the slave-holding centurion comments on the role of the enslaved: they must do as they are told. The miracle returns the enslaved man not only to health, but also to work.

The individuals enslaved by Herod Antipas (14:1–2) are similarly peripheral characters. They are added by Matthew to provide the tetrarch someone to talk to (cf. Mark 6:14–16) but they themselves are not permitted to speak. They provide no perspective or insight in response to Herod, acting instead as an outlet for Herod’s personal thoughts. In a certain way, Herod might still be imagined talking to himself, as the enslaved are conceptualized merely as extensions of their master’s person.

The man enslaved by the High Priest appears out of the crowd in Gethsemane (26:51) in order to become the victim of a violent attack from one of Jesus’s followers. In Matthew’s narrative, this assault serves as the impetus for a teaching from Jesus on the ill effects that violence has on the one perpetrating said violence. Matthew does not seem interested, however,
in the victim of the narrated attack (in this way, he mimics Mark). For our author, a violent attack committed against an enslaved person was no cause for concern.

The enslaved women in the courtyard (26:69–75), on the one hand, have their voices preserved and are given the task of confronting an important male figure (Peter). On the other hand, Matthew’s contrasting parallel between the faithful Jesus and the unfaithful Peter relies on an understanding of these enslaved women as inhabiting the very bottom of the social hierarchy. Jesus is faithful when confronted by the most powerful men in society while Peter denies Jesus before the least powerful women.

These portrayals of slavery emphasize two elements of Patterson’s model: the domination of the enslaved by the master, and the general dishonor in which the enslaved were held. The centurion understands enslaved persons as completely subordinate to the master’s will. The individuals enslaved by Herod are so completely dominated that they cease to act as separate persons and instead exist merely as extensions of their master. The enslaved man in the garden is held in such low esteem that an assault on his person is completely ignored by the author, who uses the attack as an opportunity to make a moral/theological point. The enslaved women in the courtyard, although given a voice, are characterized as the most dishonorable members of society in order to make a pointed contrast between Jesus and his disciples. In each case, Matthew portrays these enslaved characters in a manner consistent with our model.
CHAPTER 4
SLAVERY AND THE ENSLAVED IN MATTHEW’S PARABLES

Introduction
As noted in the previous chapter, though enslaved characters appear only a few times in Matthew’s broader narrative, one should not make the mistake of thinking that he imagines a world inhabited by very few enslaved persons. For proof of this, one need look only as far as Matthew’s parables, where images of slavery and the enslaved play a prominent part. Indeed, of Matthew’s eleven longer narrative parables, enslaved characters play a primary role in six: the parables of the Tares (13:24–30), the Unforgiving Slave (18:23–35), the Tenants (21:33–46), the Great Feast (22:1–14), the Faithful/Wicked Slave (24:45–51), and the Talents (25:14–30). 1

There is, of course, a wealth of scholarship available on the subject of the parables and their interpretation, much of which is not germane to the current study. Rather than presenting another lengthy survey of previous scholarship, it will be sufficient for our present needs and purposes to point to some of the more immediately relevant developments in parable studies and then to some of the difficulties that arise when one focuses specifically on the slave parables.

1 The other five long narrative parables are the Parable of the Sower (13:1–9), the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1–16), the Two Sons (21:28–32), the Ten Virgins (25:1–13), and the Sheep and the Goats (25:31–46). As will be discussed later on, even though the Parable of the Ten Virgins does not contain any explicitly enslaved characters, Mitzi Smith has argued that its titular characters would have been understood as enslaved persons by Matthew’s audience (Smith, Insights, 77–97). None of the shorter parabolic sayings (e.g., the Two Gates of 7:13–14, the Wise and Foolish Builders of 7:24–27, the Mustard Seed of 13:31–32, etc.) include enslaved persons or other servile language.
On Parables in General

First, parable studies may be roughly divided between scholars who are interested in the parables as spoken by Jesus and those who are interested in the parables as recorded by the evangelists. This is one of the primary points made by Adolf Jülicher in Die Gleichnisreden Jesu, first published in 1886, and is an idea that has been picked up by many scholars since.\(^2\) This important observation was adopted, for instance, by C. H. Dodd in his book Parables of the Kingdom (1935; rev. ed. 1961) which was primarily concerned with answering the question “What was the original intention of each parable in its original historical setting?”\(^3\) That is, what did the historical Jesus mean when he first spoke this parable in his original Sitz im Leben? Joachim Jeremias follows Dodd in his attempt to retrieve the “original parables,” arguing in Parables of Jesus that the early Church (represented in the canonical Gospels) altered the parables of the historical Jesus using “certain definite principles of transformation” which allowed the careful exegete to reliably reconstruct the original sayings.\(^4\) These scholars studied the parables of Jesus and aimed through their work to take the parables as they were found in the Gospels and to reconstruct the parables as Jesus originally spoke them.

A second group of scholars, taking a more literary approach, has chosen instead to focus on the parables as they are found in the Gospels. J. D. Kingsbury\(^5\) and Charles Carlston\(^6\) are two

\(^2\) Adolf Jülicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969). Jülicher is also responsible for moving parable studies away from allegorical interpretations.


scholars whose interest in redaction has led them to ask questions about how the Gospel writers shaped the parables. They demonstrate in their works that the Gospel authors were active participants in the forming of the Gospel (and especially the parable) traditions. That is, the Gospel authors did not simply write down verbatim the words spoken by Jesus, but they shaped them to fit their own literary and theological needs. They were “far from passive conveyors [or] mere editors” but were “theologians who selected, arranged, shaped, elaborated, and interpreted” the traditions they received to suit “their own theological perspectives” and agendas.  

In keeping with the narrative critical reading strategy adopted by this project, I am not interested in the parables of Jesus so much as I am interested in the parables of Matthew. For this reason, I will avoid all attempts to “recover” the parables as originally spoken by the historical Jesus. I will not attempt, as Dodd and others, to discern “the original intention of each parable” or their “original historical setting[s].” Instead, my focus will be the parables as they are found in the Gospel of Matthew, in its own historical and literary contexts. I make no claim to be plowing new methodological ground here, as biblical scholars have made use of such literary approaches to the parables for several decades.  

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A second point of importance for our study, made especially by Dodd, is that parables tend to reflect elements of lived experience. Dodd defines a parable as

a metaphor or simile *drawn from nature or common life*, arresting its hearers by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.\(^9\)

Whether or not Dodd’s definition is to be preferred above others is not the point here.\(^10\) What is important to notice is his insistence, highlighted above, that the pictures presented in the parables are “drawn from nature or common life.”\(^11\) Every parable, he writes, “is a perfect picture of something that can be observed in the world of our experience,” and, although the parables may contain surprising elements, overall, they convey “a singularly complete and convincing picture” of life in first-century Palestine.\(^12\)

Glancy picks up this element of Dodd’s definition while pointing to the difficulty raised when one attempts to study the slave parables. She writes, “Think of all the summaries of Jesus’ parables commenting that they reflect everyday realities of first century life among farmers, shepherds, and fisherman, summaries that *neglect to mention the presence of slaves and slaveholders* in the parables.”\(^13\) If the parables reflect the lived reality of their audiences in some way, as Dodd and others have argued, then it seems clear that slavery was a familiar part of that reality. In this chapter, we will highlight the main features of Matthew’s characterization of


\(^10\) Consider as an alternative the definition offered by Bernard Brandon Scott, who writes that “A parable is a *mashal* that employs a short narrative fiction to reference a transcendent symbol” (Scott, *Hear Then the Parables*, 8).

\(^11\) Dodd, *Parables*, 5.

\(^12\) Dodd, *Parables*, 9–10.

slavery and the enslaved in these parabolic narratives in an effort to better understand the realities that they reflect.

The importance of understanding the historical elements of the parables cannot be overstated. Amy-Jill Levine writes, “In order to better hear the parables in their original contexts and so to determine what is normal and what is absurd, what is conventional and what is unexpected, we need to do the history.”

Levine goes on to say,

If we get the context wrong, we’ll get Jesus wrong as well. The parables are open-ended in that interpretation will take place in every act of reading, but they are also historically specific. When the historical context goes missing or we get it wrong, the parables become open to problematic and sometimes abusive readings.15

Before we can hope to understand or interpret Matthew’s slave parables, we have to understand the ancient institution of slavery as Matthew and his audience understood it. Thus the parables will inform our understanding of ancient slavery (as Dodd and Glancy suggest) just as a proper understanding of the historical context of slavery will inform our understanding of the parables.

In keeping with the social science methodology of this project, I approach the parables equipped with Patterson’s model of slavery in order to see how such a model might help us better understand the world of (and the world behind) Matthew’s parables. My readings of these texts attempt to discern if the depictions of slavery and enslavement in the parables conform to or deviate from the norm which Patterson defines. As Gowler writes, “Social-scientific criticism allows us to understand better the first-century social, cultural, and historical contexts of the


15 Levine, Short Stories, 8–9.
parables.” These models “give glimpses of these ancient cultures.” Such social science studies of these texts are only possible because the parables are themselves a reflection of their author’s and audience’s world.

**On the Slave Parables in Particular**

The parables that are of particular interest here—those which include enslaved characters or servile images—have themselves been the subject of a number of studies. This section begins with a look at the contributions of Mitzi Smith and Jennifer Glancy, who have both written crucial and enlightening works on slavery in the parables and especially the parables of Matthew’s Gospel. I will then point to some of the ways that this study departs from previous work on the slave parables. First, I will differentiate what I am calling the “slave parables” from what John Dominic Crossan calls “servant parables.” Second, we will consider the work of Bernard Brandon Scott and others who have classified the slave parables using the “patron-client” model from the social sciences. Finally, we will look at the work of William Herzog and Winsome Munro, who both argue (albeit in different ways) that the parables reflect the voice and concerns of the oppressed. With this context set, we will then turn to our own exploration of Matthew’s slave parables.

**Smith and the Kingdom Rhetoric of the Matthean Slave Parables**

In her 2017 book *Insights from African American Interpretation*, Mitzi Smith presents a reading of the parable of the Ten Virgins (25:1–13) in a chapter entitled “Slavery, Torture,

16 Gowler, *Parables*, 84.

17 The influence of Glancy’s work on slavery, and on slavery in the Matthean parables specifically, on my own thought cannot be overstated. My dependence on her excellent work in this area will be evident throughout the remainder of this chapter.
Systematic Oppression, and Kingdom Rhetoric.” Here she interprets the titular characters of that parable as enslaved brides and describes the text as part of a trilogy of slave parables (together with the Faithful/Wicked Slave of 24:45–51 and the Talents of 25:14–30) which all rely on stereotypical portrayals of the enslaved characters. She writes that in these three connected parables,

Slaves are expected to respond to their master’s whims…to be “wise,” but only with regard to fulfilling their slave duties and not foolish in falling short of expectations; to expect cruelty from their masters, especially when they fail to perform; to be dispensable if they do not perform in ways that furthers that master’s economic interests and physical desires; and to be concerned only with pleasing the master…The kingdom of heaven is revealed in the loyalty, vigilance, and wakefulness of slaves…

Her analysis of the Ten Virgins includes discussions of marriage practices involving enslaved war captives, sleep deprivation as a method of torture, gender issues surrounding “wisdom” language, and the use of slave language in Matthew’s rhetoric of the “kingdom-of-the-heavens.”

This last point is of particular interest for the current study and merits further attention here. Smith has noted that Matthew uniquely describes the kingdom of God/Heaven in parables that make use of slave imagery; that is, while the other Gospels contain slave parables and metaphors, none of them utilize such metaphors explicitly to describe God’s kingdom. She writes, “The Matthean Jesus’s use of parables comparing the kingdom of the heavens to the stereotypical interactions between masters and slaves is tantamount to conforming the gospel and the character of God/Jesus to the master-slave paradigm, rather than transforming relationships

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19 Smith, Insights, 86.

20 Mitzi J. Smith, “The Historical Jesus and the Problem of the Kingdom of God and Slavery” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, Boston, MA, 18 November 2017).
and oppressive systems into the likeness of a loving, compassionate God.” The systematic oppression portrayed in the slave parables is “baptized in kingdom-of-the-heavens rhetoric” which “promotes stereotypical slave behavior and oppressive relationships as ideals worthy of imitation and transcending time and space.”

For Smith, Matthew’s rhetoric of kingdom building mirrors secular kingdom building, which is almost always accomplished on the backs of the enslaved: “few kingdoms, nations or empires have been built without the use of slave labor.” In this way, Matthew does not oppose the status quo of the Roman imperial system, as some have argued. He simply seeks to put someone else in the proverbial driver’s seat, “filling the same old oppressive structures with different people.” Smith speculates,

I wonder whether Matthew could have been a slaveholder like Philemon. Perhaps Matthew was a wealthy slaveholder who was as prosperous as the “relatively wealthy urban community” reflected in his Gospel. Or maybe Matthew was neither a slaveholder nor a wealthy person, but simply a victim of colonization who unintentionally coopted his own oppression by inscribing slavery and kingdom-of-the-heavens rhetoric in his text.

Regardless of which of these may be the case, Smith rightly notes “When oppressive structures are not dismantled but are occupied by even well-meaning folks and replicated, some will be

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21 Smith, Insights, 94.
22 Smith, Insights, 94.
23 Smith, Insights, 96.
24 Smith, Insights, 95.
oppressors and others *will be* oppressed.”\(^\text{26}\) This leads Smith to question the “appropriateness of ‘kingdom’ language as a metaphor or descriptor for a justice- and love-oriented community.”\(^\text{27}\)

For our present purposes, Smith’s analysis helpfully brings an awareness of the oppressive, pro-slavery perspective reflected in the Matthean parables which must be kept at the forefront of our interpretations of these texts. It also challenges us to consider difficult questions about our author’s complicity in upholding a violent system of oppression or in reinscribing it in “Christian” terms which served only to secure the privileged position of the slaveholding class. These questions will be considered as we read each parable below.

Glancy and the Matthean Portrayal of Parabolic Slavery

Jennifer Glancy has written two of the most critical pieces on slavery in the Matthean parables to date: first, “Slaves and Slavery in the Matthean Parables” in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, and second, the chapter “Parabolic Bodies: The Figure of the Slave in the Sayings of Jesus” in her book *Slavery in Early Christianity*.\(^\text{28}\) In these works, Glancy highlights three features that are prominent in Matthew’s parabolic representation of slavery: the prevalence of managerial slaves, a particular definition of servile faithfulness and wickedness, and an emphasis on the slave body as a site of abuse.

Glancy first notes that “the assortment of work performed by [the] parabolic slaves is heavily skewed toward managerial tasks.”\(^\text{29}\) These enslaved managers administer, or are at least


\(^{27}\) Smith, *Insights*, 94–95.

\(^{28}\) Glancy, “Matthean Parables,” 67–90; idem, *Slavery in Early Christianity*.

\(^{29}\) Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 112.
involved in, household finances and business transactions. They are often seen conducting business on their master’s behalf, earning profits and incurring debt. Such slaves, she argues, “constituted the most visible sector of slaves in Greco-Roman society” and thus “were more likely than other groups of slaves to attract the attention of various authors, erect monuments, and to engage in the kinds of transactions that created a documentary trail.”

Second, she demonstrates how the parables describe the “faithfulness” of an enslaved person in terms that betray the slave owner’s perspective. The “faithful slave,” she writes, is one who has “internalized the master’s interests to the extent that he will work unsupervised when his master is away.” Notably, the reward for faithful service is not manumission for the enslaved, but additional responsibilities. The “wicked slave,” on the other hand, “abuses the property with which he has been entrusted.” Thus, in the parables, “slave morality is inextricably identified with the master’s interests.”

Finally, Matthew’s parables highlight that the enslaved are constantly under threat of physical violence. Glancy writes “the slave’s body as the locus of abuse is…pervasive in the Matthean parables, constituting the most prominent dimension of Matthew’s representation of slavery.” Of the six parables we have already identified as slave parables, the enslaved characters are abused in all but one of them. This holds true despite the managerial positions in

which many of these enslaved characters are portrayed. Such “household stewards and financial agents embody what may be the most basic and pervasive reality of ancient slavery: the slave’s absolute corporal vulnerability.”

As noted at the outset of this section, I have found Glancy’s arguments regarding slavery in Matthew’s parables to be convincing and particularly helpful. Her observations about the vulnerability of the enslaved in these texts, even though many of those individuals are placed in managerial roles, are crucial to grasping the way Matthew understands and portrays slavery. This observation is in keeping with Patterson’s model for slavery which serves as the basis for our larger project; ancient slavery, even in these biblical parables, is characterized by violent domination.

Crossan and “Servant Parables”

As noted above, this project departs from previous works done on the slave parables in some significant ways. First, in order to define the scope of this exploration, it is necessary to distinguish what I am calling “slave parables” from what Crossan had called “servant parables.” He writes that for a parable to be identified as a “servant parable” it must meet two criteria: “[1] a master-servant relationship or superior-subordinate relationship and [2] a moment of critical reckoning between them.” These criteria lead Crossan to identify the following as


36 My own critiques of Glancy’s work on these parables are minor and will be noted in the discussion of the parables themselves.


“servant parables” in Matthew: the Unmerciful Slave (18:23–35), the Vineyard Workers (20:1–13), the Tenants (21:33–39), the Faithful/Wicked Slave (24:45–51), and the Talents (25:14–30).

While each of these parables does contain characters in a superior-subordinate relationship, these are not necessarily a master and an enslaved person. Take for example the parable of the Vineyard Workers (20:1–13), in which the subordinate characters are paid day-laborers. Consider also his treatment of the parable of the Tenants. Even though this parable does include enslaved characters, Crossan’s principal concern is with the relationship between the landowner and the tenants. The tenants, not the enslaved characters, are the “servants” of this servant parable in Crossan’s analysis. It should also be noted that Crossan’s list does not include every parable that includes enslaved characters. In Matthew, he does not interact with the parables of the Tares (13:24–30) and the Great Feast (22:1–14) because they lack the requisite “critical confrontation between servant and master” for him to classify them as “servant parables.”

In contrast to Crossan, when I speak of the “slave parables” of Matthew, I am referring to any parables which include characters that are explicitly identified as “slaves.” Using this simple criterion, we will engage with the following parable texts:

- The Tares (13:24–30)
- The Unforgiving Slave (18:23–35)
- The Tenants (21:33–46)
- The Great Feast (22:1–14)
- The Faithful/Wicked Slave (24:45–51)
- The Talents (25:14–30)

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This study will not spend significant time on those parables identified by Crossan which do not feature enslaved characters, nor will it focus on those parables featuring characters who may be enslaved but who are not explicitly said to be enslaved in the text.

Scott and the “Patron-Client” System

A number of scholars, particularly those making use of social science criticism, have approached slavery in the parables using the anthropological “patron-client” model. Studies of patronage emphasize the importance of “personal and interpersonal relations, quasi-groups, networks and power relations.” Bernard Brandon Scott writes that the patron-client model “delineates the regulation of crucial aspects of a social order: allocating resources, exchanging power and wealth, and legitimating the societal structure." He goes on to say,

In a sense, the patron-client model represents a primary mode by which Mediterranean people organized, thought about, and envisioned the world. Patron-client relationships are not part of the capitalist model of employer-laborer. The relationship is more familial than contractual. It is voluntary and requires a long-term relation in which roles and responsibilities are carefully defined. Solidarity is strong, and bonds extend beyond legal to even extralegal requirements.


41 Einstadt and Roniger outlined the nine core characteristics of patron-client relationships: (1) they are usually particularistic and diffuse; (2) they involve the simultaneous exchange of resources (both economic and social/political); (3) the exchange of these resources is a “package deal,” i.e. the exchange is all or nothing; (4) they involve unconditionality and long-term obligations; (5) they involve an element of solidarity, often expressed in terms of loyalty (even though the relationship may be ambivalent); (6) they are based on informal yet binding agreements, not legal or contractual ones; (7) they are entered into voluntarily and may, at least in theory, be abandoned voluntarily; (8) they are understood as vertical relationships rather than horizontal; (9) they are based on inequality and the difference in power. S. N. Einstadt and Louis Roniger, “Patron-Client Relations as a Model of Structuring Social Exchange,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 22, no. 1 (1980): 49–50.

42 Einstadt and Roniger, “Patron-Client Relations,” 47.

43 Scott, Hear Then the Parable, 205.

44 Scott, Hear Then the Parable, 205. Note particularly here Scott’s observation that the patron-client relationship is “voluntary” (Einstadt and Roniger’s seventh core characteristic), which will be an important point for the critique below.
I have already noted in the first chapter that this model, along with models for ancient understandings of honor-shame and of the family, has been important in shaping modern biblical interpretation.

Jennifer Glancy has written that “the idea that we can account for ancient master-slave relations in terms of patronage networks” has “[seized] the imagination of New Testament scholars.”\(^{45}\) As an example of this impulse, she points to Crossan’s work on the historical Jesus which “claims to consider the institution of slavery” but which “[subsumes] it within the practice of patron-client relations.”\(^{46}\) Similarly, Dale Martin “elides the differences between patrons and slave owners, clients and slaves”\(^{47}\) when he argues that “[i]n order to understand the dynamics of Greco-Roman slavery…we must recognize that it functioned within the dynamics of Greco-Roman patronage.”\(^{48}\) Bruce Malina, who has written extensively on the social world of the New Testament, mentions slavery only in the context of patrons and clients.\(^{49}\)

In keeping with this trend, when Scott turns to “Masters and Servants” in the Gospel parables, he immediately sets these parabolic relationships within the context of the “patron-client” model.\(^{50}\) He first demonstrates what he considers the benefits of this model by briefly discussing the Parables of the Faithful/Wicked Slave (24:45–51; Luke 12:42–46), the Man Going

\(^{45}\) Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 126.


\(^{47}\) Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 125.


\(^{50}\) “Masters and Servants” is the title given by Scott to the section dealing with slave parables (Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 205–300).
on a Journey’ (Mark 13:34–36; Luke 12:36–38), the Creditor with Two Debtors’ (Luke 7:41–43), and the so-called Worthless Slave (Luke 17:7–10). He then gives more detailed treatments of five parables, three of which are of particular interest here: the Talents (25:14–30), the Tenants (21:33–46), and the Unforgiving Slave (18:23–34).

Scott’s work on “masters and servants” in the parables presents a number of difficulties for our present study, which seeks to understand Matthew’s characterization of the enslaved in the parables. First, like Crossan, Scott blurs the line between enslaved persons and free persons in his description of both as “clients.” Consider some of the examples of “clients” in the parables which Scott provides in order to demonstrate how he sees this model working: the steward of Luke 16:1–9, who is almost certainly not understood by Luke’s audience as an enslaved person; the vineyard tenants of Matthew 21:33–44, but not the enslaved messengers whom they kill as the story progresses; the hired day-laborers of Matthew 20:1–16. Of the nine parables Scott spends substantial time discussing, three do not contain enslaved characters at all and the enslaved persons in a fourth are completely ignored.

Related to this is a second issue with Scott’s presentation: the apparent assumption that all asymmetrical relationships fit the “patron-client” model. In discussing the parable in Luke 17:7–10, Scott writes that this text “[exhibits] clearly the assumptions of the hierarchical world

51 Scott, Hear Then the Parable, 208–15.

52 The other two parables treated by Scott are the Rich Man’s Steward (Luke 16:1–8a), which is distinct to Luke and so is not of interest here, and the Vineyard Workers (20:1–15), which, though it is Matthean, is not germane to our discussion because the “servants” involved are paid day-laborers and not enslaved persons.

53 The punishment expected by this steward is more in line with what might be expected by a free (or freed) client than by a slave. Consider, as a point of comparison, the steward of Luke 12:42–48 who is explicitly depicted as enslaved and who is punished for malfeasance by being “cut to pieces.” Glancy (Slavery in Early Christianity, 109) similarly argues that this individual should be understood as a freedman rather than as enslaved.
of patrons and clients. It is a world of dependency and inequality, of clearly worked out relations. It is a world of order in which the patron-client model spells out one’s ordained place in that world.”

It is true that the relationship between patron and client in the ancient world was unequal, with a majority of the power and influence falling disproportionately to the patron. However, it does not follow that, because all patron-client relationships were asymmetrical, all asymmetrical relationships should be defined using the “patron-client” model. The patronage system was one way that social order was maintained but it was not necessarily the only way.

Finally, and perhaps most difficult, Scott’s states that patron-client relationships are necessarily voluntary by nature. Richard Saller, who is frequently cited in studies dealing with ancient patronage, defines patronage as “voluntary associations between freeborn men.” Einstadt and Roniger list the voluntary nature of these relationships among the core characteristics of patronage. Can the relationship between an enslaved person and their enslaver be called “voluntary” in any sense? And if not, how can such relationships be categorized under the patron-client model? Scott does not address these questions. In her critique of Scott’s work, Jennifer Glancy writes,

> Although crucial to Roman social relations, the patron-client structure is an unsuitable category for the analysis of slavery… Despite certain similarities, including the asymmetry of power relations, a slave was not a client, and an owner was not a patron. By collapsing master-slave relations into the patron-client paradigm, Scott and other New Testament scholars distort the parabolic representation of slavery.

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54 Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 215.
55 See Einstadt and Roniger’s eighth and ninth characteristics in n41 above.
57 Einstadt and Roniger, “Patron-Client Relations,” 50.
Discussing slavery, in the parables or elsewhere, under the rubric of patronage does not provide modern readers with additional insight. Instead, it muddies the waters by paralleling a completely oppressive institution with a voluntary one.

Herzog, Munro, and “Views from Below”

Two other modern studies of the parables and their social contexts, those written by William Herzog and Winsome Munro, argue each in their own way that the parables describe the ancient social world “from below.” Herzog, in his work Parables as Subversive Speech, argues that “the focus of the parables was not on a vision of the glory of the reign of God, but on the gory details of how oppression served the interests of a ruling class.”59 Munro’s book Jesus, Born of a Slave asks “how would it affect our reading of some problematic early Christian texts if we considered the hypothesis that Jesus may have been a slave or a former slave, born of an enslaved woman?”60

Herzog’s reading of the parables is based on a social analysis of advanced agrarian societies and the bureaucracies of traditional aristocratic empires. He adopts theoretical models from sociology which can be applied to ancient Palestine in order to “supply a coherent construction of social reality.”61 After carefully defining these models, Herzog demonstrates how they may impact our understanding of nine specific parables. His analysis leads him to a


61 Herzog, Subversive Speech, 54.
“materialist” reading of the Gospel parables which, he says, avoids the generation of more “idealistic” readings of the parables like those produced by both historical-critical and literary-critical traditions.62

While the models that Herzog uses can offer beneficial insights into some aspects of life in Palestine under Roman rule, they fail to account for the peculiar institution of slavery. Herzog writes in his introduction that the parables present scenes which are “codifications of how exploitation worked in Palestine.”63 Glancy rightly notes in response to this assertion

Curiously, in considering systems of exploitation in first-century Palestine, Herzog evinces no awareness of the operations of slavery as a system of exploitation; most curiously, because slaves and their bodily vulnerabilities figure prominently in the parables about which he writes.64

Indeed, in his discussion of the social stratification of ancient agrarian societies, Herzog mentions slaves only once, and only in passing.65 The “expendables” and the “unclean and degraded,” groups which occupy the lowest rungs of the social ladder in society as he defines it, are still made up of the free poor.

A brief look at Herzog’s analysis of the Wicked Tenants is telling for how his study marginalizes the enslaved even as it claims to highlight the voices and experiences of the

62 Herzog, *Subversive Speech*, 13. Herzog clarifies that “idealistic” readings focus on the ideas generated by a parable, whereas “materialist” readings emphasize the “social, political, and economic conditions” present in the texts (Herzog, *Subversive Speech*, 13 n2).


64 Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 126.

65 Herzog, *Subversive Speech*, 63. Here the “have-nots” of society are defined by Herzog as “little better than slaves.” So, although he marks these free poor as the bottom of the social ladder, he *does* indicate that there are people even below them—the enslaved persons who are otherwise invisible in his analysis.
oppressed. In describing the identities of and relationships between the owner, the tenants, and
the enslaved characters of the parable, Herzog writes,

[This] exploitive economic situation...did not breed good relations between tenants and
the landowners whose continual encroachment on peasant lands escalated the tensions
already present in an endless struggle for subsistence that governed most peasant villages. It is in this context that the “servants” must be seen. They are “retainers” in the
landowner’s house, the household bureaucrats and visible functionaries who carry out the
decisions of their master.66

The beatings received by these “servant-retainers” (Herzog never calls them “slaves”) are
described as “a rejection of the owner’s claim to the vineyard,” as “one of the liabilities of their
job,” and as “a peculiar form of bargaining.”67 Ultimately for Herzog this parable is about the
oppressed peasantry revolting against the elite. The violence perpetrated against the “servant-
retainers” is thus imagined as an attack against agents of the upper class, not as an oppressive act
against society’s most vulnerable.

Although Herzog’s analysis may provide some beneficial avenues for thinking about
different social elements of the parables, the sociological models he chooses to utilize are
insufficient if one wants to explore the role of slavery in these texts or in the world they reflect.
Herzog claims to focus on systems of exploitation and the voices of the oppressed, but the
sociological model upon which his work depends ignores the pervasive institution of slavery,
which I find exceptionally problematic.68 Herzog may have intended to present a view “from

below,” but his models did not allow him to dig deep enough and those who inhabited the lowest rungs of the social ladder are thus ignored in his analysis.

Winsome Munro’s *Jesus, Born of a Slave* is described by Glancy as “an ambitious thought experiment” that considers how we might understand problematic texts differently if we considered that Jesus himself may have been a slave or former slave.69 Regarding the parables, Munro argues that their focus on enslaved characters and their experiences presents a “slave’s eye view” of the world which is then offered as evidence for the possible enslaved status of the one who taught them.70 She notes that “in parables where a slave or slaves play a key role, it is always the slave characters and experiences with which the hearer/reader is to identify.”71 The parables highlight the experiences of slaves (their labors and their punishments) and also details about their relationships. For instance, she writes concerning the parable of the Unmerciful Slave, that it betrays a familiarity with “slave quarter gossip about what is fair and unfair” which, for her, is suggestive of an enslaved author.72 Although some parables may reflect slaveholding perspectives, this is to be expected as all subordinate peoples learn “the epistemic vantage points of their superiors.”73


70 Similar arguments have been made about other historical figures. Roberta Stewart writes of Plautus (the Roman comedic playwright) that ancient commentators have suggested, based on the portrayal of slavery in his plays, that he had been enslaved himself. She writes that these claims “cannot bear scrutiny, and follow a general pattern of conjuring biographical detail from an author’s writings.” However, she continues, such suggestions from the ancient biographers signal their “recognition of Plautus’ acuity in perceiving and representing accurately slaves and slave behavior” (Roberta Stewart, *Plautus and Roman Slavery* [Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012], 18–19).


72 Munro, *Born of a Slave*, 352.

73 Munro, *Born of a Slave*, 327.
Glancy offers a fair critique of Munro’s contribution to the study of slavery in the parables. Positively, she notes that Munro “successfully [outlines] the centrality of the figure of the slave in Jesus’ parables” and that she has “demonstrated that anyone who wants to come to terms with the material dimensions of Jesus’ symbolic world has to take seriously his pervasive reliance on the trope of slavery in the parables.”\textsuperscript{74} Munro has rightly recognized and highlighted that “Jesus’ parables rely as much or more on the imagery of slavery as they do on any other set of images.”\textsuperscript{75}

Ultimately, however, Glancy rejects Munro’s hypothesis that the parables express a “slave’s eye view” for a number of reasons. First, against the notion that the parables contain details that would only occur to slaves, she writes “Anyone who had contact with the slaves in such establishments could have been aware of [such details].”\textsuperscript{76} Second, while Munro focuses on parables “where a slave or slaves play a key role,” Glancy invites the reader to focus on parables where enslaved persons are incidental characters. She offers as an example the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32), in which the reader/hearer might identify with one of the (free) sons but is not likely to identify with the enslaved characters “whose labor barely attract the attention of commentators. Indeed, the presence of the slaves emphasizes the chasm between the submissive bodies of slaves and the honored body of the son.”\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} Glancy, \textit{Slavery in Early Christianity}, 128.

\textsuperscript{75} Glancy, \textit{Slavery in Early Christianity}, 127.

\textsuperscript{76} Glancy, \textit{Slavery in Early Christianity}, 127.

\textsuperscript{77} Glancy, \textit{Slavery in Early Christianity}, 128.
Finally, Glancy writes that she is “ultimately unconvinced” that the parables offer a slave’s perspective because “they uncritically accept the liability of the slave’s body to violation by slaveholders, by other slaves, and even by outsiders to the household.”78 As noted above, Munro concedes that such slaveholding perspectives will necessarily infiltrate the subordinates’ worldview. However, Glancy states convincingly,

I find no way to recount Jesus’ parables…without repeating the violence against slave bodies that they iterate. If this is a slave’s eye view, it is a perspective that has been subordinated to the dominant viewpoint of the slaveholding society to the extent that we can make no meaningful assertions about the distinguishing marks of a slave’s perspective.79

In other words, if enslaved persons are willing to accept and repeat even the idea that their own bodies are vulnerable to violence, then it is essentially impossible to distinguish between a “slave’s eye view” and the “vantage point of their superiors.” Ultimately, I find myself in agreement with Glancy here. Although Munro’s work helpfully highlights the centrality of images of slavery in these texts, her conclusions about their presentation of a “slave’s eye view” are unpersuasive.

**Enslaved Characters in Matthew’s Parables**

Having set this study within its proper context, we can now approach each of Matthew’s six slave parables in turn. The aim of this reading will be to identify who are the enslaved characters in each, drawing specific attention to the roles which they fulfill in their respective parables. It will be demonstrated that these texts overwhelmingly portray their enslaved characters as highly responsible managerial agents who are, more often than not, subjected to violent abuse, in


keeping with the work of Glancy specifically and Patterson more generally. The way that these parables assume and perpetuate the perspective of the slaveholding class is evident both in how they presume the physical vulnerability of the enslaved and in how they tie moral judgments of the enslaved to their obedience and productivity. In this way, these texts uphold and perpetuate the prevailing understanding slavery as an institution of domination.

The Tares (13:24–30, 36–43)\textsuperscript{80}

Matthew’s first slave parable, the Parable of the Tares (sometimes called the Weeds and the Wheat) is one of seven parables to appear in the Parable Discourse of Matthew 13. Warren Carter points out that six of these parables (including the Tares) are explicitly connected with “the reign of the heavens.”\textsuperscript{81} Indeed, the Kingdom of Heaven is a major theme in Jesus’s teaching as Matthew portrays it throughout the Gospel.\textsuperscript{82} The parable of the Tares, and its explanation, read as follows:

\begin{quote}
[24] He set before them another parable, saying “The Kingdom of Heaven is like this: a man sowed good seed in his field. [25] And while people were sleeping his enemy came and he sowed weeds alongside the wheat and departed. [26] When the shoots sprouted and produced fruit, then the weeds also appeared. [27] The slaves of the master of the house came and said to him ‘Master, you sowed good seed in your field, did you not? Where then have the weeds come from?’ [28] And he said to them ‘The enemy did this.’ And the slaves said to him ‘Do you want us to go out and collect [the weeds]?’ [29] And he said ‘No, lest in collecting the weeds you uproot the wheat with them. [30] Allow both to grow together until the harvest, and at the harvest time I will tell the harvesters “Collect first the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned and gather the wheat together in my barn.”’” … [36] Then leaving the crowd he came into the house. And his disciples came to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{80} Among the canonical Gospels, this parable is unique to Matthew, although a similar parable can be found in Gos. Thom. 57. The Shepherd of Hermas also contains a parable which makes a similar point (about distinguishing the righteous from the unrighteous at the end of the age), though it does so by utilizing the image of trees in the winter rather than wheat and weeds (Similitude 3). Neither of these iterations of the parable contains enslaved characters.

\textsuperscript{81} Carter and Heil, \textit{Matthew’s Parables}, 38.

\textsuperscript{82} Morris, \textit{Matthew}, 349.
him saying “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” [37] And responding he said “The one sowing the good seed is the Son of Man. [38] The field is the world. The good seed—these are the sons of the Kingdom. The weeds are the sons of evil [or “the evil one”]. [39] The enemy who sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the consummation of the age. The harvesters are the angels. [40] So then, just as the weeds were gathered together and burned with fire, so too shall it be at the consummation of the age. [41] The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect all stumbling blocks and everyone who does lawlessness, [42] and they will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. [43] Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

The enslaved characters in this parabolic narrative bring to their master’s attention the trouble sown by the enemy and inquire as to how this issue should be resolved. Our exploration of this passage will highlight the identity of these characters as “slaves,” what the parable says about their role in the household, and finally the interesting note that the enslaved characters, though appearing in the parable itself, are not a part of the parable’s explanation.

This story begins much like the parable of the sower, which immediately precedes it.

Both introduce agricultural settings which open with a man sowing seeds. In 13:3 we have ιδοῦ ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων τοῦ σπειρίου. Similarly, in 13:24 we hear the Kingdom of Heaven likened to...

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83 Ἀλλὰν παραβολὴν παρέδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγον· Ὡμοιώθη ἤ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπῳ σπείραντι καλὸν σπέρμα ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ αὐτοῦ. ἐν ὃς τοῖς καθευδόντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἦλθεν αὐτῷ ὁ ἔχορς καὶ ἐπεσπερείν ζυζάνια ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ σιτοῦ καὶ ἀπήλθεν. ὁ ἐξ ἐξελάσσεσθαι ὁ χόρτος καὶ καρπὸν ἐποίησεν, τότε ἔφυγαν καὶ τὰ ζυζάνια. προσελθοῦντες δὲ ὁ δοῦλος τοῦ οἰκοδεσπότου ἔπον αὐτῷ· Κύριε, οὐχὶ καλὸν σπέρμα ἐσπεράς ἐν τῷ σῶ ἀγρῷ; πάνθεν οὖν ἔρηξε ζυζάνια; ὁ δὲ ἐφη αὐτοῖς· Ἐχορῷς ἀνθρώπῳ τοῦτο ἐποίησεν· οἱ δὲ δοῦλοι αὐτῷ λέγουσιν· Θελεῖς οὖν ἀπελθόντες συλλέξουμεν αὐτὰ; δὲ ἐφήν· Οὐ, μὴ τοιαύτα συλλέγοντες τὰ ζυζάνια ἐκριζώσετε ἀμφότερα μέχρι τοῦ θερισμοῦ· καὶ ἐν καιρῷ τοῦ θερισμοῦ ἐρῶ τοῖς θερίσταις· Συλλέξετε πρῶτον τὰ ζυζάνια καὶ δήσατε αὐτὰ εἰς δέσμας πρὸς τὸ κατακάισθαι αὐτά, τὸν δὲ σιτον συνεγάγετε εἰς τὴν ἀποθήκην μου...
ἀνθρώπῳ σπείραντι καλὸν σπέρμα. However, unlike the titular sower of the former parable, who
is the sole character in that narrative, the man sowing good seeds in the Parable of the Tares
(identified later as the οἰκοδεσπότης) is soon joined by a host of other characters: his enemy
(αὐτοῦ ὁ ἐχθρός), his slaves (οἱ δοῦλοι τοῦ οἰκοδεσπότου), and the harvesters (οἱ θερισταί).

The appearance of the δοῦλοι has led commentators to note that the “man sowing seed”
in this parable did not actually sow seeds himself but that this task fell to the enslaved characters.
France writes “This farmer, unlike the one in the parable of the sower, is a landowner with a
workforce of slaves, so that when we are told that he sowed the seed we should probably
understand that he had it sown by them.”

Similarly, Nolland writes that this farmer is “not the
subsistence farmer with his modest plot probably to be envisaged in the earlier parable” and that
“We can no longer be sure that the work of sowing was not actually done by the slaves.”

Again, Morris says with regard to the question asked by the enslaved characters (“you sowed good seed
in your field, did you not?” 13:27) that “it was they, not he, who had done the actual sowing.”

Even Glancy seems to suggest this when she writes “the slaves who approach the master in the
parable of the weeds and the wheat…are agricultural slaves.”

84 One could possibly add to this list of characters the people who slept while the enemy did his work (τοῖς
ἀνθρώποις in 13:25). I do not list them along with the other characters since they play no active role in the story and
are given no role in its interpretation later in the chapter.

85 France, Matthew, 527. Keener similarly notes that this story’s protagonist is a “wealthy landowner” as opposed to the “tenant farmer” of the parable of the sower (Keener, Matthew, 385–6).

86 Nolland, Matthew, 545. Nolland seems to assume here that the presence of enslaved workers must mean
that the farmer of this parable was wealthy, which need not necessarily be the case. Bradley notes that the
circumstances of Roman slaveowners was varied and ranged from the extraordinary wealthy down to the
“smallscale owner of a mere handful of slaves” common in the provinces (Bradley, Slaves and Masters, 16).

87 Morris, Matthew, 350.

88 Glancy, Slavery in Early Christianity, 112.
I am less certain than these scholars that the author imagines the enslaved characters of this parable doing the sowing (or indeed any of the agricultural work). The ἄνθρωπος of 13:24 (called the οἰκοδεσπότης in 13:27) is identified as the one who sows at the outset of the parable. When the δοῦλοι come to him in 13:27, they also identify him as the one who sowed the seeds. What is more, when these enslaved characters inquire about undertaking an agricultural task themselves (“Do you want us to go out and collect [the weeds]?” 13:28) the master declines and instead says that he will give the harvesters (οἱ θερισται) instructions on how to proceed at the harvest time.

Whether these harvesters are also enslaved persons or if they are free laborers is not specified in the text, but they do seem to be distinct from the δοῦλοι who have brought the matter to their master’s attention. Several commentators have argued that this distinction between the enslaved characters and those who will work the harvest is unrealistic. France says, “in real life the slaves and the harvesters would no doubt have been the same people.”89 Gundry calls the differentiation between the “slaves” and the “harvesters” a “piece of unrealism.”90 Luz may also suggest the same when he says, “the parable does not intend to portray the usual farming procedure.”91 This “piece of unrealism” is said to be an example of the interpretation infringing on the parable’s world as it “anticipates the later identification of the harvesters as angels.”92

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89 France, Matthew, 526.

90 Gundry, Matthew, 265.

91 Luz, Matthew, 2:255. Luz may also be referring here to the order in which the wheat and the tares were harvested.

92 Gundry, Matthew, 265. See also France, Matthew, 526; Luz, Matthew, 2:255; Keener, Matthew, 389.
The argument that the enslaved characters must have been responsible for the actual sowing (or the harvesting) is not based on the text of the parable itself (and in fact contradicts what the text says). It seems instead to be built on the premise that the mere existence of these enslaved individuals is sufficient proof that the landowner would have counted on them to carry out all forms of agricultural labor. This need not necessarily be the case. Depictions of ancient slavery often differentiate between enslaved persons who labored in agricultural settings and those who labored in domestic settings; Bradley notes that Roman jurists distinguished between enslaved persons belonging to the city household (familia urbana) and those belonging to the rural household (familia rustica). Even on agricultural estates, enslaved persons may be tasked with domestic and/or managerial tasks rather than agricultural ones, hence some legal authorities argued that enslaved persons may be “differentiated not by location but by their work, so that even if they are on rural estates but do not do ‘rural’ work they are considered ‘urban.’” As Sandra Joshel puts it, “the slave’s actual work was more fundamental than where he or she did it.” One such example of a “typically urban” slave who frequently appeared in agricultural settings is the vilicus—the estate manager. The agricultural manuals of Cato, Varro, and Columella, our primary sources for understanding the organization of these ancient agricultural estates, “each stress the need of close, careful supervision by the vilicus, the slave manager.” This is not to say that the δουλοι of our parable should be thought of specifically as vilici (or any

93 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 58.

94 non loco, sed opere separant, ut, licet in praediiis rusticis sint, tamen si opus rusticum non faciant, urbani videntur (Justinian, Digest 32.1.99pr).

95 Joshel, Slavery, 162.

96 Joshel, Slavery, 171.
of the other various foremen or overseers written about in the manuals). Rather, this other evidence permits us to think about these enslaved characters as managerial by work even though they appear in an agricultural setting.

Notable as well, the presence of such domestic or managerial slaves in a household does not necessitate the presence of enslaved labor also in the agricultural sphere. Put another way, an ancient slaveowner could exploit enslaved laborers in their domestic affairs and still employ free laborers to carry out agricultural tasks. For a particularly germane example of this, we might consider the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. Here on the one hand, we see enslaved characters (δούλους, Luke 15:22; παίδων, Luke 15:26) who carry out a number of domestic tasks (bringing the appropriate raiment for the younger son and preparing the feast in honor of his return). On the other hand, the parable also speaks of the father’s hired workers (μίσθιοι, Luke 15:17) and places the (free) older son laboring in the fields. There are a number of reasons that might explain such an arrangement. The most obvious would be that agricultural labor is seasonal, requiring a large workforce at harvest time but fewer laborers for the rest of the year. Landowners may prefer for economic reasons to employ free laborers during the harvest season.

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98 Though the text says only that this son was “in the field” (ἐν ἀγρῷ), his own characterization of his lot in life as “laboring like a slave” (δουλεύω, Luke 15:29) would suggest that he was accustomed to some sort of labor (perhaps working in the field). That he describes his work as “slavish” need not imply that he performed the same sort of labor as the enslaved persons on his father’s property (who this parable only depicts doing domestic work). Rather, it should be read as the complaint of a free son who pictures himself toiling thanklessly which his prodigal brother is celebrated.

99 Dominic Rathbone, “*Latifundia/Large Estates,*” BNP, accessed online.
rather than to exploit the labor of enslaved persons when the latter option included the added cost of housing, clothing, and feeding the enslaved throughout the remainder of the year.\textsuperscript{100}

This is not to say that enslaved individuals were not or could not be forced to perform varied forms of labor that included both domestic and agricultural tasks.\textsuperscript{101} I mean instead to demonstrate that the presence of “slaves” in this parable does not necessarily mean that they were responsible for carrying out the agricultural tasks of the parable. It is equally (or perhaps more) appropriate to read these enslaved characters as managerial agents tasked with looking after the oīkoς of the oikodespotēς.\textsuperscript{102} In their oversight, they come to realize that there is an issue in the fields which they bring immediately to their master’s attention. The master decides that no immediate action is necessary and instead decides to give special instructions to the harvesters (possibly free actors, though the text does not specify) when the harvest time arrives. This reading, which portrays the enslaved characters in a managerial role, is consistent both with the parable as it is told in Matthew and also with the Gospel’s portrayal of enslaved characters throughout the parables (where, as Glancy has argued, the enslaved often appear in managerial roles).

The explanation which Matthew offers for this parable also prompts the audience to understand the landowner (and not the enslaved characters) as the one who sowed the seeds.

\textsuperscript{100} A number of the commentaries recognize the potential need for a landowner to employ additional workers at the harvest, though they often do so while still insisting that the δοῦλοι must also necessarily have been involved. See France, \textit{Matthew}, 526; Nolland, \textit{Matthew}, 546; Keener, \textit{Matthew}, 389.

\textsuperscript{101} See the parable in Luke 17:7–10, which imagines such an enslaved person laboring in the fields and then coming into the house to serve at the table.

\textsuperscript{102} Here I use oīkoς in its broadest sense as “household” or “property,” not narrowly as “house.” Such a supervising agent is often called an oikovōmos. Latin literature often refers to such an agent as a vilicus.
When the explanation begins in 13:37 this character is referred to not as ἀνθρώπος or as ὁ ὁκοδεσπότης but as ὁ σπείρων τὸ καλὸν σπέρμα—“the one sowing good seed.” The character’s identity in the parable is subsumed by his agricultural task. Gundry has noted “Indeed, that it is the ‘man’ who sows, not his ‘slaves,’ contains a Christological emphasis concerning Jesus’ establishing God’s kingdom.” Matthew’s Jesus says that this sower represents the Son of Man and the good seed that is sown represents the people of the kingdom. The enslaved characters in the narrative are given no role whatsoever in the explanation of the parable; here they clearly did not sow the seeds. And how could they? Who else could send the children of the kingdom out into the world except the Son of Man? Who else could direct the angelic harvesters to separate the peoples at the eschaton? Only the Son of Man can do these things and thus, at least by this reading of the parable, only the landowner could be responsible for sowing the seeds.

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103 Gundry, Matthew, 263.

104 Literally, “sons of the kingdom” (οἱ νίκοι τῆς βασιλείας).

105 Davies and Allison write, “The slaves…are not identified, and they are not mentioned in the interpretation” (Matthew, 2:413).

106 One might well be reminded of another distinctly Matthean parable: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his throne. And all the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate them from one another just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats…” (25:31–32).

107 It is plausible, I think, that some of the confusion regarding who is sowing the seeds may come from a conflation of this parable with the preceding Parable of the Sower. In that parable, the seed represents the message of the kingdom and the sower (who is not explicitly identified in the explanation) may be anyone who spreads that message. In that context, one could understand an enslaved character to represent the believer who faithfully serves the master (understood as God or Christ), but this would be to add elements to that parable which are not there. If one thinks of the good seed in the parable of the Tares as “the good news” or the “message of the kingdom,” as in the Sower, it might make sense that the enslaved characters (again, representing the faithful believer) were tasked with spreading that seed into the world. However, the sower and the seed in this parable represent something completely different, as already described above. Luz notes the possibility of such a misunderstanding when he says “In the history of interpretation based on Mark 4:14/Matt 13:19 the seed is often interpreted as referring to the word. Cf., e.g., Tertullian Praescr. haer. 31” (Luz, Matthew, 2:268 n15).
All this prompts the question “Why include the enslaved characters in the parable at all?”

As has already been noted, the enslaved characters are afforded no place in the explanation of the parable. They do not sow the good seed. That is the master’s work. They do not separate the weeds and the wheat at the end. That is the work assigned to the angelic harvesters. So, what narrative function do these characters fulfill that necessitates their inclusion in this parable?

I suggest that the enslaved characters in this narrative function primarily as simple agents, moving the narrative forward by asking questions that provide the landowner of the parable with opportunities to speak. “Master, you sowed good seed in your field did you not?” “Where then have the weeds come from?” “Do you want us to go out and collect the weeds?” The first two questions allow the landowner to identify “the enemy” as the source of the weeds on his property, and the third question allows him to describe how the harvest will be handled. It is interesting to note that in response to the third question the landowner does not give the enslaved characters themselves any instructions for the harvest. They will not conduct the harvest, nor will they be tasked with instructing the harvesters. All this will be handled by the landowner (“at the harvest time I will tell the harvesters…”). He therefore has no reason to tell them any of this except as a mechanism to inform the audience about these important details of the story. Thus, the enslaved characters are present to ask the questions to which the audience requires answers if the narrative is going to move forward.

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108 For commentators who have suggested that the “slaves” of the parable represent Jesus’s disciples, see France, Matthew, 526; Luz, Matthew, 2:255; Gundry, Matthew, 265; Keener, Matthew, 389.

109 Recall the similar narrative function assigned to the man enslaved by the centurion (8:5–13) and those enslaved by Herod the Tetrarch (14:1–2).
The unforgiving slave (18:23–35)

The second of Matthew’s slave parables, the story of the Unforgiving Slave, is unique to that Gospel. Like the parable of the Tares, this story is told to illustrate some truth about the Kingdom of Heaven. It reads as follows:

[23] For this reason, the Kingdom of Heaven is like this: [there was] a man—a king—who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. [24] When he began to settle [them], one debtor was brought to him [owing] ten thousand talents. [25] When he was not able to pay him, the master commanded that he be sold and also his wife and his children and everything else he had and that he be paid back. [26] Falling down the slave knelt before him saying “Be patient with me and I will pay everything back to you.” [27] Moved with compassion, the master of that slave released him and forgave his debt. [28] Going out, that slave found one of his fellow slaves who owed him one hundred denarii and seizing him he choked him saying “Pay [me] if you owe [me] anything.” [29] And falling down his fellow slave knelt before him saying “Be patient with me and I will pay you back.” [30] But he was not willing; instead going out he cast him into prison until he could pay what he owed.

[31] When his fellow slaves saw what happened they were extremely distressed and going out they reported to their master what had happened. [32] Then his master called to him and said “Worthless slave! I have forgiven you all that debt because you begged me. [33] Is it not necessary for you also to show mercy on your fellow slave as I have shown you mercy?” [34] Being moved with anger, his master turned him over to the torturers until he could pay all that he owed. [35] This is what my heavenly Father will do to you if you do not each forgive your brother from your hearts. 110

This parable may be broken down into three scenes. First, there is the interaction between a man (called both “king” and “master”) and an enslaved debtor who owed him a large sum. Second, 

110 Διὰ τοῦτο ὑμιῶθη ἢ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπου βασιλεῖ ὡς ἡθέλησεν συνάραι λόγον μετὰ τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ· ἀρξαμένῳ δὲ αὐτοῦ συναίρειν προσηνέχθη αὐτῷ εἰς ὀφειλήτης μιρίων ταλάντων. μὴ ἔχοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀποδοῦναι ἐκέλευσεν αὐτόν ὁ κύριος πραθῆναι καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἔχει καὶ ἀποδοθῆναι. πεσὼν οὖν ὁ δοῦλος προσεκύνει αὐτῷ λέγον· Μακροθύμησον ἐπ’ ἐμοί, καὶ πάντα ἀποδόσο σοι. σπλαγχνισθεὶς δὲ ὁ κύριος τοῦ δούλου ἔκακνον ἀπέλυσεν αὐτόν, καὶ τὸ δάνειον ἀφήκεν αὐτῷ. ἐξελθὼν δὲ ὁ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος εὑρὼν ἕνα τῶν συνδούλων αὐτοῦ ὡς ὀφειλεῖ αὐτῷ ἐκατόν δηνάρια, καὶ κρατήσας αὐτὸν ἐπνίγει λέγον· Ἀπόδοσε εἰ τι ὀφείλεις. πεσὼν οὖν ὁ σύνδολος αὐτοῦ παρεκάλει αὐτῷ λέγον· Μακροθύμησον ἐπ’ ἐμοί, καὶ ἀποδόσο σοι. ο δὲ οὐκ ἠθέληκεν, ἀλλὰ ἀπέλυσεν ἐμαυεῖ τινὰ ἐπὶ φυλακὴν ἔσω ὅπως ἀποδόῃ τὸ ὀφειλόμενον. ἰδόντες οὖν οἱ σύνδολοι αὐτοῦ τὰς γενόμενα ἑλπισθέντας σφόδρα, καὶ ἐλθόντες διεσάφησαν τὸ κυρίον ἐπιτός πάντα τὰ γενόμενα. τότε προσκαλεσάμενος αὐτοῦ ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ λέγει αὐτῷ· Δοῦλε πονηρε, πάσαν τὴν ὀφειλήν ἐκείνην ἀφῆκα σοι, ἐπεὶ παρεκάλεσας με· οὐκ έδει καὶ σὲ ἐλεησά τὸν σύνδολον σου, ὡς κἀγὼ σὲ ἠλέησα; καὶ ὀργισθεὶς ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν τοῖς βασιλείταις ἐκεῖς ὅπως ἀποδόῃ πάν τὸ ὀφειλόμενον. Οὕτως καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ οὐρανίος ποιήσει ύμῖν ἐάν μὴ ἀφήτῃ ἐκαστὸς τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν καρδίων ύμῶν.
there is the confrontation between this first enslaved man and his “fellow slave” who owed him a much smaller sum. Finally, the “unforgiving slave” is confronted by the king and is punished for his “wickedness” with torture and imprisonment. The parable is then concluded with a brief moral and a warning against believers withholding forgiveness from one another.

The first scene begins in familiar fashion by likening the reign of heaven to a man (ἄνθρωπος), immediately identified more specifically as a king (βασιλεύς), who called together “his slaves” (τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ) in order to check on or settle his accounts.\textsuperscript{111} There is disagreement among scholars as to whether the enormous debt accounted to the enslaved debtor in the first scene (10,000 talents) should be understood literally or figuratively. Those who take the sum as a believable number presume that the δοῦλος in the parable is a tax farmer or some other such figure. Luz writes, “Many of [the listeners] will have concluded that the story is about some sort of dignitary—perhaps a minister or major tax collector—so that the amount remains somewhat plausible.\textsuperscript{112} Others, like Heil, take the 10,000 talent debt accounted to the first slave as an “incredibly huge and obviously exaggerated amount.”\textsuperscript{113} Nolland likewise says that the

\textsuperscript{111} The parable of the Tares began in similar fashion. Compare ὡμοιώθη ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπῳ σπείραν (13:24) with ὡμοιώθη ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπῳ βασιλεῖ (18:23). See also the parallel language in 13:45 (πάλιν ὡμοια ἔστιν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπῳ ἐμπόρῳ) and 13:52 (πᾶς γραμματεύς μαθητευθεῖς τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν ὠμοίῳ ἐστιν ἀνθρώπῳ ὀικοδεσπότῃ).

\textsuperscript{112} Luz, Matthew, 2:471. See also Morris, Matthew, 272 n69, 273; Jeremias, Parables, 210–14; Derrett, Law in the New Testament, 32–47. Josephus sets the tax revenue generated by Palestine as 8,000 talents and, in the same context, tells the story of a man who bid 16,000 talents to acquire the taxing rights (A.J. 12.175–176).

\textsuperscript{113} Carter and Heil, Matthew’s Parables, 117. Davies and Allison comment that, if the astounding figure is not meant to be taken figuratively, the parable leaves the reader with a number of questions. How could the sale of the slave’s family repay such an amount? How could the slave ask for time to repay such a debt? Is 10,000 talents a plausible amount for a loan (δάνειον) in the first place? How could the slave’s imprisonment effect the money’s recovery in any meaningful way? (Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:795).
number represents “fairy-tale-like exaggeration” and France argues that the sum is “far beyond what any individual…might owe even to a king.” Jeremias points out that μύρια and τάλαντα are “the highest magnitudes in use” for the reckoning of numbers and currency, respectively. The point for these latter scholars is thus not the actual monetary amount, but its enormity, on the one hand, and also its contrast to the trifling amount due in the second scene (100 denarii) on the other.

The sheer magnitude of the sum has led some commentators to argue that the enslaved debtor with whom the king was settling accounts was not a slave at all. Keener writes, “A king’s ‘servants’ could refer to his higher officials, like provincial satraps…Possibly the ‘servants’ here are tax farmers working for the king.” Per Davies and Allison, “If one accepts the sum of 10,000 talents as an original part of the parable, δοῦλος must mean not ‘slave’ but, in accordance with oriental usage, ‘minister’ or ‘official.’” Gundry likewise notes,

Many think that the huge sum of the first slave’s debt to the king implies that the slave holds the position of a governor, or satrap, that δοῦλος means “servant” rather than

114 Nolland, Matthew, 756.
115 France, Matthew, 704.
116 Jeremias, Parables, 28.
117 The text does not specify whether this debt is a talent of gold or a talent of silver. L&N suggests that a talent of silver was worth approximately 6,000 denarii, and so the debt owed by the first slave to his master the king would be approximately 600,000 times larger than the debt owed to him by his fellow slave. A talent of gold, according to L&N, would be worth at least 30 times more, and thus the debt forgiven by the king would be approximately 18 million times larger than the 100 denarii owed by the “fellow slave.” Put another way, 100 denarii could be earned with around three months’ labor. To earn 10,000 talents of silver, that same laborer would have to work for 150 millennia (4,500 millennia for 10,000 talents of gold).


119 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:797. Emphasis added. Davies and Allison prefer to take the large monetary sum as figurative and thus prefer to read the δοῦλοι of this parable as “servants.”
“slave,” and that the debt represents taxes which the governor has failed to collect from his territories or deliver to the king.\textsuperscript{120}

Morris argues similarly, saying,

A king would have many officials who handled money in various departments of state… The word rendered \textit{servants} is the ordinary word for ‘slaves,’ but in accordance with the usage of the time it was commonly applied to those who served the king. These people would not have been slaves in our sense of the term, but responsible officials in high office.\textsuperscript{121}

Harrington says simply that these characters should be thought of as high bureaucratic officials “despite the term \textit{douloi}.”\textsuperscript{122}

All of these arguments overlook the fact that, in the ancient world, one could be a “responsible official in high office” and “a slave” at the same time.\textsuperscript{123} Nolland recognizes in his discussion of the “slave” or “official” debate that “the situation is confused by cases in which those who were in fact slaves held positions of major responsibility.”\textsuperscript{124} All that is clear from the parable as it is written, he says, is that “a number of people [whom Matthew calls ‘slaves’] have been given responsibility with considerable independence of operation for matters that involve financial transactions and a need for reckoning with the master.”\textsuperscript{125} Luz notes that it “was not

\textsuperscript{120} Gundry, \textit{Matthew}, 373. Like Davies and Allison, Gundry argues that recognition of the hyperbole allows one to read this character as a “common slave” (Gundry, \textit{Matthew}, 374).

\textsuperscript{121} Morris, \textit{Matthew}, 472.

\textsuperscript{122} Harrington, \textit{Matthew}, 270.

\textsuperscript{123} Recall, by way of example, Musicus Scurranus, the master of the Gallic treasury who was enslaved to Tiberius Caesar. See the discussion in chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{124} Nolland, \textit{Matthew}, 755 n120.

\textsuperscript{125} Nolland, \textit{Matthew}, 755.
unusual that slaves were entrusted with financial matters.”

France also expresses doubt that the “oriental” usage of δοῦλος to mean “minister/satrap” “would have been familiar to Palestinian Jews,” suggesting that the more common understanding of δοῦλος, particularly when juxtaposed with κύριος as it is in this story, would be as “slave.”

Glancy writes that the “magnitude of [the] debt” owed by the unmerciful slave “suggests that he is deeply involved in household financial affairs.” Such “managerial slaves” were not uncommon (indeed Glancy says they “constituted the most visible sector of slaves in Greco-Roman society”), even though the majority of the individuals enslaved in the ancient world were likely consigned to “more onerous tasks.”

Regarding the enslaved debtor of this parable Glancy says, “The parable of the unmerciful slave gestures toward the heights that elite slaves could reach: the unmerciful slave apparently has access to his royal master’s resources, to the extent that he eventually accrues a vast debt to his owner totaling ten thousand talents.”

Whether the monetary figure is meant to be taken literally or figuratively, the debtor in this story should be read as an enslaved financial agent whom the king has called to account for his debt. Such an identification is consistent with the details of the parable and with how Matthew portrays enslaved characters elsewhere. It also will allow us to make sense of later details in the story, particularly the sale of the debtor’s family.

126 Luz, Matthew, 2:471.
127 France, Matthew, 705–6 n21.
130 Glancy, “Matthean Parables,” 72. The same basic argument holds true regardless of whether one takes this number literally or figurately.
Scholars who insist that this debtor is not enslaved, despite his explicit identification as a δοῦλος, must contend with the fact that the king (now called “his master”) threatens not only to sell the man but to sell his wife and children as well. Harrington notes, “Although some biblical texts assume that children could be sold into slavery to make up their father’s debts, this was not the practice in Jesus’ time. Under no circumstances in the law could the wife be taken.” Luz writes that the sale of a debtor into slavery was “permitted in both Hellenistic and Roman law” but that, at least in Jewish law, “a man is forbidden to sell his wife and, according to some texts, also his sons.” Gundry appeals to Jeremias, saying, “Jewish practice did not allow sale of a wife, and children constitute a man’s last possession.”

Indeed, if this man is not enslaved, the sale of his wife and children may represent a breach of Jewish law and custom. However, the text of Matthew explicitly identifies the character in question as a δοῦλος and, as Nolland rightly points out, “The wife of a slave and his children…were most likely already owned by the master.” France also writes, “As a slave, the debtor, together with his family and his belongings, belonged to his master, and so could be sold.” Glancy notes that even though this enslaved manager is highly placed, his owner still has the prerogative of “selling him and his family into a harsher slavery.” The purpose of the

131 Harrington, Matthew, 270
132 Luz, Matthew, 2:472.
133 Gundry, Matthew, 374. See also Jeremias, Parables, 211.
134 Nolland, Matthew, 757.
135 France, Matthew, 706. Emphasis added.
136 Glancy, “Matthean Parables,” 73. Admittedly there is nothing in the text to suggest the nature of the slavery into which these individuals would be sold (whether it would be “harsher” or otherwise).
sale is punitive; there is little chance that the sale of the enslaved family will make up for the enormous debt owed. 137 “The master’s plan,” writes Nolland, “is actually to shore up his own financial position by liquidating some of his own assets [i.e., the enslaved debtor and his family] and at the same time to bear down punitively on the slave.” 138

Those familiar with the story know that the master, in a magnanimous display of mercy, agrees not only to forestall the sale of the enslaved debtor and his family but to cancel the immense debt in its entirety. The enslaved debtor departs, now newly forgiven, and the second scene begins with him finding (or perhaps seeking out?) “one of his fellow-slaves” (ἔνα τῶν συνδούλων αὐτοῦ) who owed him a (comparatively) small amount. 139 Luz writes that the term “fellow slave” here is “consciously chosen in order to indicate that [the two] belonged to the same class and thus should share a sense of solidarity.” 140 Morris says that the term suggests the two were “on the same level.” 141 However both of these understandings of the term pose problems.
Regarding Luz’s argument, there is no indication from the ancient world that enslaved persons thought of one another as belonging to the same distinct class nor that their mutual experience of enslavement led to any sort of solidarity or class consciousness. Bradley writes,

The neat cleavage between masters and slaves, between those who were free and those who were not, should not lead to any belief that slaves in the Roman world ever formed a rigid social class, in the modern sense of that term, with a recognizable consciousness of itself and a concomitant programme for its own amelioration.\textsuperscript{142}

In his discussion of the variety of enslaved occupations evident from the ancient world, he writes,

Yet as far as can be told there never developed among the slave population a sense of common identity—or class consciousness—that led to an ideological impulse to produce radical change in society… The diversity of slave jobs and slave statuses in Roman society served to disperse, not to unite, the slave population, which should never be conceived of as a solid, undifferentiated monolith.\textsuperscript{143}

He makes note of this point again when he discusses acts of rebellion among the enslaved, saying, “Rebelliousness, however, must not be confused with notions of class solidarity among slaves.”\textsuperscript{144} Even the few large revolts led by enslaved persons in Roman Italy “were not impelled by ideological imperatives to effect radical political and social change, but were usually attempting only to protest against, and to diminish, their personal suffering and to take a measure of revenge against their owners.”\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{142} Bradley, \textit{Slaves and Masters}, 15.

\textsuperscript{143} Bradley, \textit{Slavery and Society}, 72–73.

\textsuperscript{144} Bradley, \textit{Slavery and Society}, 130. For a modern parallel, see Mary Karasch (\textit{Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro} [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987], 325–26), who suggests that the absence of slave revolts in Rio de Janeiro is explained by the absence of any class cohesion among the enslaved population.

\textsuperscript{145} Bradley, \textit{Slavery and Society}, 110.
Morris’ suggestion that the two slaves were “on the same level” is likewise problematic. First, as with Luz, it may insinuate a sort of class consciousness that is unlikely to have existed in the ancient world. Second, it has already been noted that ancient enslavement practices allowed for slavery to exist on numerous “levels” (from high level, administrative duties on the one hand all the way down to menial and dangerous labor on the other). The enormous amount owed by the enslaved debtor suggests that his position includes high administration and financial responsibility, but there is nothing about the “fellow slave” that would lead us to a similar conclusion about his role or responsibilities. To the contrary, the “fellow slave” is presented in at least a small way as subordinate to the enslaved debtor (since the latter has the authority to have his “fellow slave” imprisoned).\(^{146}\)

The simplest way to understand the reference to the “fellow slave” here and elsewhere in this parable is that these are individuals who share not a consolidated class identity but who simply share the same master. The term is used to point not to their common status as “enslaved” but to their common enslaver.\(^{147}\) Thus at the end of this scene when the enslaved debtor’s hypocrisy is displayed in his brutal treatment of his fellow, more σύνδουλοι appear and run with their report to their κύριος (18:31). Here the master is more specifically called τῷ κυρίῳ ἑαυτῶν (“their own master”); the reflexive pronoun is used to emphasize that this is their shared master.

\(^{146}\) Such an enslaved person, who was placed under the authority of a fellow enslaved person, is called in Latin literature a *vicarius*. See chapter 2, n3.

\(^{147}\) On this, LSJ cites Julius Pollux (3.82) who distinguishes between σύνδουλος (“slave of the same master”) and ὁμόδουλος (“companion in slavery”). We might think of the former as “enslaved together” (συν-) and the latter as “similarly enslaved” (ὁμο-).
The enslaved debtor does not threaten to sell his “fellow slave” (perhaps because it was not within his power to do so,\textsuperscript{148} or perhaps because this smaller debt was not sufficient to warrant such a sale\textsuperscript{149}). The demand for repayment is, however, accompanied by physical violence as the enslaved debtor “takes hold of” and “begins choking” (κρατήσας αὐτὸν ἔπνιγεν, 18:28) the man indebted to him.\textsuperscript{150} The “fellow slave” is vulnerable to physical violence, even from someone who is enslaved just as he is.\textsuperscript{151} And, while the parable does go on to criticize the unforgiving debtor, we will see in the third scene that he is condemned only for his failure to cancel the debt and not for his abusive actions. He assaults his fellow and ultimately has him consigned to imprisonment, but the text is surprised only at his hypocrisy, not because his actions are “unlawful or unjust.”\textsuperscript{152}

The master excoriates the unforgiving man as δοῦλε πονηρός, a “worthless slave,” and it is worth spending some time exploring what earns him this unflattering epithet. The kingly master rebukes the enslaved debtor, saying, “I have forgiven you all that debt because you begged me. Is it not necessary for you also to show mercy on your fellow slave as I have shown you mercy?” (18:32b–33). The admonition and the subsequent punishment come not because the enslaved debtor abused his fellow, but rather because of his failure to emulate his master’s merciful behavior. Put differently, he is called worthless (πονηρός) because he does not appropriately

\textsuperscript{148} Nolland, \textit{Matthew}, 758.

\textsuperscript{149} Luz, \textit{Matthew}, 2:473.

\textsuperscript{150} For an interesting parallel to this scene, see Bava Batra 10:8 in which a creditor similarly takes a debtor by the throat in public. In the rabbinic text, the ultimate outcome is that a third party offers to pay what is owed.

\textsuperscript{151} Keeping in mind, as was said previously, that slavery manifested on a number of different levels, making it possible for one enslaved person to be subordinated to another.

\textsuperscript{152} Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 2:801.
represent or emulate his master. From a Roman perspective, such an enslaved person would be useless as a financial agent.

Elite members of Roman society were, on the one hand, concerned with maintaining and growing their own personal fortunes. Yet, on the other hand, they were barred by traditional and legal precedents from pursuing business matters (*negotia*) on their own.\(^\text{153}\) To get around these barriers, elite Romans worked through intermediaries, often enslaved or formerly enslaved agents (*procuratores*) who were connected to their households. Joshel writes, “Slaves acted as managers and business agents for the rich, and complex legal stipulations enabled slaves to engage in commerce on behalf of elite owners, keeping the elite at a distance from the marketplace, which…the upper classes considered vulgar.”\(^\text{154}\) These individuals, as representatives of their masters (or former masters), would have been expected to act in their owner’s best interests and to anticipate and emulate their owner’s response to the matters which they addressed.\(^\text{155}\)

Enslaved persons who failed to increase their master’s worth or who conducted their business in a way the master deemed inappropriate, like the enslaved debtor in our story, might be deemed δοῦλος πωληρός—“worthless” or “unfit” slaves. In such a situation, πωληρός should not be understood to mean “wicked” in a moral sense but is instead an indication of relative

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\(^{153}\) Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, 79.

\(^{154}\) Joshel, *Slavery*, 165. Later on the same page, Joshel explains the disdain of the upper class for commercial work by saying “In the view of Roman authors, those who succeed in the marketplace are always skilled at flattery, which, for the freeborn, is simply a form of pleasing: such men willingly do what others want them to do and mold their behavior to the desires of others. For the freeborn author, such behavior evokes the image of the slave, who has no choice but to please.”

\(^{155}\) Recall here our previous discussion on the Roman concept of *auctoritas* and the expectation not only of obedience but also that the enslaved person would anticipate the master’s desire (chapter 3, n72).
Such a slave is unfit for the task to which they have been assigned. Although Matthew often uses πονηρός in its moral sense (both as an adjective and as a substantive), the Gospel is also familiar with its use to describe relative value (see 7:18).

And so, when the master-king of the parable addresses the enslaved debtor as δοῦλε πονηρέ, he is not accusing him of acting immorally but is instead indicting him for failing at his task (i.e., for failing to appropriately represent the master in his business dealings). In 18:32, when the master says, “Is it not necessary for you also to show mercy on your fellow slave as I have shown you mercy?” he is not suggesting that his enslaved representative learn a moral lesson about the value of forgiveness. Rather he is saying that as the master’s representative the slave has a responsibility to emulate the master (in this case by cancelling a debt).

The enslaved debtor failed to emulate his master in his dealings with his “fellow slave,” and so now the master emulates the slave. Just as the enslaved debtor assaulted his fellow in 18:28, so the master turns the unforgiving man over to the torturers (18:34). Just as the “fellow slave” was imprisoned until his debt was repaid (ἕως οὗ ἀποθῇ τὸ ὀφειλόμενον), the unforgiving man is imprisoned until his whole debt was repaid (note the addition of πᾶν to the otherwise verbatim phrase in 18:34). Nolland is probably right to note that the motive behind the

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156 See L&N 65.27 for πονηρός as “possessing a serious fault and consequently being worthless.”

157 Nolland’s comment (Matthew, 760) that the addition of torture to the punishment here represents “the master’s strategy to go one better than what this slave has inflicted upon his fellow slave” fails to take into account the physical assault of the “fellow slave” by the enslaved debtor in 18:28.

158 France notes the “squeamishness” of the RSV in rendering βασανισταῖς as jailers (France, Matthew, 708). The motive of torture in such cases, beyond its use as a punitive measure, would be to compel the persons loved ones to provide the funds to pay the debt. See Luz, Matthew, 2:474; Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:802–3. For the use of torture in Palestine in this period, see Josephus, B.J. 1.548.

159 There may be an intentional parallel between the addition of πᾶν to the first debtor’s prison sentence and his earlier plea to his master. When he begs the king for time, he foolishly claims that eventually he will repay the
imprisonment would be taken by the audience as primarily punitive.¹⁶⁰ There is little hope that the enslaved debtor’s family or friends would ever be able to pay off his astronomical debt and secure his release.

It is interesting to note that, despite being moved with anger (ὀργισθεὶς, 18:34), the royal master does not carry out the punishment of the enslaved debtor himself but rather entrusts that task to torturers.¹⁶¹ Such a detail may be intended to portray the king in a positive light as one who was not mastered by his emotional state. We have in a previous chapter noted the work of Galen, the physician and philosopher, who argued that one should not punish an enslaved person in anger but should rather wait until the rage passed and then “inflict as many blows as they wished.”¹⁶² In his treatise “On Anger,” Seneca similarly writes that masters should not exercise their authority over those they have enslaved in anger but should rather wait until their anger has passed (De Ira, 3.32). Earlier in the same work he suggests that such enraged masters allow another person to handle the punishment for them. To illustrate this, he tells a story of the philosopher Plato who stopped himself from striking a slave in anger, standing still seemingly in mid-swing until a friend appeared and asked what he was doing. As a part of his responses, Seneca writes:

whole debt (καὶ πάντα ἀποδώσω σοι, 18:26), whereas the second debtor, despite the smaller sum owed, says only that he will offer repayment (καὶ ἀποδώσω σοι, 18:29).

¹⁶⁰ Nolland, Matthew, 760.

¹⁶¹ See Glancy, “Matthean Parables,” 67, for evidence of professional torturers (mancipes) who might be utilized in such scenarios. Glancy also notes that the enslaved retinue of the fictional Trimalchio includes two torturers (Petronius, Satyricon 49).

¹⁶² Galen, On the Passions and Errors of the Soul, 4.6.
[Plato] said, “Speusippus, will you please correct that slave with stripes; for I am in a rage…I should beat him more than I ought. I should take more pleasure than I ought in doing so. Let not that slave fall into the power of one who is not in his own power.”

Even in his anger, the master of our parable administers punishment in a way that other ancient authors would deem “appropriate.” Unlike the unforgiving slave, who laid hands on his fellow in the street, the parabolic king, in the midst of his anger, punishes the enslaved debtor through an intermediary.

This parable highlights all three of the features which Glancy finds prominent in Matthew’s slave parables. First, the unforgiving debtor of the story is portrayed in a managerial role that places him in the company of the king, makes him responsible for enormous amounts of wealth, and gives him some authority over other individuals who are enslaved by his master. Second, the characterization of the enslaved man as πονηρός in this parable is centered entirely on how his work benefits and/or represents the master; this man proves to be a poor representative of the master and is thus characterized as worthless. Finally, the enslaved characters of the parable are subjected to violence. The unforgiving debtor is handed over to torturers as punishment for his failures and, much more unsettling, his “fellow slave” is physically assaulted in the street in a way that is passed over (by Matthew and by commentators) as largely mundane.

163 Tu, inquit, Speusippe, servulum istum verberibus obiurga; nam ego irascor...plus faciam quam oportet, libenti faciam; non sit iste servus in eius potestate qui in sua non est (De Ira, 3.12). For further examples from Seneca, see De Ira 1.15 and 3.5. Consider also the example of Vedius Pollio, who was said to keep a pool of man-eating eels into which he would throw any enslaved person who angered him (Cassius Dio, Historiae Romanae, 54.23.2–4; Pliny the Elder, Naturalis Historia, 9.39; Seneca the Younger, De Clementia, 1.18.2).

164 What is more, Matthew gives the King’s behavior divine sanction when he concludes his parable by saying that God will behave in the same way when confronted with unforgiveness.
The Tenants (21:33–44)\textsuperscript{165}

The remainder of Matthew’s slave parables are found in the context of the Gospel’s passion narrative. In 21:23 a group called “the chief priests and elders of the people” (οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ) comes to Jesus and questions his authority (perhaps in response to the incident in the temple the day before; see 21:12–17). As a part of his response to them, Jesus tells this parable.

\[\text{[33]}\] “Listen to another parable. There was a man—the master of a house—who planted a vineyard and he placed a fence around it. He dug a winepress in it, and he built a watchtower. And he leased it to tenant farmers, and he left on a journey. \[\text{[34]}\] When the time for fruits drew near, he sent his slaves to the tenant farmers to collect his crops. \[\text{[35]}\] The tenants seized his slaves. Some they beat. Some they killed. Some they stoned. \[\text{[36]}\] Again he sent other slaves—more than the first time—and they treated them the same way. \[\text{[37]}\] Finally, he sent his son to them, saying ‘They will respect my son.’ \[\text{[38]}\] The tenants, seeing the son, said among themselves ‘This is the heir. Come! Let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ \[\text{[39]}\] And seizing him they cast him out of the vineyard and killed [him]. \[\text{[40]}\] When the master of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’” \[\text{[41]}\] They said to him “He will utterly destroy those evil men, and he will lease the vineyard to other tenants who will hand over to him the crops in their seasons.” \[\text{[42]}\] And Jesus said to them “Have you never read in the scripture ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is from the Lord and it is remarkable in our eyes’? \[\text{[43]}\] For this reason I say to you the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and will be given to a people who produce its fruit. \[\text{[44]}\] And the one who falls down on this stone will be shattered; it will crush anyone upon whom it falls.”\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{166}}


\textsuperscript{166} Ἀλλὰν παραβολὴν ἀκούσατε. Ἀνθρώπος ἦν ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης ὁ ὀφειλότατον ἀμπελώνα καὶ φραγμὸν αὐτῷ περιεθῆκεν καὶ ἄροξεν ἐν αὐτῷ λήγην καὶ ἰκοδόμησεν πύργον, καὶ ἐξέδετο αὐτῶν γεωργοῖς, καὶ ἀπεδήμησαν. ὅτε δὲ ἤρρισεν οἱ καιροὶ τῶν καρπῶν, ἀπέστειλεν τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ πρὸς τοὺς γεωργοὺς λαβεῖν τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτοῦ. καὶ λαβόντες οἱ γεωργοὶ τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἱππὸς ἔδιναν, καὶ δὲ ἀπέκτειναν, καὶ δὲ ἐλαυθώρισαν. πάλιν ἀπέστειλεν ἄλλους δούλους πλείονας τὸν πρῶτον, καὶ ἐποίησαν αὐτοῖς ὄσατος. ὦτερον δὲ ἀπέστειλεν πρὸς αὐτούς τὸν ιὼν αὐτοῦ λέγων· Ἐντραπήσωσαν τὸν ιῶν μου. οἱ δὲ γεωργοὶ ἱδόντες τὸν ιὼν εἶπον ἐν ἑαυτοῖς· Οὔτος ἐστιν ὁ κληρονόμος· δέδωκεν ἐποκείμενον αὐτοῦ καὶ σχόμεν ἡν τὴν κληρονομιὰν αὐτοῦ· καὶ λαβόντες αὐτὸν ἔξβαλον ἐξο τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος καὶ ἀπέκτειναν. ὅταν δὲν ἔλθῃ ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος, τί ποιήσει τοῖς γεωργοῖς ἑκείνοις· λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· Κακοὶς κακοὶ ἀπολέσατε αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὸν ἀμπελῶνα ἐκδώσατε ἄλλους γεωργοῖς, οἵποις ἀμφότεροι αὐτῶν τοὺς καρποὺς ἐν τοῖς καιροῖς αὐτῶν. Λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Οὐδὲπότε ἀνέγνωτε ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς· Λίθον δὲν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες αὐτὸς ἐγένηθε εἰς κεφαλὴν γονίας· παρὰ κυρίου ἐγένετο αὐτή, καὶ ἐστίν θαυμαστή ἐν ὑσταλμοῖς ἡμῶν· διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἀρθήσεται ἢρ’ ὑμῖν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ
The enslaved characters of this parabolic narrative serve as their master’s emissaries, making his demands known to those tending his land and suffering dishonor and violence at the hands of these tenants when they refuse to turn over the produce. And while these tenants are characterized by the text as “wicked” (κακός), we will see that this has little to do with their treatment of the enslaved messengers and more to do with their withholding of produce and the murder of the master’s (free) son.167

The “master of the house” (οἰκοδεσπότης) is presented as an absentee landowner, which France says would have “[reflected] a familiar economic situation at the time.”168 He goes on to write “Some of the chief priests and elders to whom Jesus is speaking would probably have owned land away from Jerusalem.”169 Samuel Adams notes that “land grabs” by the elite were a common problem for subsistence farmers in Palestine as early as the eighth century BCE.170 Closer to our period of interest, he notes that Alexander Balas awarded the Hasmonean leader Jonathan with a large estate (“Ekron and all its environs”) as a reward for his loyal service.171 He also briefly mentions the possibility that at least some of Judea’s rural poor “worked on

δοθήσεται ἔθνει ποιοῦντι τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς. Καὶ ὁ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον τούτον συνθλασθῆσεται· ἐφ’ ὄν δ’ ἂν πέσῃ λιμησοῦ αὐτὸν.

167 France identifies these two faults in the tenants (withholding produce and murdering the son), noting only parenthetically the violence against the slaves (France, Matthew, 809). Notice here the use of κακός to indicate a moral failure as opposed to πονηρός (used at 18:32 to describe an enslaved person as useless or defective).

168 France, Matthew, 808–9. See Finley (Ancient Economy, 133), who similarly states “the typical large landowner was an absentee owner.”

169 France, Matthew, 808–9.

170 Adams, Social and Economic Life, 130. See also Devadasan Nithya Premnath (Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis [St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003], 9) who discusses the “latifundialization” of the region as the context behind the prophetic oracles.

171 1 Macc 10:89.
royal/priestly lands.”

Outside of Palestine, in Ptolemaic Egypt, rulers “made land concessions to key constituencies, especially the priestly class.” During the Roman period, the Romans “[dependent] on the loyalties of local elites, also provoked an increase of [latifundia] in the East” as they granted land rights to promote allegiance. We have already noted the Roman distinction between the familia urbana and the familia rustica. The latter was overseen by the vilicus while the landowner spent the majority of their time at their urban home. The concept of the “absentee landowner,” then, would likely be well-known throughout the larger Roman world. Such an arrangement is seen in this parable: the vineyard is cared for by free tenant farmers while the owner is away.

172 Adams, Social and Economic Life, 168. For a more in-depth discussion of landownership during the Hasmonean period, see Jack Pastor (Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine [New York: Routledge, 2012], 72–81), who argues that of the lands conquered by Alexander Jannaeus some were allocated as royal properties while others were privately settled. This is a reaction against the prevailing view of Abraham Schalit (The Hellenistic Age: Political History of Jewish Palestine from 332 B.C.E. to 67 B.C.E., [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1972], 280–82) and Shimon Applebaum (“Economic Life in Palestine,” in The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions, ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969], 2:632–38), who argue that Jannaeus “claimed all the land as his, took the best lands for royal estates, gave lands to deserving servants of the crown, and tried to convert the free farmers to royal tenants” (Pastor, Land and Economy, 79).


175 Here we may note a difference between common practice in Palestine and in Roman Italy. In Italy, large agricultural estates (latifundia) were typically worked by enslaved laborers whereas many scholars suggest that free agricultural labor was more common in the provinces.

176 These two details—free agricultural workers and absent landowners—appear a number of times in the Synoptic parable tradition, though this parable is unique in that it contains both together. For other parables portraying free agricultural workers see the Tares (13:24–30; this assumes the validity of my previous argument that the enslaved persons in that text are not portrayed as agricultural workers), the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1–16), the Two Sons (21:28–32), and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32). For other parables portraying absent landowners see the Faithful/Wicked Slave (24:45–51//Luke 12:42–46), the Talents/Pounds (25:14–30//Luke 19:12–27), and the Waiting Slaves (Mark 13:34–47//Luke 12:35–38).
Rather than working the vineyard, the enslaved characters of this narrative appear as their master’s emissaries and business agents. As has already been mentioned, such positions of high responsibility do not necessarily translate to positions of high honor or privilege and this parable again demonstrates the physical vulnerability of its enslaved characters.\(^{177}\) The enslaved messengers who are sent to collect the rents are all “rejected with violence.”\(^{178}\) Matthew writes that they are “seized” (λαβόντες) and mistreated in various ways; some are beaten (ἐδειραν), some are killed (ἀπέκτειναν), and some are stoned (ἐλιθοβόλησαν).\(^{179}\) The master’s immediate response to this violence is not to bring punishment against the tenants but rather to “send other slaves—more than the first” (ἀπέστειλεν ἄλλους δούλους πλείονας τῶν πρώτων) who are (mis)treated in the same manner.

Perhaps the most troubling part of this careless disposal of enslaved persons is that commentators do not seem to find it troubling at all. In his discussion of the “servant parables,” Crossan disregards the enslaved characters and focuses instead on the relationship between the master and the tenants.\(^{180}\) Morris calls the killing of the enslaved characters a “rejection of the owner’s claim” to the vineyard and its produce.\(^{181}\) Davies and Allison note that “more slaves

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\(^{177}\) In writing about this parable France (Matthew, 812) again notes “In first-century society slaves were not necessarily of low social importance. Trusted slaves held important responsibilities in wealthy households.” This seems to ignore the fact that enslaved persons, no matter how highly placed, were vulnerable to violence. This vulnerability is particularly evident in the present parable.

\(^{178}\) Morris, Matthew, 541.

\(^{179}\) Nolland (Matthew, 872) writes that the sequence suggests that “the stoning involved will be stoning to death.”

\(^{180}\) Crossan, “Servant Parables,” 19. Similarly, Herzog (Subversive Speech, 105–6) classifies the tenants as the oppressed poor and sees the attack against the enslaved emissaries as a strike against the elite landowners.

\(^{181}\) Morris, Matthew, 541.
means redoubled effort” by the landowner to collect what is due. Keener will later write that it is “utter folly” to send the son to the murderous tenants, but he shows no such concern for the enslaved individuals who continue to be sent after the first group is killed. Of course, the text of Matthew is similarly apathetic when it comes to the fate of the enslaved characters. Ultimately, the mistreatment and murder of the enslaved emissaries is an inconvenience that the landowner solves by sending more.

Commentators are quick to highlight the parallel which Matthew makes between the killing of the enslaved characters and the killing of the prophets. Luz writes that anyone in Matthew’s audience familiar with the biblical tradition would connect the enslaved characters with the prophetic figures of the Hebrew scriptures. He argues,

The abuse they experience— their murder and stoning—is reminiscent of the fate of the prophets of Israel of which numerous biblical texts in the so-called Deuteronomistic tradition about the murder of prophets as well as early Jewish and Christian texts speak.

Davies and Allison note, providing numerous examples, that even the term δοῦλος used for these parabolic characters would cause the biblically literate among Matthew’s audience to think of the prophets. The mistreatment of the prophets has already been mentioned earlier in Matthew’s

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182 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:182.
183 Keener, Matthew, 513.
184 In Mark, one might understand that the master sends every enslaved person at his disposal before resorting to sending his son. After the sending of “many others” (πολλοίς ἄλλους), Mark 12:6 reads “he still had one, a beloved son” (ἕτε ἔνα εὐγενῆ, ὦν ἀγαπητόν) which may imply that the son is the only person left for him to send. As is typical for Matthew, he simplifies Mark’s statement, writing only that the son was sent “last of all” (ὑστερον).
185 Luz, Matthew, 3:40.
186 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:176 n12. They note 1 Kgs 18:36; 2 Kgs 14:25; Ezra 9:11; Isa 20:3; Jer 7:25; 25:4; Dan 9:6, 10; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6; Ezek 38:17; Bar 2:20, 24; 1QpHab 2:9; 7:5; 1QS 1:4; Philo,
Gospel (5:11–12) and will appear again in the last of the Seven Woes (23:29–36). Nolland suggests that Matthew’s addition of “stoning” to the injustices perpetrated against the enslaved messengers is explicitly paralleled at 23:37, where Jesus laments “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.”

The parallel that Matthew makes between the murdered slaves and the fate of the prophets prompts the question “Do the enslaved characters of this parable suffer violence simply because the prophets suffered violence? Or is such violence a constituent part of enslaved life which makes such enslaved characters suitable parabolic substitutes for the prophets?” Reading this parable in the context of Matthew’s broader portrayal of enslaved characters leads me to answer both of these questions in the affirmative. Certainly, the suffering of the enslaved characters is emphasized (even more in Matthew than in his Markan source) in a way that evokes the mistreatment and murder of the prophets, characters who are likewise portrayed in the Hebrew Bible as God’s enslaved emissaries. This does not mean, however, that the physical vulnerability of these enslaved characters may not also reflect the lived reality of enslaved persons in Matthew’s own time and place. The vulnerability of enslaved characters throughout the rest of Matthew’s slave texts demonstrates this aptly.

The landowner’s final recourse is to send his son to the tenants in order to collect what is owed him, a move which we have already seen Keener call “utter folly” considering what has

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Decalogue 178; Targum on Isa 50:10. They write that the use of servile language in these passages “[reinforces] the allegory.”

187 Nolland, Matthew, 872. Emphasis added.
happened to his previous representatives.188 Davies and Allison’s presumption that the son would have legal authority where the enslaved messengers would not is probably not what Matthew’s slaveowner means when he says “They will respect my son.”189 Neither is this assertion purely moral, as Luz suggests.190 Rather the expectation that the son will be respect where the slaves were mistreated is based on social considerations. Nolland writes that the ancient world was very conscious of the distinction between enslaved and free status. Therefore, he argues, “there is some reasonableness in the landowner’s expectation that his son would be respected. While someone else’s slaves could be mistreated with impunity, it would be quite another matter to mistreat someone’s son.”191 Morris similarly says, “Apparently [the landowner] was reasoning that slaves are one thing, the son of the house is quite another.”192

Those who hear the parable correctly predict the landowner’s response when his son is killed: “He will utterly destroy those evil men.” Morris says that he will not “let this final horror go unpunished.”193 Davies and Allison note, “He will act according to the lex talionis: murder calls forth murder.”194 Within the logic of this parable, however, it is only the murder of the free son that calls for a response in kind. The assaults brought against the enslaved characters are

188 Keener, Matthew, 190. Perhaps the landowner’s actions appear foolish because Keener never recognizes the unfree status of the enslaved characters whom the tenants mistreat and murder.
189 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:182.
190 Luz, Matthew, 3:40.
191 Nolland, Matthew, 873.
192 Morris, Matthew, 541–42.
193 Morris, Matthew, 542.
194 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:184.
seen only as a rejection of the master’s rights to the produce. The violence perpetrated against the slaves does not call for violent retribution. The son ought to receive respect but there is no such expectation for the dishonored slave. In this parable again we see the vulnerability and dishonor inherent in enslaved life vividly displayed.

The Great Feast (22:1–14)

Matthew follows the Parable of the Tenants directly with the Parable of the Great Feast. The parable is presented as a response (ἀποκριθεὶς) given to an unspecified “them” (αὐτοῖς), presumably the chief priests and pharisees of 21:45 who desired to arrest Jesus after he told the previous parable. The text reads as follows:

[1] And responding Jesus again spoke to them in parables saying, [2] “The kingdom of heaven is like a man—a king—who held a wedding feast for his son. [3] And he sent his slaves to call those who had been invited into the feast, and they did not wish to come. [4] Again he sent other slaves saying ‘Tell those who had been invited, “Behold the dinner has been prepared, the bulls and fattened [calves] have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come into the feast.”’ [5] But those disregarding [them] went away, one into his own field, another to his business. [6] The rest, seizing the slaves, mistreated and killed [them]. [7] The king was furious and, sending his troops, he destroyed those murderers and burned their city. [8] Then he said to his slaves, ‘The feast is prepared, but those who were invited are not worthy. [9] So go to the crossroads and call whomever you find into the feast.’ [10] And going out into the roads those slaves gathered everyone they found, both the wicked and the good, and the feast was filled with those reclining. [11] But when the king entered and looked at those reclining he saw there a man not wearing wedding attire. [12] And he said to him ‘Friend. How did you enter here without wedding attire?’ But he was silent. [13] Then the king said to the servants ‘Tying his feet and hands, cast him out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ [14] For many are called but few are chosen.”

195 See Morris, Matthew, 541–42. “His slaves had been rejected with force and his rights totally disregarded.” Emphasis added.

196 This may be contrasted with the response of the royal master in the parable of the Great Feast, who sends soldiers to punish those who kill his enslaved emissaries. See discussion below.


198 Καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν εἶπεν ἐν παραβολαῖς αὐτοῖς λέγον· Ἡμιοιόθη ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπω βασιλεῖ, δόστις ἐποίησαν γάμους τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἀπέστειλαν τούς δούλους αὐτοῦ καλέσαται τούς.
Much like the Parable of the Unforgiving Slave in chapter 18, this parable contains two or perhaps three distinct scenes. A king’s invitation to his son’s wedding feast is scorned by those who were invited and so the king instead has his slaves gather everyone they could find (22:10) so the feast would be filled. This might be reckoned as one scene or as two, divided by the (Matthean?) insertion regarding the destruction of the murderous would-be guests and the burning of their city (22:7). In the last scene, the king confronts one of his guests about his improper attire and has him expelled “into the outer darkness.” This final scene is distinguished from the previous material by, among other things, the term used to describe those serving the king; in vv. 1–10 they are slaves (δοῦλοι) whereas in v. 13 they are servants (διάκονοι).

The presentation of the enslaved characters in this narrative is familiar from the parable which immediately precedes it in two important ways. As in the story of the tenants, the enslaved persons in this parable act as their master’s emissaries, summoning those who have been invited to the wedding feast. Secondly, like in that parable, Matthew’s version of the Great Feast says that some of these enslaved messengers are met with violent abuse; they are seized

κεκλημένους εἰς τοὺς γάμους, καὶ οὐκ ἤθελον ἔλθειν. πάλιν ἀπέστειλεν ἄλλους δοῦλους λέγον· Ἐπιστεῖται τοῖς κεκλημένοις· Ἰδοὺ τὸ ἄριστόν μου ἥτοιμα, οἱ ταύροι μου καὶ τὰ σιτιστὰ τεθημένα, καὶ πάντα ἔτοιμα· δεῦτε εἰς τοὺς γάμους, οἱ δὲ ἀμελήσαντες ἀπῆλθον, δὲ μὲν εἰς τὸν ἱδίον ἄγρον, δὲ δὲ ἐπὶ τὴν ἐμπορίαν αὐτοῦ· οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ κρατήσαντες τοὺς δοῦλους αὐτοῦ ὑβρίσαν καὶ ἀπέκτειναν. ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ὀργίσθη, καὶ πέμψας τὰ στρατεύματα αὐτοῦ ἀπόλλεσεν τοὺς φονεῖς ἐκείνους καὶ τὴν πόλιν αὐτῶν ἔνεπρησεν. τότε λέγει τοῖς δοῦλοις αὐτοῦ· Ὅ μὲν γάμος ἔτοιμός ἐστιν, οἱ δὲ κεκλημένοι οὐκ ἤσαν ἄξιοι· πορεύεσθε οὖν ἐπὶ τὰς διεξόδους τῶν ὀδών, καὶ δόσου ἐὰν εὐρίτητα καλέσατε εἰς τοὺς γάμους. καὶ ἠξελθόντες οἱ δοῦλοι εκείνοι εἰς τὰς ὀδοὺς συνήγαγον πάντας οὓς εὗρον, πονηροὺς τε καὶ ἄγαθοὺς· καὶ ἐπλήθη ὁ γάμος ἀνακειμένων. εἰσελθόντων δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς θεάσασθαι τοὺς ἀνακειμένους εἶδεν ἐκεῖ ἄνθρωπον ὁμοίον ἐνδος ἐνδομίῳ γάμου· καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· Ἕταρε, πῶς εἰσῆλθες ὁδῷ μὴ ἔχουν ἐνδομίῳ γάμου; ὁ δὲ ἐξιμώθη, τότε ὁ βασιλεὺς εἶπεν τοῖς διεκάνοις· Δῆσαντες αὐτοῦ πόδας καὶ χείρας ἐκβάλαντες αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξόπερον· ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμός καὶ ὁ βρογμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων. πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰσίν κλητοὶ ἀλλοί δὲ ἐκλεκτοί.

199 Keener (Matthew, 519) notes that the practice of double invitation would be recognizable from both upper class and regular village life. See also Scott, Hear Then the Parable, 169. When Matthew says that the enslaved messengers were sent “to call those who had been called” (καλέσαται τοὺς κεκλημένους) it means that the individuals who had already received an invitation are now being summoned to the feast.
(κρατήσαντες), mistreated (ὑβρισαν), and killed (ἀπέκτειναν). At this point in Matthew, the attentive audience member will not be surprised by such treatment and may in fact have come to expect it. Enslaved characters, even those in positions of high responsibility, are regularly subjected to violence.

The logical progression of the story is interrupted by the king’s furious act of retribution (22:7).200 Moved with anger (ὠργίσθη), the king sends soldiers to “destroy those murderers and burn their city” (ἀπώλεσεν τοὺς φονεῖς ἐκείνους καὶ τὴν πόλιν αὐτῶν ἐνέπρησεν).201 The refusal of the summons to the feast is an insult202 and a “horrendous breach of social custom.”203 To refuse such a summons from a king and to subsequently kill his messengers is called by commentators a blatant act of rebellion.204 Several note the “striking parallel” between this parable and a story told by Josephus where messengers sent by Hezekiah to northern Israel with an invitation to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem are mocked, spit on, and ultimately killed (A.J. 9.265).205

In spite of the insistence by these scholars that the guests are guilty of rebellion, the text calls them “murderers” (φονεῖς), not “rebels” (λῃσταὶ). The mistreatment and murder of the

200 The audience is told in 22:4 that the dinner has been prepared (τὸ ἄριστὸν μου ἡτοίμακα). In 22:8, after the king’s soldiers enact his revenge, we again hear that the wedding feast is ready (ὁ μὲν γάμος ἐτοιμὸς ἐστιν). As the text stands in Matthew, the hearer imagines that the meal sat on the table while the soldiers carried out their orders. It is the interruptive nature of 22:7 that leads me to consider it an insertion (possibly by the author of Matthew or possibly already inserted into the tradition as he received it).

201 The audience may recall the royal master of the Parable of the Unforgiving Slave, who is similarly moved by anger and who brings punishment to his subjects through an intermediary.

202 Nolland, Matthew, 887.

203 Keener, Matthew, 520.

204 Morris, Matthew, 550; Nolland, Matthew, 887; Keener, Matthew, 520–1.

205 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:201; France, Matthew, 824 n124; Keener, Matthew, 521.
enslaved emissaries, all but ignored in the previous parable, is met in this parable with an immediate and even extreme response from their royal master. It is probably wishful thinking to read this as a recognition from our author of the human dignity of the enslaved messengers. If it were such an acknowledgment it would be unique in this Gospel, which in all other cases seems to disregard the plight of the enslaved. The killing of the king’s enslaved representatives may be better understood in Matthew’s context as an act of defiance or dishonor aimed toward the royal master himself, thus prompting his extreme response. Luz suggests that the killing of the messengers, as in the previous parable, would be recognized by the audience as the murder of the prophets, familiar to them from Jewish traditions, particularly the Deuteronomistic texts. Such a reading is not impossible, particularly since the previous parable also connects the abuse of the enslaved messengers to the mistreatment of the prophets. However, the connection in this parable is not as clear as in the Parable of the Tenants. The destruction (ἀπώλεσεν) of the murderers in this parable may also be an intentional echo of the destruction (ἀπολέσει) of the evil tenants who killed the son in the previous parable.

Once the king’s vengeance has been exacted, the parable returns to the matter at hand; the wedding feast is ready and there are as of yet no guests in attendance. The master tells his slaves to go out to the crossroads (τὰς διεξόδους τῶν ὁδῶν) and bring whomever they are able to find. In keeping with this instruction, the enslaved characters call everyone, “both the wicked and the good” (πονηρούς καὶ ἀγαθούς) to come recline at the feast. What is notable here is that the invitation is extended to everyone except the enslaved characters themselves. The good and the

206 Luz, Matthew, 3:53.
wicked may co-mingle at this event (in a move reminiscent of the Parable of the Tares), but the inclusion of the enslaved messengers never seems to occur to the master (or to the author). The feast is open to all people except the enslaved characters who are, in this way, somehow less than “people.”

In the final scene (22:11–14) the concern is no longer finding guests to attend the feast but rather turns to being appropriately dressed or prepared for the feast. It is strange in the present context that the guests would be expected to arrive at the wedding feast dressed appropriately (since they were literally called in off the street). Regardless of his reason (or whether or not it is reasonable at all) the king is upset by the improperly dressed man. He instructs his “servants” (διάκονοι) to bind the man (δέω) and cast him out (ἐκβάλλω) “because,” Matthew concludes, “many are called but few are chosen” (πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰσίν κλητοὶ ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί).

Most interesting for our purposes is the shift from δοῦλος (used to describe the enslaved messengers who carried the master’s invitation) to διάκονος (used to describe those who served the master by throwing out the unprepared guest). The semantic range of the two words overlap in that every enslaved person (δοῦλος) is a person who serves (διάκονος) but not every person who serves is enslaved. While this overlap could allow the two terms to be read as synonymous in this story (that is, they could both refer to the same group of enslaved persons), it is more likely that the author here is purposely distinguishing the former “slaves” from the latter “servants.”
One could compare the appearance of the two terms here with their appearance two
chapters earlier, at 20:26–27. There Matthew writes “Whoever wants to become great among
you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave” (ὅς ἄν
θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν μέγας γενέσθαι ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος, καὶ ὃς ἄν θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι πρῶτος ἔσται ὑμῶν δοῦλος). These two clauses, intended to be understood as parallel by their construction, utilize δοῦλος and διάκονος in a way that demonstrates their semantic proximity to one another. In this context, however, it may be the differences between the two words, not their similarity, that is emphasized as Matthew uses the second half of the parallel to intensify his point. The desire to be “great” is intensified and becomes a desire to be “first.” That desire is replaced first by becoming a person who serves (generically) and then is intensified by taking the lowest possible serving role: the role of a slave.

Perhaps the best argument for distinguishing the “slaves” from the “servants” in this parable comes from Gundry, who has recognized a link here to the Parable of the Tares. In that parable, the enslaved estate managers are differentiated from the angelic harvesters. The latter bind the tares (δέω) and throw them (βάλλω) into the fire. Here, Gundry notes, Matthew uses the same verbs when the servants bind the guest (δέω) and cast him out (ἐκβάλλω). Likewise, in both cases, those who are cast out face identical fates, finding themselves in a place where “there

207 The only other occurrence of the noun διάκονος in Matthew is at 23:11, which repeats a shortened version of the saying from 20:26–27 (ὁ δὲ μείζων ὑμῶν ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος). The verbal form (διακονέω) is only slightly more common, appearing when individuals serve Jesus (angels in 4:11, Peter’s mother-in-law in 8:15, and “many women” from Galilee in 27:55), when the parabolic goats fail to serve their royal Lord (25:44), and to describe the service which Jesus himself came in order to perform (20:28). This last example follows immediately upon the use of διάκονος in parallel with δοῦλος.

will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμός καὶ ὁ βρυγμός τῶν ὀδόντων; 13:42; 22:13). Gundry writes,

Therefore Matthew now switches from slaves (we might have expected τοῖς δούλοις) to servants (τοῖς διάκόνοις). The servants are distinct from the slaves and represent the same angels that do the judgmental work in the parables of the tares and bad fish, both of which are peculiar to Matthew.\(^\text{209}\)

For Gundry, the author switches to διάκονος in order to signal that these characters are distinct from the enslaved messengers and represent the angels who carry out judgment (as in previous parables).

In agreement with Gundry, even though other Matthean uses of διάκονος may allow us to take it as synonymous with δοῦλος, the intention in this passage seems to be to differentiate the messengers from those who expel the unprepared guest. The blatant parallels with earlier parables make a clear connection between the “servants” of this text and the angels who take part in the eschatological judgment.\(^\text{210}\) As was already noted above, the “slaves” of this parable are depicted not as angelic agents of judgment but as suffering messengers and would more appropriately be connected with the prophets (as in previous parables).

The enslaved messengers of this parable, like those of the Parable of the Tenants, are subjected to humiliation and violence. Unlike in that parable (and in Matthew’s accounts of violence against enslaved persons elsewhere) the killing of the enslaved persons in this parable elicits a response in kind from the royal master, who destroys those responsible. In keeping with Matthew’s depictions of enslaved persons elsewhere, the δοῦλοι of this parable are vulnerable to

\(^{209}\) Gundry, *Matthew*, 440. Davies and Allison quote Gundry on this verse, adding only that “Many commentators have had this thought” (*Matthew*, 3:205). France (*Matthew*, 827 n25) also appeals to Gundry here.

\(^{210}\) Matthew’s apparent hesitance to apply “slave” terms to angelic figures is worth recognizing.
dishonor, violence, and death. Additionally, the enslaved characters are not invited to join the feast even as their royal master is so desperate to fill his halls that he allows even “the evil” to join the festivities. This portrayal of the enslaved individuals as effectively “non-persons” emphasizes their dishonored status.

The Faithful/Wicked Slave (24:45–51)\textsuperscript{211}

Jesus’s final discourse in Matthew, which focuses largely on eschatological themes, concludes with the telling of four distinct parables: the Faithful/Wicked Slave (24:45–51), the Ten Virgins (25:1–13), the Talents (25:14–30), and the Sheep and Goats (25:31–46). All of these stories focus on the theme of readiness in light of the anticipated second coming, often highlighting the rewarding of those who are prepared and the punishments that await those who are not. The first of these parables reads as follows:

\textsuperscript{45}[Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom the master puts in charge of his household servants to give them food at the proper time? \textsuperscript{46}Blessed is that slave whom the master finds doing just that when he comes. \textsuperscript{47}Amen I say to you that he will put him in charge of all he owns. \textsuperscript{48}But if that wicked slave says in his heart “My master is delayed” \textsuperscript{49}and he begins to beat his fellow slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards, \textsuperscript{50}the master of that slave will come on a day which he does not expect and at an hour which he does not know, \textsuperscript{51}and he will cut him in two and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.]

The absent master/landowner is already a familiar theme from Matthew’s parables. Here the context of the larger discourse parallels the return of the master with the return of Christ. The


\textsuperscript{212}Τίς ἄρα ἐστίν ὁ πιστὸς δούλος καὶ φρόνιμος ὃν κατέστησαν ὁ κύριος ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκετείας αὐτοῦ τοῦ δούλου αὐτοῦ τὴν τροφὴν ἐν καιρῷ; μακάριος ὁ δούλος ἐκεῖνος ὃν ἐλθὼν ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ εὐφέρσει οὕτως ποιόντα· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὃτι ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπάρχονσιν αὐτοῦ καταστήσει αὐτόν. ἐὰν δὲ εἴπῃ ὁ κακὸς δούλος ἐκεῖνος ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ· Χρονίζει μου ὁ κύριος, καὶ ἄρξηται τύπτειν τοὺς συνδούλους αὐτοῦ, ἐσθίη δὲ καὶ πίνῃ μετὰ τῶν μεθιστών, ἢξει ὁ κύριος τοῦ δούλου ἐκείνου ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἤ ὕπερ ἢ ὅ προσδοκᾷ καὶ ἐν ὕδρε ἢ ὅ γινόσκει, καὶ διχοτομήσει αὐτὸν καὶ τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ὑποκριτῶν θήσετι· ἐκεί ἐσται ὁ κλαυθμός καὶ ὁ βρυγμός τῶν ὀδόντων.
slave who is faithfully obedient during the master’s absence is “rewarded” with increased responsibility while the slave who shirks his responsibilities and mistreats his fellows is punished severely.

The parable is framed by the question “Who is the faithful (πιστὸς) and sensible (φρόνιμος) slave?” Earlier in the Gospel, Matthew described those who hear and obey Jesus’s words as being “like the sensible man” (ὁμοιοθήσεται ἄνδρι φρόνιμῳ) who built on a solid foundation (7:24). He will go on to use φρόνιμος in the following parable to describe the five virgins who have prepared themselves with a sufficient supply of oil to pass the night (25:1–13). Πιστὸς in this passage will mean something like “trustworthy” or perhaps even “loyal.” The πιστὸς δοῦλος can be relied upon to faithfully and obediently carry out the master’s orders in his absence. Matthew will use the same term to describe two of the enslaved characters in the Parable of the Talents (25:14–30) when they successfully increase their master’s fortune. The present parable addresses the question, “How will the trustworthy and sensible slave behave when given responsibilities during the master’s absence?”

The hypothetical “trustworthy and sensible slave” of this parable is tasked with giving food to the other household staff (οἰκετείας, likely to be understood as the other enslaved members of the household) at the appointed times. The enslaved overseer will be “blessed” (μακάριος) when the master returns to find him “doing just that” (οὖς ποιοῦντα). This, says Nolland, provides the answer to the opening question: “the faithful and wise servant is the one who reliably carries out his master’s bidding.”213 France writes, “The readiness of the good slave

213 Nolland, Matthew, 998.
consists…in getting on with the job he has been given.”

Morris says that this enslaved overseer “works at the task committed to him so that whenever the master chooses to come back all will be in order.”

The enslaved man is deemed “trustworthy” inasmuch as he faithfully carries out the task assigned to him. He is “sensible” in that he does so even in the master’s absence, recognizing the need to be prepared for the master’s return at any time.

Glancy notes regarding this parable (and the Parable of the Talents), “Both parables seem to assume that a faithful slave is one who occupies a managerial position and has moreover internalized the master’s interests to the extent that he will work unsupervised when his master is away. Slave morality is inextricably identified with the master’s interests.”

The “reward” given to this faithful overseer is an increased level of responsibility. He was responsible for feeding the household staff. Now he will be responsible for “all that [the master] owns” (πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπάρχουσιν αὐτοῖ). France writes,

In place of a temporary commission in his master’s absence he will be promoted to a permanent and very responsible role as steward. As in the third parable of the series [the Talents], the reward for responsible service is greater responsibility, not an easing of the master’s demands.

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214 France, Matthew, 944. Recall the centurion’s assertion that an enslaved person should do as he/she is told (8:9).

215 Morris, Matthew, 616.

216 As noted above, these two themes are taken up in reverse order in the following two parables. The five virgins who are called “sensible” have prepared themselves with sufficient oil for the whole night. The two enslaved managers who are called “faithful” have successfully anticipated and carried out their master’s will.

217 Glancy, Slavery in Early Christianity, 115.

218 France, Matthew, 944. See also Luz, Matthew, 3:224; Morris, Matthew, 616.
Mary Ann Beavis finds the “reward of more work” (rather than the reward of freedom) to be a distinctive element of the New Testament slave parables but Glancy has demonstrated that it is not so strange. “Both in practice and in literature,” she writes, “many faithful slaves achieved manumission; both in practice and in literature, many faithful slaves did not achieve manumission.” She later writes

The reward of faithful slaves in the Matthean parables—additional responsibility rather than freedom—was neither distinctive nor countercultural. In order to ensure smooth functioning of their households, masters relied on skillful slaves. In turn, as they undertook increasing responsibility, slaves sometime amassed personal funds and even political influence. Such rewards were a strong positive incentive to fidelity.

Whatever the “benefits” that might accompany such responsible positions, the fact remains that “rewarding” the loyalty of an enslaved person with more work rather than by granting manumission shows a greater concern for the interests of the master than for the wellbeing of the enslaved person. In this way, again, we see Matthew’s parables reflecting the interests of the slaveholding class.

Juxtaposed with the “trustworthy and sensible slave” is the “wicked slave” (κακὸς δοῦλος). Encouraged by the master’s delay, he not only shirks his given responsibilities but takes the opportunity to mistreat those placed under his care and to indulge himself with food and drink. Luz writes that this behavior would not come as a surprise to the ancient audience. “What [Matthew] reports about the slave corresponds both to material from Jewish stories and to

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220 Glancy, Slavery in Early Christianity, 117.
221 Glancy, Slavery in Early Christianity, 118.
222 Perhaps the very food and drink that he was tasked with distributing to the household staff, which he is now hoarding for himself.
experiences from life… ‘Chief slaves’ take advantage of their position instead of being in solidarity with their ‘fellow slaves.’”

He quotes, by way of example, Columella, who says “They [slaves] are corrupted by the great remoteness of [their] masters.” We may also note Bradley, who writes that the Romans “passed down from generation to generation a stereotyped portrait of the slave as an unscrupulous, lazy and criminous being.”

Nolland says regarding the actions of this enslaved person,

The behaviour represents a usurpation of the role of the master, but with an exercise of the master’s power in an irresponsible manner: the beatings are arbitrary, not appropriate impositions of justice; he exercises control of the food supplies in a totally self-indulgent manner.

Davies and Allison write perhaps more simply, “From a slave’s point of view, masters were precisely those who ate and drank and beat their servants.” The “wicked slave” has been given a measure of authority and autonomy and, unlike the “faithful slave,” he chooses to exploit it.

The master’s unexpected return comes with severe punishment for the “wicked slave.” The text literally says that his master will return and “will cut him in two” (διχοτομήσει) before consigning him to the now familiar fate of being banished to a place where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Again, this parable highlights the bodily vulnerability of the enslaved person, this time in a particularly brutal way. While the enslaved person deemed loyal

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223 Luz, Matthew, 3:224. See n135–8 above for the problems involved in talking about solidarity among ancient, enslaved persons.

224 Ili tam longa dominorum distantia corrumpuntur (Columella, Res Rustica, 1.1).

225 Bradley, Slavery and Society, 65.

226 Nolland, Matthew, 999.

227 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:225.
may be “rewarded” (if you can call it that) with more responsibilities, the enslaved person deemed wicked will be dismembered.

Several commentators, perhaps put off by the gruesome nature of the punishment, insist that διχοτομήσει should be understood figuratively. Morris writes, “[Cut in two] cannot be meant literally (the man is still alive in the next clause), but clearly it stands for severe punishment, perhaps a heavy beating.” Scott sees the splitting not as a realistic punishment but as the sort of “shocking disjunction [that] is characteristic of Jesus’ parabolic style.” Luz makes note of two popular metaphorical interpretations of this punitive dissection: the separating of the Christian from the Holy Spirit, and excommunication from the true community.

Gundry rightly points out that many of the arguments that call for a metaphorical understanding of διχοτομήσει “overlook the fact that the bad slave continues to exist only in a punitive afterlife. The cutting in two of his present body simply represents an extremely severe punishment that appropriately launches him into that kind of afterlife.” France notes that the term “cut in two” only appears in other biblical literature to describe the splitting of sacrificial victims but argues that “there is no evidence for its use elsewhere as merely a metaphor for

228 Morris, Matthew, 617.

229 Scott, Hear Then the Parable, 210–11.

230 Luz, Matthew, 3:224 n26. On the metaphorical cutting off from the community, see also Harrington, Matthew, 344.

231 Gundry, Matthew, 497. On this point Davies and Allison (Matthew, 3:391) suggest a “plausible…link” to the story of Ahiqar. They write, “In addition to the parallel between v. 49 and Nathan’s activities, it was said that Nathan ‘was torn and his belly burst asunder…And his latter end was destruction and he went to hell’ (Ahiqar 8.38 Arabic).”

232 Regarding the splitting of sacrificial victims, France also notes that “the practice is…taken as a model for human punishment in Jer 34:18” (France, Matthew, 945 n40).
extreme punishment, and it is probably to be taken here literally as a particularly brutal execution.” Luz also argues that we must understand διχοτομήσει literally even if it does not reflect modern sensitivities, and we must recognize that the brutal action of the slave owner obviously did not pose a problem for Jesus and that, what is more, the church interpreted this brutal slave owner allegorically to refer to Jesus. The various attempts to exonerate the slave owner or Jesus…are all products of the exegetical fantasy born of this discomfort.

Luz provides, as a relevant parallel, an excerpt from Epictetus, in which an enslaved steward who abused his position meets a fate similar to the “wicked slave” of this parable: “If his master turns and sees how he gives orders with violence, he will drag him out and cut him up.”

Matthew’s punishment of this enslaved person may be gruesome, but it would not be surprising.

As in many of the other passages we have already explored, this parable approaches slavery from the perspective of the master rather than the enslaved. It is the master’s interest that are in mind when the enslaved overseer’s morality is defined by loyal obedience. It is ultimately for the greater benefit of the master when the “loyal slave” is “rewarded” with greater responsibilities. And when the “wicked slave” acts in self-interest rather than in obedience, the

233 France, Matthew, 945.
234 Luz, Matthew, 3:225.
235 εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἐπιστραφεῖς ὁ κύριος καὶ ἰδόν αὐτὸν σοβαρῶς διατασσόμενον, ἔλκυσας ἔτεμεν (Epictetus, Discourses, 3.22.3).
236 As for the purpose behind this specific punishment, it is possible that Matthew has chosen “splitting in half” for theological reasons. While the parallel in Epictetus demonstrates that such a punishment would not strike a first-century audience as out of place, Matthew may have chosen διχοτομέω because it is an appropriate punishment for a covenant breaker.
master responds with extreme violence against his body, which is still vulnerable in spite of his responsible position.

The Talents (25:14–30)\textsuperscript{237}

Matthew’s final slave parable follows shortly after the Parable of the Faithful/Wicked Slave and emphasizes the importance of being “faithful” (πιστός), a concept which was introduced there. As in that parable, the return of the master in this story is made to represent the return of Christ who will come to reward the faithful and punish the wicked. The parable reads as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[14]} & \text{For just as a man going on a journey calls his own slaves and hands over to them his belongings, } \text{[15]} \text{and to one he gives five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability, and he goes on a journey.} \text{[16]} \text{Immediately the one who received five talents went out and did business with them and gained another five.} \\
\text{[17]} & \text{Similarly, the one who received two gained another two.} \text{[18]} \text{But the one who received one went away, dug a hole [lit. dug the earth], and hid his master’s silver.} \\
\text{[19]} & \text{After a long time, the master of those slaves came and settled [his] account with them.} \text{[20]} \text{The one who received five talents came bringing another five talents saying “Master, you have given me five talents; behold I gained another five.”} \text{[21]} \text{His master said to him “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things. I will set you over many things. Enter into your master’s joy.”} \\
\text{[22]} & \text{The one who received two talents said “Master, you have given me two talents; behold I gained another two.”} \text{[23]} \text{His master said to him “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things. I will set you over many things. Enter into your master’s joy.”} \\
\text{[24]} & \text{The one who received one talent came and said “Master, I know that you are a harsh man, reaping where you do not sow and gathering where you did not scatter seed.} \text{[25]} \text{And I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. Behold, you have what is yours.”} \\
\text{[26]} & \text{And responding his master said to him “Worthless and idle slave! You know that I reap where I did not sow and gather when I did not scatter seed?”} \text{[27]} \text{Then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and when I returned I would receive what is mine with interest.”} \\
\text{[28]} & \text{Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents.} \text{[29]} \text{For to all those who have, more will be given and they will have an abundance. But from the one who does not have, even that which he has will be taken from him.} \\
\text{[30]} & \text{And cast that useless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.} \text{[238]}
\end{align*}
\]

\textsuperscript{237} Paralleled in Luke 19:21–27 and, to a lesser extent, Mark 13:34.

\textsuperscript{238} Ὁσπέρ γὰρ ἀνθρώπων ἀπόδημων ἐκάλεσεν τοὺς ἰδίους δούλους καὶ παρέδωκεν αὐτοῖς τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὃ μὲν ἐδωκεν πέντε τάλαντα ὃ δὲ δύο ὃ δὲ ἕν, ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν δύναμιν, καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν. εὐθέως
This final slave parable returns to several recognizable themes. The enslaved characters are responsible financial agents entrusted with their master’s wealth in his absence. Those who take the initiative to increase that wealth are praised as “good and faithful” and are given greater responsibility. The enslaved manager who fails to produce an increase is denigrated as “worthless” (πονηρός), “idle” (ἀκνηρός), and “useless” (ἄχρειος) and is expelled.

As in the Parable of the Unforgiving Slave, some commentators have argued that the δοῦλος of this parable should not be understood as “slaves” because of the large sums of money for which they were made responsible. Morris writes, “δοῦλος normally signifies a ‘slave,’ but that can scarcely be the meaning here, for these men were able to enter financial arrangements involving quite large sums of money.”239 Davies and Allison note that although entrusting such large sums of money to enslaved persons “may seem strange to us,” it would not seem so strange to an ancient audience.240 As Beavis reminds us, “slaves could fill an enormous range of functions, including positions involving onerous duties, political influence, and relatively high responsibility. The enslaved manager who fails to produce an increase is denigrated as

239 Morris, Matthew, 627 n23.

240 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:251.
As I have already argued above, in the Roman world one could be a “responsible official in high office” and “a slave” at the same time.242

So, against Morris’s insistence that these δοῦλοι are not “slaves,” I argue that what we see in this parable is a small group of enslaved individuals placed in managerial positions in their master’s absence. France has noted that this setting parallels the Parable of the Faithful/Wicked Slave, told shortly before this story, except whereas that parable deals with “domestic management,” this parable raises the stakes in imagining “high-level commercial management.”243 Luz writes that these enslaved managers “were to do business with their master’s money with the clear understanding that both the money and the profit earned belonged to the slave owner.”244 When the master returned, they would be expected to give an accounting of their management of his finances, which is in fact what happens in 25:19.245

The two enslaved managers who successfully increase their master’s fortune in his absence are commended as “good and faithful.” Like the “faithful” slave of 24:45, these individuals are deemed trustworthy insofar as they faithfully carry out the task assigned to them.246 Meier notes that both enslaved men identified as “good and faithful” receive the same


242 See the discussion of the Unforgiving Slave above.

243 France, Matthew, 953. “One talent is a small fortune,” France writes. “Five is an extremely large sum of capital.”

244 Luz, Matthew, 3:251. Luz identifies such funds, which are placed at the disposal of an enslaved person but which still technically belong to the master, as a peculium. See Joshel, Slavery, 128; Bradley, Slaves and Masters, 108–9.

245 Recall the similar scene in 18:23, where the royal master calls in his enslaved manager to settle accounts. See also Luke 16:2, where a manager (οἰκονόμος) is made to give an account to his master (κύριος).

246 Though it is perhaps worth noting here that the master gives no explicit instructions to the enslaved characters and so they are left to anticipate his will.
reward which, he argues, “shows that what is valued is not one’s accomplishments in a quantitative sense but the fidelity of one’s commitment.” France writes simply that they are called “trustworthy” because “they have done what was expected of them.” He goes on to point out that, like in 24:47, “the reward for reliability...[is] not to be released from responsibility but to be given more of it.” “You were faithful with a few things. I will set you over many things,” (ἐπὶ ὀλίγα ἦς πιστός, ἐπὶ πολλῶν σε καταστήσω, 25:21, 23). Again, as Glancy has argued, slave morality is tied to the master’s interests. “Good and faithful slaves” work to increase their master’s worth and are “rewarded” with more opportunities to do the same.

The audience is told earlier in the parable that the third enslaved man has not increased his master’s money but rather has buried it in the ground (25:18). When the master returns to him, he expresses that he was afraid to invest (and perhaps lose) the money because of the master’s reputation as “a harsh man.” The agricultural images which qualify or illustrate this harshness show the lengths to which the master will go in order to make a profit. Nolland says that they demonstrate the master’s drive to get ahead and his lack of regard for anyone “who gets

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247 Meier, Matthew, 299. Davies and Allison (Matthew, 3:408) likewise note that the first two enslaved men play the same role in the parable for all practical purposes.

248 France, Matthew, 954.

249 France, Matthew, 954.

250 Glancy, Slavery in Early Christianity, 115.

251 When Matthew’s audience hears an enslaved character say that their master is “harsh” (σκληρός can also be translated “violent”), it is not impossible that they recall the numerous physical abuses brought against enslaved characters in previous passages.

252 France, Matthew, 955.
trampled in the process.”253 This is a man with “an eye to business” who will take advantage of any situation he can.254

There is a definite difference in perception between this enslaved man and the master. “Evidently,” Davies and Allison suggest, “the third slave expects to be commended for his caution,” but the master instead interprets his fearful hesitation as indolence.255 For Matthew, the “wickedness” of the slave is further qualified by his inactivity. Davies and Allison write, “the slave is evil because he is lazy/slothful.”256 Indeed, many commentators have tended to focus on the master’s characterization of the enslaved man as “lazy,” as opposed to his own description of himself as fearful, sometimes to an exceptional and even troubling degree that seems to double-down on the slaveholder’s point-of-view. For example, Keener writes, “The lazy servant does nothing with his resources,” adding that this is “because he does not care about the master’s agenda.”257 France similarly suggests, “The third slave’s inaction is perhaps to be attributed to simple self-interest: he could not expect to get any significant personal benefit from whatever his trading might achieve, so why bother?”258 This goes beyond fear or laziness, the only two motivating factors mentioned in the text, suggesting instead that the enslaved man’s idleness was driven by selfishness. Perhaps most distressing is Morris’s assertion that “[the slave] let a natural

253 Nolland, Matthew, 1017.

254 Morris, Matthew, 630.

255 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:408. See also Harrington, Matthew, 353.


257 Keener, Matthew, 600–1.

258 France, Matthew, 955.
disinclination for work cooperate with a dislike for getting some gain for his master.” This statement seems to rely, at least implicitly, on the idea that laziness is not just a character flaw present in this single enslaved individual, but an inherent defect in enslaved persons more generally. Such an idea is not uncommon in Roman texts but there is nothing in Matthew that implies such a thing. To depict the enslaved man in this text as “naturally disinclined to work” is unfounded, unnecessary, and unwelcome.

What is important to note here is that unlike the “wicked slave” of our previous parable, whose transgression was willful disobedience and the purposeful mistreatment of his fellows, the enslaved man called “worthless” in this parable is guilty only of inactivity. As France puts it, his failure “consists not in any loss of money, but in returning it without increase. It was not that he did something wrong—he simply did nothing.” Strictly speaking we cannot even say that he was disobedient, since the master in this parable gave no instructions for what was to be done with the money that was given. The enslaved manager did not anticipate and act upon his master’s will. His idleness is presented as the opposite of the “faithful” behavior of the other

259 Morris, Matthew, 631.

260 It is interesting that the commentators and translators who approach this passage insist on depicting the enslaved man as “lazy” since this is not the only or even the primary meaning of ὀκνηρός. Patte notes that the word is derived from a verb meaning “to hesitate” (e.g., because of fear) which is “a meaning that is quite appropriate in view of the explanation the servant gives of his action” (Daniel Patte, The Gospel according to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew’s Faith [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 352 n23). Nielsen, who is cited by Keener, argues that the term would typically mean “fearful” (Keener, Matthew, 601 n224; Helge Kjaer Nielsen, “Er den ‘dovne’ tjener dovne? Om oversættelsen af ὀκνηρός i Matth 25,26,” Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift 53 [1990]: 106–15). Indeed, in agreement with Nielsen, the primary definition for ὀκνηρός given in the LSJ is not “lazy” but “timid…esp. from fear.” The image is not necessarily laziness, which implies a lack of motivation or an unwillingness to work, but idleness more generally. Within the logic of the parable, the enslaved man’s hesitance to act is perceived as a problem by the master. This “inactivity” leads the master to characterize him as “worthless” and “useless.” See Luz, Matthew, 3:252 n52.

261 France, Matthew, 951.
managers. To be a “good slave” is to anticipate and dutifully carry out the master’s will in a way that increases his (financial) worth. To be a “worthless slave” is to do nothing, as if “worthless” (πονηρός) and “useless” (ἀχρεός) are somehow the default mode of enslaved existence (from the master’s perspective) which one must actively work to overcome.262

The “useless slave” cannot be counted on to adequately represent the master in his financial dealings and so he is expelled “into the outer darkness…[where] there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον· ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμός καὶ ὁ βρυγμός τῶν ὀδόντων, 25:30). The parable consigns him to the familiar place of torment and, for this reason, Glancy includes this parable as one that demonstrates the bodily vulnerability of the enslaved.263 While there are no details provided of any particular bodily abuse, and while the expulsion into this “outer darkness” is not unique to enslaved persons in Matthew’s Gospel, I would tend to agree with Glancy on this point. Matthew has consistently portrayed enslaved characters as vulnerable to abuse. The fact that he does so here using a phrase that has become commonplace in the Gospel does not diminish this. Generic torment is still torment.

Matthew’s final slave parable again portrays its enslaved characters as individuals who fulfilled financial, managerial roles. One of these characters describes his own fear of his “harsh” (or “violent”?) master and is, at the end of the parable, ultimately subject to punishment for failing to please him. Perhaps more than in any of the other parables, this narrative has highlighted the way that Matthew ties moral judgments about the enslaved characters to their

262 See above our discussion about πονηρός carrying the meaning “worthless” or “unfit” in the Parable of the Unforgiving Slave (n156).
master’s interests. The enslaved characters who increase their master’s fortune are “good and faithful” while the character whose fear makes him idle is denigrated as “worthless.”

**Conclusion**

These brief glimpses into the world(s) of Matthew’s parabolic texts present us with a startling image of the world behind these texts, a world in which enslaved managers are exploited for their master’s benefit and punished severely when they fall short. It is a world in which enslaved persons are dishonored to such an extent that they can be violently abused and even killed by their masters, by other enslaved persons, and by those outside the household. Such a portrayal of enslaved existence conforms to Patterson’s model of slavery which has been central to our study, particularly where that model describes slavery as violent domination and general dishonor.

The highly responsible, managerial positions in which the enslaved characters of the parables often find themselves should not be considered positions of high honor. Rather, a number of the parables demonstrate the dishonor experienced even by such “highly placed” individuals. They are turned over to torturers, abused and murdered in the vineyard and in the streets, and even cut in half. Their existence is characterized by the persistent threat of incredible violence, not by high esteem.

Matthew’s slave parables are told in a way that assumes and even perpetuates the slaveholding perspective of the wider Roman world. Beyond the fact that these parables seem to accept the corporeal vulnerability of the enslaved, the texts also demonstrate an understanding of “slave morality” that is linked directly to the interests of the master. The deciding factor in whether an enslaved person is considered “good” or “wicked” is how faithfully they have performed their duties. Enslaved characters who obediently follow their orders and who increase their master’s fortunes are considered “faithful” while those who do not are “useless” and
“wicked.” By repeating and reinscribing the slaveholding perspective, these texts continue to idealize and promote “stereotypical slave behavior and oppressive relationships” for their audiences.264

Taken together with Matthew’s portrayal of enslaved characters in his larger narrative, we see a consistent image of slavery and the enslaved emerge in this Gospel that is in keeping with Patterson’s definition. To be a slave, in Matthew, is to suffer violent domination and a general dishonor, to be denied personhood, and to have one’s worth evaluated solely on the benefits provided to the masters. For our author, the distinguishing marks of slavery are violent domination and dishonor. Enslaved existence is characterized in Matthew by unquestioning obedience, bodily vulnerability, and humiliation.

264 Smith, Insight, 94.
CHAPTER 5

EXCURSUS ON SLAVERY AND THE ENSLAVED IN MATTHEW’S BIBLICAL QUOTATIONS

The previous chapters have demonstrated that Matthew’s portrayal of enslaved characters conforms to Patterson’s definition of slavery as violent and coercive. Before moving on to our discussion of how such a portrayal of slavery informs our reading of Matthew’s slave metaphors, it is appropriate to look briefly at two other passages where servile vocabulary may appear. Two of Matthew’s biblical quotations use language which may potentially be taken as references to enslaved persons. While these are not necessarily as explicit as the other passages discussed in this study, they are worth considering for what they may say about Matthew’s understanding of slavery and enslaved persons.

Quotation of Micah 7:6 (10:35–36)

Near the end of the Missionary Discourse of chapter 10, Matthew cites the book of Micah in an effort to demonstrate how Jesus’s coming (and by extension his message) will lead to the disruption of earthly relationships. Jesus says,

\[[35] \text{For I came to turn “man against his father and daughter against her mother and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”} \ [36] \text{And the members of his household [are] a man’s enemies.}\]

It is perhaps more appropriate to call this a paraphrase of (or perhaps an allusion to) Micah rather than a quotation, since Matthew freely departs from both the Greek and Hebrew texts (which

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1 ἕλθον γὰρ διχάσαι ἄνθρωπον κατὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ θυγατέρα κατὰ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτῆς καὶ νύμφην κατὰ τῆς πενθερᾶς αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ ἄνθρωπος οἱ οἰκισκοὶ αὐτοῦ.
follow one another fairly closely). The “son” (LXX: νιός; MT: bēn) of these texts becomes Matthew’s “man” (ἀνθρωπος). Matthew replaces separate verbs for “dishonor” (LXX: ἀτιμάζω; MT: nābal) and “stand up [against]” (LXX: ἐπανίστημι; MT: qûm) with the simpler “turn against” (διχάζω), which is the only finite verb in his version. The ἐπι of the LXX (representing the bêt preposition of the MT) becomes κατά. Matthew also chooses ἀνθρωπος for “man” in the final clause instead of the Septuagint’s ἄνήρ.

The most notable of the changes for our purpose is Matthew’s insertion of the word οἰκιακοί to the final clause, which may be taken as an explicit reference to enslaved persons within the household. The LXX instead has “the [persons] in his house” (οἱ ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ), following closely after the MT (“the men of his house”; anšê bêtō). Matthew’s οἰκιακοί is a reasonable interpretation of the sense of both of these versions and in this immediate context would not necessarily present a pressing cause for discussion.

The wider context of chapter 10, however, makes the choice of οἰκιακοί at 10:36 more interesting. Matthew’s only other usage of this term (in fact, its only other appearance in the New Testament) comes at 10:25 where it is set opposite οἰκοδεσπότης. This juxtaposition, as well as the presence of the slave-master metaphor in 10:24–25, suggests that Matthew intends the term in 10:25 to be understood as a reference to the enslaved household staff (as opposed to the

2 France (Matthew, 409) writes that 10:36 “echoes the sense rather than the words of the final clause in the Micah text.”

3 It is notable that anšê bêtō appears also in Genesis 17:27, where it appears to be a reference to the enslaved members of Abraham’s household. This is the only other occurrence of the phrase in the MT.
house’s master). If the master is maligned, then the enslaved staff of his house (τοὺς οἰκισμοὺς αὐτοῦ) should expect it all the more.⁴

Returning to 10:36, a number of commentators suggest that οἰκισμοί here refers not to enslaved individuals (as in 10:25) but to “family members or relatives.”⁵ These arguments typically cite as evidence the proximity of familial language in the rest of the Micah quotation (fathers, daughters, mothers, etc.). They do not, however, adequately explain why the author of Matthew would change the wording of the LXX and MT to include a word which he had just used to refer to enslaved persons. Even if οἰκισμοί is not meant in 10:36 to refer exclusively to enslaved persons, it is plausible in the context of the chapter that it was meant be inclusive of enslaved members of the household (in addition to members of the family).

Taking οἰκισμοί in 10:36 as a reference to enslaved persons (or at least as inclusive of the enslaved household staff) makes it possible to read the final clause in the Micah paraphrase as an oblique reference to a specific fear of the slaveholding elite. Our previous chapter has demonstrated the expectation that enslaved persons be “faithful” by performing the duties assigned to them and by working for their master’s betterment in all things. Roman authors remember fondly these idealized “faithful slaves” such as Philocrates, who refused to turn his master Gracchus over to the senate in 121 BCE and instead died at his side.⁶ Juxtaposed with this desire for faithfulness, however, is the fear expressed by Roman elites that enslaved persons

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⁴ For a full discussion of this passage, see chapter 6.

⁵ This argument is made explicitly by Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:220; France, Matthew, 406 n4; Harrington, Matthew, 151; Luz, Matthew, 2:97 n21. It is suggested implicitly by Morris, Matthew, 260; Turner, Matthew, 280 n11.

⁶ Appian, Civil Wars, 1.26; Plutarch, Caius Gracchus, 17.23.
harbored resentment toward them. Perhaps the most well-known example of this idea from Roman literature comes from one of the letters of Seneca, who relayed the following proverb (proverbiwm): “there are as many enemies as there are slaves.”\(^7\) The assumption of the saying is that all those who were enslaved in a person’s house were harboring ill-will toward them and should be considered hostile.

Matthew’s portrayal of enslaved persons, particularly in the parables, demonstrates the typical desire for faithfulness from the enslaved by the enslaver. In this passage, however, as Matthew reflects on the reversals in earthly relationships that will result from the mission of the apostles, we catch a glimpse of a typical Roman fear as well: the fear that the “faithful slave” may become an enemy. Reading οἰκιακοὶ as a potential reference to enslaved persons allows for the possibility that Matthew inserts this elite anxiety in his paraphrase of Micah.

**Quotation of Isaiah 42:1–4 (12:18–21)**

In 12:18–21, Matthew quotes Isaiah 42 as a part of one of his standard “fulfillment quotations.” Jesus’s conflict with the Pharisees has begun to escalate (12:14 tells us for the first time that “the Pharisees went out and conspired against him”)\(^8\) and he has commanded the crowds who are following him “not to make him known” (12:16).\(^9\) These things, Matthew says, fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah when he said,

\(^{[18]}\) Behold my slave whom I chose, my beloved one in whom my soul delights. I will set my spirit upon him and he will proclaim justice to the nations. \(^{[19]}\) He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone in the roads hear his voice. \(^{[20]}\) A bruised reed he will not break

\(^7\) Totidem hostes esse quot servos (Seneca, Letters 47.5). After quoting the proverb, Seneca goes on to say that these enslaved persons are not enemies when they are acquired but are made so after the fact (non habemus illos hostes, sed facimus).

\(^8\) ἐξελθόντες δὲ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι συμβούλιον ἔλαβον κατ’ αὐτὸν

\(^9\) μὴ φανερὸν αὐτόν ποιήσωσιν
and a smoldering wick he will not extinguish until he has brought justice to victory. [21] And in his name the nations will put their hope.  

Matthew produces a text which blends the LXX and MT, along with a few additions of his own. The most significant of Matthew’s changes for our purposes should be briefly noted. Matthew’s παῖς is first described as “chosen” (ἠρέτισα), borrowing from the second clause of the passage in the LXX (ἐκλεκτός) and the MT (beḥirî), rather than as “upheld” (LXX: ἀντιλήψομαι; MT: ’etmāk-ḇô). The designation of the παῖς as “beloved” (ἀγαπητός) is Matthew’s unique contribution. Its appearance here alongside εὐδόκησεν (another Matthean revision) is reminiscent of the baptism scene in 3:17 (where the heavenly voice says, “This is my beloved son in whom I delight,”). Interestingly, Matthew’s παῖς is charged not with “bringing forth” justice (LXX: ἐκφέρω; MT: yāṣa’) but rather with “announcing” or “proclaiming” it (ἀπαγγέλλω). While Matthew “translates freely” throughout the passage, especially when it comes to his choice of verbs, these two (εὐδοκέω and ἀπαγγέλλω) are particularly noteworthy.

The question of how to read παῖς in this passage is difficult to answer. The term could be used as an indicator of age (“young child”), of descent (“child” or “son”), or of status (“slave”).

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10 Ἰδοὺ ὁ παῖς μου ὁν ἡρέτισα, ὁ ἀγαπητός μου εἰς ὅν εὐδόκησεν ἡ ψυχή μου· θήσω τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπὶ αὐτῶν, καὶ κρίσιν τοῖς ἐθνεῖσιν ἀπαγγέλει. οὐκ ἔρισεν οὐδὲ κραυγάσει, οὐδὲ ἄκουσεν τις ἐν ταῖς πλατείαις τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ. κάλαμον συντετριμμένον οὐ κατεάξει καὶ λίνον τυφόμενον οὐ σβέσει, ἐκεῖν ἐν ἐκβάλῃ εἰς νῖκος τὴν κρίσιν. καὶ τῷ ὄνοματι αὐτοῦ ἐθνη ἐλπίοῦσιν.

11 Οὕτως ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ὧν εὐδόκησα. A similar phrase will appear again in 17:5 at the transfiguration (ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός).

12 Keener, Matthew, 360–61.
depending on its context. Matthew demonstrates a familiarity with each of these meanings and uses παῖς in all three of these ways in the course of his Gospel.

As a translation of the Hebrew ‘abdi, “my slave” would be most appropriate, and this is the most probable meaning of the term παῖς in the LXX text. Additionally, Matthew depicts this παῖς as a messenger by changing “he will bring forth justice” to “he will proclaim justice.”

This depiction of Jesus as God’s enslaved messenger conforms to the portrayal of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, who are often seen as “slaves of God” who proclaim God’s message (often enough God’s message of justice). In the wider context of Matthew, specifically in the parables, we frequently see enslaved persons as messengers. The parables often implicitly connect their enslaved messengers with the prophets. Thus, the reference to Isaiah could be understood as a depiction of Jesus as the enslaved messenger of God, proclaiming God’s message of justice (like many of the prophets before him).

However, Matthew’s description of this παῖς as “beloved” (ἀγαπητός) may suggest the figure’s sonship. Matthew’s only uses of ἀγαπητός outside of this passage are declarations from the mouth of God of Jesus’s status as “beloved son,” once at his baptism (3:17) and again at the Transfiguration (17:5). The link here with the “beloved son” of 3:17 is strengthened by

13 See entries in BDAG, GE, L&N, and LSJ, all of which distinguish between these usages.

14 For παῖς as “young child,” see 2:16; 21:15. For παῖς as “son,” see 17:18. For παῖς as “slave,” see 8:6, 8, 13; 14:2.

15 See my extended discussion of παῖς as a translation of ‘ebed in chapter 3, especially n28–32. Harrington (Matthew, 180) suggests δ ὁ δῶλος μου as an appropriate way to translate ‘abdi. Nolland (Matthew, 492) notes that although παῖς can mean “child,” παῖς μου never means “my child” in the LXX but rather is always “my servant.”

16 I am not arguing that it is impossible for an enslaved figure to be called “beloved.” I merely point out that Matthean usage of ἀγαπητός with υἱός elsewhere in Matthew (as previously noted) is suggestive of a similar use here. Though the terminology used is different, the parables do provide examples of masters being pleased with enslaved persons whom they deem “faithful.”
Matthew’s choice of εὐδοκέω (LXX: προσδέχομαι; MT: rāṣāh), also an echo of 3:17. At the very least, Matthew’s revisions of Isaiah, identifying the παῖς as God’s “beloved” in whom he “delights,” point back to the baptism scene generally, if not specifically to God’s declaration of Jesus’s status as his son.

This particular use of παῖς, somewhat uniquely for Matthew, may be playing with two meanings of the word rather than settling on one. This is the stance adopted by Harrington, who takes this passage as a “reminder concerning the real identity of Jesus as God’s Servant/Son.”

Talbert similarly, though he translates παῖς as “child,” speaks about the “servant/child” throughout his discussion of this text. Schnackenburg writes that the “Servant of God…for Matthew [is] also the ‘Beloved Son.’” Keener says that Matthew “reads Jesus as Isaiah’s ‘servant of Yahweh’” but that he also conforms Isaiah’s language “to God’s praise of his Son” elsewhere in the Gospel.

As the “slave” of God, the παῖς has been chosen to proclaim a message of justice to the nations. Such a depiction of Jesus as God’s slave conforms to depictions of enslaved characters as messengers elsewhere in Matthew, especially in the narrative parables.

17 Harrington, Matthew, 180.
18 Talbert, Matthew, 153–54.
19 Schnackenburg, Matthew, 113.
20 Keener, Matthew, 360–61.
21 The Parable of the Tenants (21:33–44) provides a particularly interesting parallel to the concept of “beloved son as enslaved messenger” seen here. There we see the son take over the role of messenger from other enslaved persons. Notably, Mark specifically describes the son in this parable as ἄγαπητός (“beloved”) but Matthew removes that designation (Luke, in his telling, follows Mark).
Summary

While these passages may not be explicit references to enslaved characters, they can still be read in a way that demonstrates the same general understanding of enslavement and enslaved persons that we have seen in the previous chapters. As a reference to enslaved members of the household, the οἴκιακοι of 10:36 may be read as reflecting an anxiety, common among ancient slaveholders, that the people whom they enslaved secretly harbored ill-will toward them. The portrayal of Jesus as enslaved messenger in 12:18–21 is reminiscent of the parables, which often portray enslaved persons as the emissaries of their masters.\(^\text{22}\) Though these citations are less explicit than the passages explored in the previous chapters, they still conform to Matthew’s portrayal of slavery and enslaved persons throughout the Gospel.

\(^{22}\) That a “beloved son” may be called upon to play the role of “enslaved messenger” will later be explored by Matthew in the Parable of the Tenants (21:33–44), as we have already pointed out.
CHAPTER 6
SLAVERY AND THE ENSLAVED IN MATTHEW’S METAPHORS

Introduction

Matthew’s portrayal of enslaved characters throughout his narrative material is consistent with the model for slavery based on Patterson’s definition, as the previous chapters have demonstrated.\(^1\) Enslaved characters are marginalized and victimized; their moral worth is evaluated based on their obedience, their productivity, and on how effectively they emulate their masters. Enslaved existence is characterized by complete submission, by bodily vulnerability, and by humiliating dishonor.

This characterization of slavery found in Matthew’s narrative should serve as our hermeneutical guide when interpreting that Gospel’s three slave metaphors (which portray the believer as slave to God, as slave to Christ, and as slave to one another). When interpreters fail to recognize the violent and coercive elements of ancient slavery, especially those which are specifically highlighted in the Gospel itself, they run the risk of misinterpreting the metaphorical texts which rely on the image of slavery. Put another way, it is impossible to properly interpret the Gospel’s slave metaphors if we do not first properly understand the ancient social institution on which these metaphors are built.

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\(^1\) As a reminder, Patterson defines slavery as “the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons” (Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 13).
Consider the discussion in Davies and Allison on Matthew’s “slave of Christ” metaphor (10:24–25). Their exploration of this text begins with the (unsubstantiated) assertion that “[t]here is for our author no negative connotation to the idea of being a servant or slave.” Our survey of Matthew’s characterization of enslaved persons in his narrative has demonstrated quite the opposite. “Being a servant or slave,” in Matthew, is to suffer dishonor and violence at every turn. It would be more appropriate, based on our previous survey, to begin our investigation of Matthew’s slave metaphors by saying that “For our author, the distinguishing marks of enslaved existence are violent domination and dishonor.” Though it may prove to be a more troubling starting point, it is more consistent with the way Matthew seems to understand and portray slavery throughout this Gospel.

Keeping this portrayal of slavery as domination and dishonor in mind, this chapter will proceed through Matthew’s three slave metaphors in turn and will demonstrate how reading them through the lens of ancient slavery helps direct our understanding of these texts. For Matthew, “slave of God” (6:24) is not an honorific title or an indicator of high position but is instead an image of complete submission to the demands of one master. The “slave of Christ” (10:24–25) is not depicted as upwardly mobile, ultimately achieving high status as they strive to

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2 Matthew never uses the term “slave of Christ” but in the passage in question, Christ is the presumed master in the metaphorical “slave” / “master” relationship. Thus, here and elsewhere, I use the phrase “slave of Christ” as a convenient shorthand for the Matthean teaching that “no slave is greater than his master…” in 10:24–25.

3 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:193.

4 Again, this assertion is based on our survey of Matthew’s portrayal of enslaved characters and conforms to Patterson’s definition of slavery which has served as our model. It is worth noting at this point that the third point of this definition—that the slave is natally alienated—does not appear with the same frequency in Matthew, though it is hinted at in the Parable of the Unforgiving Slave (18:23–35; esp. v. 25) with the threatened sale of the enslaved family.
be like the master, but instead is doomed to suffer the master’s lowly fate. Finally, as “slaves of one another” Jesus’s followers are told to give up on self-assertion and self-aggrandizement and instead to choose radical humility.

**Source Domain(s): A Jewish Tradition Influenced by a Roman Reality**

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider what is the “source domain” for Matthew’s slavery metaphors and for this we will borrow a number of insights from parallel discussions in Pauline studies. Paul’s use of slavery as a metaphor (for his own relationship to God and Christ, for the believer’s relationship to righteousness, and for their former relationship to sin) has been hotly debated and the origin of these metaphors is still disputed. A brief look at the major perspectives in this debate among Pauline scholars will be instructive for how we understand Matthew’s employment of slavery metaphors (especially the “slave of God/Christ” metaphors) in our text.

Scholars who have looked for a Greco-Roman source behind the New Testament “slave of God” metaphors have often pointed to the temple of Apollo at Delphi and the Greek practice of sacral manumission. Adolf Deissmann argued that such metaphors are “analogous, and perhaps indebted, to [this] Hellenistic practice” in which an enslaved person attains their freedom through a “fictitious sale” by which they become the property of the god. We have more than 1,000 inscriptions preserved from Delphi that document the manumission of enslaved persons from 200 BCE until 76 CE These inscriptions follow the form of a standard “purchase

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for freedom” (πρᾶσις ἐπ᾽ ἐλευθερία) contract used throughout Greece with the special caveat that, at Delphi, “it was Apollo who bought the slave from his owner; i.e., Apollo redeemed the slave from slavery.” Bartchy offers a helpful summary:

According to this view, Apollo did not make any use of his formal property rights in the slave, for real manumission was the goal of the procedure. But because the former slave now belonged to Apollo, he enjoyed divine protection: to touch the new freedman would be to injure the god himself.

Goodrich call this a “fascinating extrabiblical example of the freedom acquired through a slave’s devotion to a deity.”

As fascinating as this claim is, problems arise on closer inspection. Westermann observed in his article “The Freedmen and the Slaves of God” that such transactions were not “fictional sales” at all but were actually entrustment sales. That is, because enslaved persons could not represent themselves in financial transactions, the money secured for their freedom would be entrusted to a third party, who would fulfill the manumission contract on their behalf. At Delphi, that third party was the god Apollo. Thus, “an entrustment sale did not relate the slave to the god…The slave did not become in any way the formal property of Apollo. The slave who was set free at Delphi became neither ‘slave of Apollo’ nor a ‘freedman of Apollo.’” Phrases analogous to δοῦλος θεοῦ or δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἱησοῦ (or, more relevant for our present purpose, analogouses to δοῦλος θεοῦ or δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἱησοῦ (or, more relevant for our present purpose,

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7 Bartchy, ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ, 122

8 Bartchy, ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ, 122.


11 Bartchy, ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ, 123.
θεῷ δουλεύειν) do not appear in these Delphic inscriptions. Most frequently in the first century CE the inscriptions read ἀπέδοτο ὁ δεῖνα τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι τὸν δεῖνα ἐπ᾽ ἑλευθερίᾳ.12 “Indeed,” says Bartchy, “no Greek would ever ask another Greek to become a ‘slave of a god’; to describe ‘freedom’ in such terms would have been unthinkable for a Greek.”13

Other scholars have focused less on the religious sphere and more on the laws and customs of domestic slavery in the Greek and Roman worlds. Harrill argues broadly for such a view, saying, “When Paul exhorted Christians that slavery was the proper relationship of the believer to God, his words were embedded in [his] Roman cultural milieu.”14 Speaking specifically of Romans 6, Francis Lyall sees the biblical slavery metaphor as an allusion to voluntary self-sale—“entry into slave status by yielding oneself to another.”15 Dale Martin, focusing instead on the alleged potential for upward social mobility for those individuals enslaved to high-status persons, argues that Paul’s slavery metaphors “connote salvation as well as honor.”16 For this reason, he argues that enslavement to God/Christ “would…have been an appealing image for people caught in low-status or dead-end positions.”17 Taking an opposing

12 GDI 1738. “Mr. So-and-So sold ‘John Doe’ to Apollo for freedom.”

13 Bartchy, ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ, 125. Rengstorf likewise writes that the Greeks did not express their relationship to the gods with the word δοῦλος (“δοῦλος,” TDNT 2:267). Though he notes that Semitic and Egyptian cultures embrace the concept of “divine service,” Rengstorf believes that this is not a prominent idea among the Greeks (“δοῦλος,” TDNT, 2:271). See also Franz Bömer, Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven in Griechenland und Rom (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1958), 2:136. Westermann shows that enslaved persons serving in temples are sometimes called “slaves of the god,” noting Pausanias X 32.12 and Euripides’s Ion 309, but these individuals’ enslavement is real, not metaphorical (“Freedmen and Slaves,” 56 n10).


15 Lyall, Slaves, Citizens, Sons, 34. See also idem, “Roman Law in the Writings of Paul: The Slave and the Freedman,” NTS 17 (1970): 73–79.


17 Martin, Slavery as Salvation, 63.
view (which is still dependent on a Greco-Roman source domain) Sheila Briggs argues that Paul’s metaphor demonstrates that “Christians share in the enslavement and extreme social degradation of Christ.”

Other scholars, in an attempt to discern the source domain of the New Testament slave metaphors, have looked not to the Greco-Roman cultural context but rather to the Jewish tradition. Horsley argues that this tradition, drawing its conceptual origin from the exodus, shapes slavery discourse to resemble the political history of national Israel. Just as the Jewish people were subjected at various times to foreign political powers until liberated by Yahweh and (re)enlisted into his service, so believers in Christ have been freed from evil personified powers to serve God as their king.

Goodrich helpfully surveys the works of three scholars who argue for such a source for Paul’s slave metaphor: Horsley, Byron, and Holland. After reviewing their work, he offers this summary of their key themes:

First, all three scholars assert that Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors in Romans 6 and elsewhere derive not from Greco-Roman physical, domestic slavery but from the apostle’s Jewish tradition and exodus-shaped world view. Second, and as a correlate to the first, all three scholars (Byron most explicitly) seem to assume that the δοῦλος metaphors used by other Second Temple Jewish authors were employed free of influence from Greco-Roman slavery. Third, in the case of Horsley and Holland, Paul’s metaphor in Romans 6 implies free service rather than slavery to righteousness/God.

As an expansion on the first theme Goodrich lists, we see in Byron’s work the helpful insight that the slave metaphors of the Jewish tradition, based on the event of the exodus which

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18 Briggs, “Bondage and Freedom,” 118. Briggs notably makes use of Patterson’s work on slavery, from which this project draws its model for slavery. The concept of Christians sharing in the “degradation of Christ” will appear in our discussion of Matthew’s second slavery metaphor.


“installed the Israelites as God’s slaves,” 21 were patterned after state slavery rather than domestic slavery. 22 That is, individual Israelites were not enslaved to individual masters in individual households. Rather Israel as a nation was enslaved to Egypt as a nation (or to the Pharaoh as the head of that nation). Byron further argues that by the time of Paul (and the Gospel authors) slavery to God had become a “dead metaphor”—“that is, one which ceases to be directly associated with the source domain on which it once drew its meaning” 23—and so these Second Temple authors could talk about “slavery” without having the present reality of physical enslavement in mind. 24

The real benefit of these studies is the attention they draw to the Jewish tradition as the point of origin for the New Testament slave metaphors. As discussed above, the Greek and Roman traditions did not typically describe the human-divine relationship using the language of enslavement to god/the gods. Horsley, Byron, and Holland all demonstrate that the language of metaphorical enslavement to God is common in the Jewish tradition, having the exodus event as its foundation. It is plausible, and even likely, that the New Testament authors who utilize such language have taken it up from the Jewish scriptural tradition. “But even considering this point,” writes Goodrich, “it does not follow that [the New Testament δοῦλος metaphors] must be void of

22 See the summary of Byron’s argument in Goodrich, “Slaves,” 515.
24 Hence the second theme, above. For examples of the third theme, see Holland’s insistence that the “slave of Christ” is not really a slave “but is a [free] servant with all of the dignity and privileges that such a calling carries.” Tom Holland, Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul’s Biblical Writings (Fearn: Mentor, 2004), 82. Such an understanding of Paul’s slave metaphor leads Holland to write regarding Romans 6:16 “in this verse there is a subtle switch: once, slaves (doulos) to Sin (or Pharaoh); now, servants (doulos) to Yahweh.” Tom Holland, Romans: The Divine Marriage: A Biblical Theological Commentary (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 199.
any and all influences from Greco-Roman physical slavery. Scriptural concepts were not preserved in a vacuum.”

The argument that the slave metaphors of the New Testament are influenced by the Jewish scriptural tradition is a convincing one. However, I am less convinced that these traditional ideas are applied without likewise being influenced by the Hellenized world from which the New Testament texts arise and to which they are addressed.

In an article exploring Paul’s usage of slavery metaphors, Goodrich writes, “It is clear from a variety of texts…that Jewish notions of slavery assimilated in varying degrees to contemporary Hellenistic approaches as Israel came into close contact with Greco-Roman societies.”

Along with Hezser, he sees the “Levitical distinctive of Israelite debt and domestic slavery fade during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.” Additionally, the metaphorical conceptualizations of slavery to God “were…affected by the inroads of Hellenism. Slavery to God may still have had nationalistic and honorific overtones, but the metaphor gained additional connotations through the influence of Greco-Roman chattel slavery.”


26 Goodrich, “Slaves,” 520–21. On the blending of Hellenistic and Jewish cultural traditions more broadly conceived, see Tessa Rajak, “The Jewish Diaspora,” in The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine, ed. Margaret M. Mitchell and Francis M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1:53–68, esp. 1:62 which reads, “Eschewing a picture of two world-views in opposition, expressed by those time-honoured abstractions, ‘Hellenism’ and ‘Judaism’, we do better to conceive of the culture of this diaspora as a complex interweaving of traditions, to produce, in the distinctive culture of Greek-speaking Judaism, a fabric in which the threads are no longer separable. At the same time, it is now widely accepted that a process of Hellenization was integral to the development of Judaean society too, even if the extent, depth and significance of its impact continue to be contested.”

27 Goodrich, “Slaves,” 521. See also Hezser, Jewish Slavery, 93.

Benjamin Wright III analyzes the ways in which biblical terms are “culturally transformed” by subsequent interpreters. He writes,

To a great degree, living in the Hellenistic-Roman Mediterranean and speaking (or, at least understanding) Greek or Latin meant transforming the notion of slavery or servanthood from that of the Hebrew Bible to that of the slave systems characteristic of the Mediterranean social world in the Hellenistic-Roman period.

Goodrich, summarizing Wright’s arguments, notes,

The predominance of δοῦλος in Josephus, Philo, and various apocryphal texts—especially when the term refers to persons whom the LXX labeled with the more ambiguous παῖς—together with the intimate knowledge these authors possessed of Greco-Roman slave systems, suggests that they conceptualized the various modes of service mentioned in the Jewish scriptures in basically the same way as they perceived the chattel slavery they knew firsthand.

Harrill argued similarly regarding Philo’s use of slave language in his response to Byron’s work on Jewish and Christian slave metaphors. He argues,

When Philo of Alexandria wrote about slavery in the past, he naturally assumed it to be similar to the institutions and ideologies in his Hellenistic and Roman world, interpreting Moses and other biblical figures, for example, through the Stoic philosophy of mastery over that passions and the distinctively Roman moral value of authority (auctoritas).

As a final example, Goodrich notes that the New Testament consistently makes use of domestic slavery when illustrating the believer’s proper relationship to God/Christ. He offers as evidence for this the Haustafeln (Eph 6:5–7; Col 3:22–24; 1 Pet 2:16) and, most significant for our

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30 Wright, “’Ebed/Doulos,” 84.


purposes, the slave parables in the Gospels (pointing specifically to Matthew 24:45–51 and 25:14–30).

Goodrich concludes concerning Paul’s slavery metaphors that they “are Jewish—insofar as they build on a familiar scriptural concept—as well as Greco-Roman—insofar as they draw on aspects of contemporary slave practice.”33 This conclusion may be fairly applied to Matthew’s use of slavery as a metaphor as well. These metaphors are Jewish in that they draw on the biblical metaphors from the Jewish scriptural tradition about the believer (or the believing community) as enslaved to God. They are Roman in that they are influenced by the realities of the Roman system of domestic slavery (a system that is visible throughout Matthew’s text, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapters). We will keep both of these sources in mind as we proceed through our discussions of Matthew’s metaphors.

**On Being Slave to Two Masters (6:24)**34

The first time that servile language appears in Matthew is at 6:24, in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus tells his disciples that they cannot be slaves to two masters (οὐδεὶς δύναται δυσί κυρίοις δουλεύειν). Matthew has placed this teaching shortly after the instruction about storing up treasures in heaven (6:19–21) and just before the exhortation not to worry in light of the providential provision that comes from the “heavenly Father” (6:25–34). This first metaphorical passage reads,


34 Paralleled in Luke 16:13. Outside of the New Testament, parallels are found in Gos. Thom. 47:1–2 and 2 Clement 6:1. See also the parallel in b. Berakhot 58b, “It is enough for a slave to be like his master.”
No one is able to be a slave to two masters; for he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will cling to one and despise the other. You are not able to be a slave to God and to mammon.\[35\]

Here Matthew highlights the impossibility (οὐδεὶς δύναται) of being a slave to two different masters.\[36\] This statement should not be taken as commentary on the legality of such an arrangement, as we will see, but is rather an assertion about the necessity of total allegiance and the impossibility of faithfully maintaining incompatible loyalties.

Technically speaking, Matthew’s opening statement here is untrue, as a number of commentators have pointed out. It was legally possible, under both Roman and Jewish law, for an enslaved person to have more than one master. Acts 16:16 tells of an enslaved woman in Philippi who was possessed by a Pythian spirit and “who was providing great profit to her masters by prophesying.”\[37\] Outside of the New Testament, Dio Chrysostom also indicates that such co-ownership is possible (though far from ideal). He writes,

Any slavery, of course, is hard to bear. But those who by fate are enslaved in such a house in which there are two or three masters differing both in age and nature—for example, a mean old man and his childish sons who want to drink and indulge—who would not agree that they are more wretched than other slaves, when they must serve such [masters] and each of [those masters] desire and order something different?\[38\]

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\[35\] Οὐδεὶς δύναται δυσὶ κυρίοις δουλεύειν· ἢ γὰρ τὸν ἕνα μισήσει καὶ τὸν ἄλλον ἀγαπήσει, ἢ ἕνος ἀνθέξεται καὶ τοῦ ἐπέφυγε καταφρονήσει. οὐ δύνασθε θεοὶ δουλεύειν καὶ μαμωνα.

\[36\] Schnackenburg writes “The word ‘slave’ does not occur” in this passage (Matthew, 71), but the appearance of δουλεύειν (rather than the more generic διακονέ) makes it clear that slavery, not free service, is in view.

\[37\] ἡτίς ἐργασίαν πολλήν παρεῖχεν τοῖς κυρίοις αὐτῆς μαντευμένη.

\[38\] πάσα μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ δουλεία γαλάζη· τοὺς δὲ ἀπὸ τύχης ἐν οἰκίᾳ τουατή δουλεύονται ἐν Ἰδοὺ ἢ τρεῖς διαπόσται, καὶ ταῦτα ταῖς τῇ ἡλικίαις καὶ ταῖς φύσεις διάφοραι—λέγω δὲ πρεσβύτης ἀνελεύθερος καὶ τοῦτον παιδίς νεανίκης πίνειν καὶ σπαθῶν θέλοντες—τίς οὖν ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις οἰκεῖοι θυμολογήσανθαι ἄθλιοτέρους, ὅταν τοσοῦτος δὴ θεραπεύειν καὶ τούτων ἔκαστον ἄλλο τι θουλόμενον καὶ προστάττοντα; (Dio Chrysostom, Discourses 66:13)
In the pseudepigraphic *Testament of Joseph* 14:2, the Ishmaelites are referred to as Joseph’s plural “owners.” The rabbinic literature also contains several discussions regarding individuals who are enslaved to two masters: what should happen if one master grants them freedom while the other does not (m. Gittin 4:5; m. Eduyyot 1:13) and whose paschal lamb such an enslaved person should eat (m. Pesahim 8:1).

Since the statement is not legally true, it is better to read it as elliptical, meaning either that one cannot serve *the two particular masters in question* (i.e., God and mammon), or that one cannot serve two masters *well, particularly when those masters are opposed to each other*. In this passage, and in other places where a similar metaphor is employed, we will see that the metaphor hinges on the idea that one cannot serve two masters well and that it is utilized to discuss the competing desires of particular masters.

The concept of being a slave to two competing masters is not unique to the Christian biblical tradition and, when the trope appears outside of the New Testament, the masters in question are varied. In the *Testament of Judah*, the patriarch warns his children to beware of both fornication and the love of money. When carried about by these things, he says at 18:6, one becomes “a slave to two contrary passions, and cannot obey God.” Davies and Allison write that Ruth Rabbah similarly understands humans as slaves both of the creator and of their own inclination; “when he does the will of his Creator, he angers his inclination [and] death becomes his freedom, as it is said ‘And the slave is free of his master.’” In these examples, the metaphor hinges not on the specific identity of the masters in question, but on the fact that their demands

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are “contrary” to the will of God. Doing the will of one of these masters will necessarily mean working against the other, thus making true service to both impossible.

Van Tilborg suggests, I believe rightly, that even though the matter is explored in relation to the experience of the slave, it is the slave owner’s perspective that provides the basis for the evaluation of the saying. From the slave’s perspective, Nolland argues, having two owners may be seen in some way as beneficial in that it could provide opportunities to resist “by playing his two masters off against each other.” Nolland also writes that a slave would not need two masters in order to feel hatred toward one. It is from the perspective of the master, however, that the saying becomes more intelligible: “being part owner of a slave is not a very satisfactory arrangement.” Your slave cannot serve you well if they are busy serving someone else. Thus, Matthew is not appealing to a common understanding that enslaved persons cannot legally serve two masters; rather he is appealing to masters who know that this system of co-ownership is not ideal.

I would suggest that the core of the Matthean saying (and the other similar metaphorical sayings noted above) is the assumption that one cannot serve two masters well, an assumption

41 That is, the aphorism begins with “No one is able to be a slave to two masters,” as opposed to assuming the master’s experience by saying something like “No master is able to be co-owner of a slave.”


43 Nolland, Matthew, 303 n381. I am always hesitant to express any “benefits” of enslavement, as they often overlook the violence and coercion of slavery as an institution. Consider that, although Nolland notes the “benefit” of playing one master against the other, he does not mention the vulnerable position that such actions would put the enslaved person in.

44 Nolland, Matthew, 303.

45 Nolland, Matthew, 303.
dependent on the prevailing viewpoint of the slaveholder. It is not just slavery to *mammon*, but slavery to any competing master that presents problems for those who are called to be enslaved to God. Within the context of Matthew 6, however, the particular “competing master” that is being discussed is *mammon*. The impulse to store up treasures on earth instead of in Heaven (6:19–21) and to obsessively worry about one’s personal, physical needs (6:25–34) demonstrates that a person is serving as *mammon’s* slave, not as God’s. So, while any competing loyalty is impossible for a slave of God, it is commitment to *mammon* that is specifically targeted in this passage. Here God and *mammon* are presented as masters that demand allegiance, and these competing demands are wholly incompatible.46 This picture illustrates that the demands of God’s lordship (his role as κύριος) cannot be combined with the pursuit of *mammon*.47 Slavery to *mammon* amounts to a *de facto* rejection of God and his lordship.48

Matthew places *mammon* opposite to God as something that competes for the audience’s allegiance. Translations often capitalize the word in order to personify it as “an idolatrous power that can compete with God,”49 however this is not necessary. France notes that it is unlikely that *mammon* is thought of personally in this context.50 *Mammon* should not be thought of as a

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pejorative term in and of itself.\textsuperscript{51} In the Jewish tradition it is not considered “inherently evil.”\textsuperscript{52} The Hebrew word is not found in the Old Testament books but the Aramaic term shows up in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Mishnah, simply meaning “money” or “property.”\textsuperscript{53} The targum of Deuteronomy 6:5 encourages the faithful reader to “love the Lord your God with…all your \textit{māmôn},” and a targum of Proverbs 3:9 says “honor the Lord with your \textit{māmôn}.”\textsuperscript{54} The rabbinic literature recognizes that there is a \textit{mammon} “free from ethical objections.”\textsuperscript{55} Pickett summarizes this point well, saying that “in line with Jewish biblical tradition, there is nothing inherently immoral about wealth \textit{per se}. In the Deuteronomistic and Wisdom traditions in particular, wealth is typically associated with blessing.”\textsuperscript{56}

If \textit{mammon} is not a negative term on its own, it often becomes so in certain contexts and when paired with particular adjectives.\textsuperscript{57} The phrase “mammon of unrighteousness” notably shows up twice in Luke immediately prior to the appearance of the “Two Masters” saying in that Gospel (Luke 16:9, 11).\textsuperscript{58} Oakman suggests that \textit{mammon} should always be read in a negative sense in the New Testament.\textsuperscript{59} It is difficult to argue with him since, of the four occurrences of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{51} France, \textit{Matthew}, 262–63.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Green, \textit{Luke}, 596.
\item \textsuperscript{53} France, \textit{Matthew}, 263.
\item \textsuperscript{54} France, \textit{Matthew}, 263.
\item \textsuperscript{55} F. Hauck, “\textit{μαμωνᾶς},” \textit{TDNT} 4:389.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Pickett, “God and Mammon,” 42.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Harrington, \textit{Matthew}, 101.
\item \textsuperscript{58} France, \textit{Matthew}, 263.
\end{itemize}
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the word, two appear as “mammon of unrighteousness” and the other two (the parallel “Two Masters” sayings in Matthew and Luke) portray mammon as something opposed to God. It is the context, not the choice of vocabulary, that makes mammon a negative force in this saying. Mammon, in this instance, seems to refer not to wealth generically but the covetous attachment to wealth that interferes with the lordship of God.60 Here, according to Nolland, “Mammon is actually functioning as a demanding master usurping the exclusiveness of God’s claim.”61

It may be surprising, given the harsh images of slavery that we have seen elsewhere in this Gospel, that the attitudes toward the two masters in this passage are described using the language of “love” and “devotion.”62 Nolland has attempted to make sense of this language by appealing to a mollified vision of ancient slavery. He writes, “Given our harsh images of slavery, talk of love might at first seem out of place, but in the Greco-Roman world the lot of slaves was extremely varied and in many cases was consonant with deep loyalty to and warm affection for the master.”63 As evidence of this, Nolland points to the agricultural handbook of Varro which,

60 Luz, Matthew, 1:335.

61 Nolland, Matthew, 304.

62 Historical sources present several slave-master relationships which may be defined using such terms but the individual situations involved are complicated for a number of reasons. First, as has already been noted, the sources that survive antiquity describing such relationships were written by the free elite, not by enslaved persons, and therefore present these relationships only from the master’s perspective. Second, one must take into account the power dynamic involved in relationships between the enslaver and the enslaved person. Expressions of love and devotion from the enslaved may be genuine, or they may simply be strategies utilized to cope with and survive their enslavement. They may also represent a psychological coping mechanism akin to Stockholm syndrome in which the enslaved develop a bond with their enslaver. Patterson’s sociological model, which is interested in the general characteristics of the institution of slavery and not the details of individual slave-master relationships, would suggest that domination, not devotion, is the requisite characteristic of Roman slavery as an institution. This does not mean, however, that feelings of love (real or imagined) would never occur.

63 Nolland, Matthew, 303–4. When Nolland says “our harsh image of slavery,” I take him to mean our understanding of modern (Antebellum American) slavery.
he says, “assumes that the desired norm for slaves working on agricultural estates would be to have ‘goodwill (voluntatem) and kindly feeling (benevolentiam) toward the master.’”\(^6^4\) While I agree that the lot of enslaved persons in antiquity was varied, I do not follow the line between Varro’s assertion that masters who are able to engender goodwill can expect more productivity from those they enslave and Nolland’s assertion that “in many cases” the enslaved harbored feelings of “deep loyalty and warm affection” for their enslavers. Varro is giving advice to slaveholders. He is not necessarily making a claim about the typical experience of the enslaved.

Keener suggests that the contrast between “love” and “hate” in this passage should be taken in a comparative sense as something like “to prefer more” and “to prefer less.” He writes, “The slave naturally preferred one master over the other.”\(^6^5\) Again, he argues, “‘Hate’ could mean ‘love less,’ i.e., hate by comparison to one’s love for something else.”\(^6^6\) In making this latter point, he appeals to parallel passages in Matthew 10:37 and Luke 14:26, where Matthew writes, “The one who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and the one loving son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”\(^6^7\) Luke, on the other hand, has written, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters and even his own life he is not able to be my disciple.”\(^6^8\) Against Keener’s point, these parallels demonstrate that luKE uses the language of “hate” in a

\(^6^4\) Nolland, Matthew, 304 n383. Varro, De Re Rustica, 1.17.

\(^6^5\) Keener, Matthew, 233.

\(^6^6\) Keener, Matthew, 233 n204.

\(^6^7\) ὁ φιλὸν πατέρα ἢ μητέρα ύπὲρ ἐμὲ οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος· καὶ ὁ φιλὸν υἱὸν ἢ θυγατέρα ύπὲρ ἐμὲ οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος·

\(^6^8\) Εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρός με καὶ οὐ μισεῖ τὸν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τὰς ἀδελφὰς, ἐπὶ τις καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἑαυτοῦ, οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητής.
context where he may mean “to love less” but it does not show a similar impulse in Matthew.\textsuperscript{69}

Keener also points to Genesis 29:30, 33 (by way of Gundry) in an attempt to demonstrate that “hate” should mean “prefer less”\textsuperscript{70} but I find this argument similarly unpersuasive. In Gen 29:30, the author writes that Jacob “loved Rachel more than Leah.” This passage does demonstrate a preference for one wife over the other, but it notably does not use the language of “hate.” Later, in v. 33, Leah says, “the LORD has heard that I am hated,” but there is no indication that this should be taken to mean “I am preferred less.” In fact, vv. 31-32 suggest that Leah was not loved before bearing children to Jacob. The appeal to Genesis also fails to adequately demonstrate a precedent for “love” and “hate” to merely be indicators of preference.

Other scholars have rightly noted that the intention of the “love” / “hate” language in this text is “to mark a radical dichotomy”\textsuperscript{71} between two incompatible loyalties.\textsuperscript{72} France observes “the antithetical form of this saying indicates a choice [that must be made] between two options rather than a comparative ranking.”\textsuperscript{73} It is not an ordering of a list of priorities or preferences, but rather a narrowing of that list down to one. In this context, “love” and “devotion” should not be taken to mean “prefer,” but instead could be understood as reflecting the image of the “faithful

\textsuperscript{69} The suggestion that Luke does not mean “hate” when he says “hate” may also miss the point of Luke 14:26, but this is well outside the scope of this project.

\textsuperscript{70} Gundry (Matthew, 115) writes of Genesis 29:30, 33, “[Here] hating one wife means not loving her as much as another wife.”

\textsuperscript{71} Schnackenburg, Matthew, 71.

\textsuperscript{72} Morris, Matthew, 155–56. Morris notes that the “stark alternatives” in this passage make it clear that Matthew’s point here is that service to one master renders service to any other impossible.

\textsuperscript{73} France, Matthew, 263 n33.
slave” that will be taken up in the parables later in Matthew. The slave who is faithfully “devoted” to the master is totally obedient, working for the master’s betterment at all times.

In order to show this sort of wholehearted faithfulness to one master, one must necessarily be devoted to that master alone. Herein lies the problem with endeavoring to serve two masters; any such attempt to serve God and mammon will necessarily fail. To serve two masters in such a way is impossible. As Morris puts it “To belong wholly to one owner means that all other owners are ruled out.”74 Matthew’s “slave of God” metaphor highlights this truth: to be a slave of God is to completely submit oneself to one Lord to the exclusion of any other claim or allegiance. Notably Matthew makes this point by using a metaphorical statement that relies on the perspective of the slaveholder regarding the difficulty of co-ownership, and that assumes an image of “devoted slaves” that similarly betrays the slaveholder’s perspective.

Slaveholding becomes the model for understanding human devotion and faithfulness to God.

The Slave is not Greater than the Master (10:24–25)75

Matthew’s second slavery metaphor appears in the midst of the Mission Discourse of chapter 10. After giving the disciples instructions for their mission (10:5–15), Jesus warns them about the persecutions that they will face as a part of this mission (10:16–25). This warning concludes with two parallel metaphors, one of which involves the image of slavery. Matthew writes,

74 Morris, Matthew, 155–56.

75 This teaching is paralleled in Luke 6:40 but interestingly Luke only makes use of the Student-Teacher metaphor and has omitted the Slave-Master metaphor. A similar teaching also appears in John 13:16.
A student is not above the teacher, nor is a slave above his master. It is enough for the student that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they called the master of the house ‘Beelzeboul,’ how much more the members of his household? Placed at the end of the section on impending persecution, Matthew utilizes these parallel metaphors to emphasize the fact that, as students and slaves of Christ, the disciples should not expect to be treated better than Christ himself was treated. If the master of the house (ὁ ἱκοδεσπότης) was maligned and mistreated, then the slaves of his household (ὁικιακοί) should expect no different.

It is important from the outset that we avoid the confusion that could arise from conflating the two parallel metaphors in this passage. It would be unhelpful to attempt to interpret this passage in a way that reads the “slave” and the “student” as the same hypothetical individual. Similarly, slavery is not invoked by Matthew in order to describe the student-teacher relationship. Such conflation can potentially be seen in France’s exploration of this passage, in which he writes that “slave” is “a surprisingly strong term [to describe the] conventional relationship” between student and teacher. He points to a rabbinic tradition which designates certain duties (specifically taking off the master’s sandals) which are appropriate for enslaved persons but not for students. France’s “surprise” seems to arise from thinking of the “student” and the “slave” in the passage as the same metaphorical individual. Although enslaved persons

76 Oὐκ ἐστιν μαθητὴς ὑπὲρ τὸν διδάσκαλον οὐδὲ δοῦλος ὑπὲρ τὸν κύριον αὐτοῦ. Ἄρκετον τῷ μαθητῇ ἵνα γένηται ὡς ὁ διδάσκαλος αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὁ δοῦλος ὡς ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ. εἰ τὸν οἰκοδεσπότην Βεελζεβούλ ἐπεκάλεσαν, πόσῳ μᾶλλον τοὺς οἰκιακοὺς αὐτοῦ.

77 France, Matthew, 400 n11.

78 France, Matthew, 113 n64. See b. Ketubot 96a: “All tasks that a slave performs for his master, a student performs for his teacher, except for untying his shoe.” As is the case with the passage from Dio Chrysostom discussed below, the point here seems to be an attempt to discern the differences between two asymmetrical relationships.
and students in the ancient world both represented the subordinated party in asymmetrical relationships, there is not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between them. Matthew’s parallel metaphors do not argue for such a correspondence. Instead, Matthew draws on the similar nature of these two relationships (slave to master and student to teacher) to describe something about the relationship between Jesus and his followers.

Michael Wilkins has written an extensive treatment of discipleship in the ancient Mediterranean world which focuses first on defining the Classical and Hellenistic usage of μαθητής. He writes that ancient writers use μαθητής either as a general term “to designate a ‘learner’ in a course of study” or as a technical term “to designate an ‘adherent’ of an individual teacher, philosophy, or cultural milieu.” Elsewhere he defines this technical term as referring to “a committed follower [or] student of a great master.”

A number of the primary sources that Wilkins brings into his exploration are of interest for the present study, particularly on the question of the relationship between “student” language and “slave” language. Dio Chrysostom, a contemporary of Matthew, wrote in his second discourse On Slavery and Freedom, “and indeed on account of obeying and receiving blows, you say that those learning from a schoolmaster are slaves to them and that gym masters (or those who teach any other thing) are owners of their students. For they give orders and they beat those

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79 Consider, for instance, the situation in large domestic households in which enslaved persons worked as teachers, thus being subordinates in one relationship (enslaved person to master) but ostensibly superior in another (teacher to student). For the roles played by enslaved persons in ancient households, see Joshel, Slavery, 183.

80 Michael J. Wilkins, Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew’s Gospel, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 32.

81 Wilkins, Discipleship, 41.
who do not obey." In response to this assertion, the second speaker says, “Yes indeed, he said, but it is not for the gym master nor the other teachers to bind the student nor to sell them nor to cast them into the mill, but for masters all these things are allowed.” In this dialog, the interlocutors agree that both teachers and slaveholders are permitted to give orders to those below them (“students” and “slaves,” respectively) and to subject the disobedient to corporal punishment. The second speaker, however, points to the limits that are imposed on the teacher that are not similarly imposed on the enslaver.

The language of “student” and “slave” are brought together, albeit in a different way, in Wilkins’ discussion of the stoic philosopher Epictetus. Wilkins writes, “Epictetus recognized the general and institutional usage of μαθητής, but rejected it” for his own followers. Instead, he designated his followers as ἀνδράποδα, a word for those taken captive in war and sold into slavery. For Wilkins’ study, Epictetus “confirms the status of terminus technicus for μαθητής at this time. Μαθητής refers to the intimate follower of a master.” Such a usage would not fit the Stoic ideal for the relationship between student and teacher. Wilkins goes on to say, “The Stoic desired to be in control, hence the term ἀνδράποδον would describe a subservience of his followers which would render the master in control.”

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82 Καίτοι ἐνεκα τοῦ πειθεσθαι καὶ πληγάς λαμβάνειν καὶ τῶν γραμματιστῶν οἰκέτας φήσεις τοῦς παρ’ αὐτοῖς μανθάνοντας καὶ τοῖς παιδοτρίβας δεσπότας εἶναι τῶν μαθητῶν ἢ τοὺς ἄλλο τι διδάσκοντας· καὶ γὰρ προσάττουσιν αὐτοῖς καὶ τύπτουσιν μὴ πειθομένους (Dio Chrysostom, Discourses, 15.19.1–5).

83 Νὴ Δί’, ἐφ’ ἄλλ’ οὐκ ἔστι τοῖς παιδοτρίβαις οὐδὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις διδασκάλοις δῆσαι τοῖς μαθηταῖς οἷοι ἀποδόσθαι οὐδὲ γε ἐις μυλῶνα ἐμβαλεῖν· τοῖς δὲ γε δεσπότας ἀπαντα ταῦτα ἐφειμένα ἐστίν (Dio Chrysostom, Discourses, 15.19.5–8).

84 Wilkins, Discipleship, 39.

85 Wilkins, Discipleship, 40.

86 Wilkins, Discipleship, 40.
enslavement term to describe the subservient nature of his students is notable. As with the example from Dio Chrysostom, the relationship between student and teacher is seen as an asymmetrical relationship between superior and subordinate, similar in some ways to enslavement.

Josephus also takes up the technical use of μαθητής, “which signifies an intimate relationship of an accomplished master / teacher and one who is attached to him in a common cause or lifelong pursuit,” and applies it to biblical characters like Joshua (the μαθητής of Moses), Elisha (the μαθητής of Elijah), and Baruch (the μαθητής of Jeremiah). As Wilkins notes, “the LXX does not use μαθητής with reference to these individuals, so Josephus has interpreted the relationships to be that between a master and a disciple.”

Again at a later point he writes, Josephus may be imposing his own personal Hellenistic use of μαθητής, but more likely he reflects the situation in Judaism as a whole...Although he had been removed from Israel for some time, and had certain apologetic purposes in mind, he still appears to write with an understanding of μαθητής that was current in Judaism. Judaism as a whole appears to be influenced by Hellenism with regard to the master-disciple relationship.

Notable for this study, Josephus also brings together the language of student and servitude (though he does not use explicit slavery terminology) when describing Elisha, who he calls “student and servant of Elijah” (ἦν Ἡλίου...μαθητῆς καὶ διάκονος). For Wilkins, this twin designation for the prophet pairs the common Greek concept (μαθητής) with a “typical Old

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87 Wilkins, Discipleship, 112
88 Wilkins, Discipleship, 113.
89 Wilkins, Discipleship, 115.
90 Josephus, Ant. 8:354.
Testament signification for a man of God.”91 This assertion misses the important point that the prophets and other men of God are typically called “slaves/servants of God,” whereas Josephus calls Elisha a servant of Elijah. Thus, Josephus is not making a point about the piety of Elisha as a prophet of God but is instead referring to his subordinate position vis-à-vis Elijah, his teacher/master. Elisha leaves his family and his domestic responsibilities behind in order to become the “student and servant” of Elijah. In this context, both terms are used to demonstrate Elisha’s commitment and devotion to his teacher and master. As in the above examples, the μαθητής appears as the subordinate in an asymmetrical relationship, paralleled directly here with the language of servitude.

Matthew begins his dual metaphor by saying that “A student is not above the teacher, nor is a slave above his master.” The meaning of this portion of the aphorism is self-evident. In both of these asymmetrical relationships it is inappropriate for the subordinate party to think of themselves as greater than the superior party in those areas upon which their relationship is defined. The enslaved person, so long as they remain enslaved, can never hope to exceed their master in power or social honor. The student, so long as they remain a student, can never hope to exceed their teacher in the knowledge or skill of their craft.92 Morris writes, “A slave is not to be

91 Wilkins, Discipleship, 113. Wilkins notes, against Rengstorff, that μαθητής and διάκονος are likely meant to be read as supplementary terms (Wilkins, Discipleship, 113 n90).

92 On the latter point, Wilkins gives examples of students whose knowledge equals and even exceeds that of the teacher. He writes that the advanced student in the Talmud “is the talmîdh Chatham, ‘the disciple of the wise,’ This disciple had advanced to the point where he was considered the intellectual equal of his teacher, could even render halakhic decisions, but was not yet ordained as a fully qualified rabbi,” (Wilkins, Discipleship, 93–94). In Hellenistic literature, he references Diodorus of Sicily who, in describing the Romans’ facility in naval warfare, wrote “So now, should the Carthaginians compel them to learn naval warfare, they would soon see that the students (μαθητάς) had become superior to their teachers (διδασκάλον),” (Diodorus of Sicily, 23.2.1.13, 26; in Wilkins, Discipleship, 33). Both of these passages refer to exceptional cases. In the first, particularly apt students may eventually advance to the point where they are nearly ready to become teachers themselves. In the second, Diodorus
thought of as above his master; the very concept of slavery means that the slave occupies an inferior position. He may be a more worthy man, but as a slave he is subordinate.”

Instead of attempting to surpass their superiors, Matthew says it is enough (ἀρκετόν) for the student or enslaved person “to become like” (γένηται ὡς) the teacher or master. Davies and Allison write, “Although never the teacher’s equal, the disciple can aspire to be like the teacher, and the servant can aspire to be like the Lord. The theme is the imitation of Christ.” I will submit to the idea that these parallel metaphors anticipate a level of imitation from Jesus’s followers, but with the caveat that a very specific sort of imitation is in view: an imitation of Christ in his suffering. Far from a generic call to self-betterment by “becoming more like Jesus,” this metaphor instead serves as a reminder that his follower should expect to be treated as poorly as Jesus was.

First, in the context of Matthew 10, this metaphor falls at the end of a warning about impending persecutions, and acts as a literary transition which closes its section by expressing the necessity of suffering for Jesus’s followers. The section which follows continues the theme illustrates Roman exceptionalism by stating that, unlike a typical student, the Romans were capable of advancing beyond their teachers (and did so with some frequency).


95 This might be compared with the Johannine use of this metaphor in John 13:16–17, a passage which is explicitly about the positive imitation of Christ. There Jesus says, “Amen amen I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them,” (ἀμήν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐκ ἔστιν δοῦλος μείζων τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ οὐδὲ ἀπόστολος μείζων τοῦ πέμψαντος αὐτόν. εἰ ταύτα οἶδατε, μακάριοι ἔστε ἐὰν ποιῆτε αὐτά.) Jesus’s demonstration of humility and service is explicitly called an example that the disciples should follow (John 13:15). In this context, the metaphor of the enslaved person is applied (alongside that of the messenger) to make the point that the disciples should imitate Jesus by doing the very things which they had seen him do. Interestingly, John returns to this metaphor two chapters later (John 15:20) in order to illustrate the necessity of suffering persecution for the “slave of Christ.”
of persecution, consoling the disciples by reminding them that God is ultimately in control. In this context, the message of the metaphor is not “You should strive to become like Jesus” in some generic sense. Rather its specific message is “You should not expect to be treated better than Jesus, your teacher and master, was treated.”

Second, against the concept of imitation as self-betterment, we must consider how the enslaved characters in Matthew’s Gospel are called to “become like” their masters. In our discussion of the parables, we saw two enslaved characters who were punished for their failure to emulate their masters, to anticipate the master’s desires, and to respond to situations as their master would have responded.\(^6\) In both of these cases, the enslaved person is characterized by the master as “worthless” (πονηρός);\(^7\) they are of no use to the master if they are unable or unwilling to represent him appropriately. One enslaved character is called to emulate his master’s mercy, a positive trait to be sure. The other, however, is called to imitate his master’s harsh (even perhaps predatory) business practices in order to improve the master’s financial standing. The point of this imitation is not self-betterment on the part of the enslaved person in either case. Similarly, in the present passage, the imitation of the master and teacher is not about a striving for self-betterment. It is, in this context, a reminder that, for better or worse, it is the duty of the enslaved person to emulate the master and, more specifically, to suffer persecution like the master did.

Finally, the idea of the enslaved person becoming like the master in a positive, imitative way seems to accept tacitly the older consensus idea which thought of slavery in the ancient

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\(^6\) See the discussion of the Unforgiving Slave and the Talents in chapter 4.

\(^7\) For the translation of πονηρός as “worthless,” see chapter 4, esp. n156.
Mediterranean world as a vehicle for upward social mobility. This is not an idea which appears anywhere else in Matthew’s portrayal of slavery or the enslaved. As we have demonstrated in the previous chapters, even the enslaved characters who serve in “higher” administrative roles are dishonored and are often subjected to violence and domination. Similarly, there is nothing in this passage that would point toward such “upward mobility” for the metaphorical slave. The enslaved person does not “become like” the master by moving up the social ladder. He is like the master in his humiliation.

The conclusion of the saying in Matthew demonstrates these points. Matthew says if the master of the house (οἰκοδεσπότης) is maligned, how much more should the persons enslaved by him (οἰκιακοί) expect such treatment. This summary conclusion is a continuation of the slave metaphor, with οἰκοδεσπότης standing as a synonym for κύριος and οἰκιακοί used as a synonym for δοῦλοι. This demonstrates specifically what Matthew means when he says that the enslaved person will be like the master: the “slave” will be maligned just as the master was. As Nolland concludes, when the master is treated in this way, “the upper ceiling now becomes no better than being demonized by those who are nearby.”

The point of both of these parallel metaphors is not that a student/slave can expect to be elevated to the level of the teacher/master, enjoying an improvement in their status or honor. Rather the point, in context, is that the student/slave should expect to be treated no better than the

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98 In this context, I take οἰκιακοί to refer to the enslaved staff of the household rather than to all household members in general.

99 Nolland, Matthew, 434.
teacher/master was treated. As Briggs has noted about the “slave” metaphor elsewhere in the New Testament, “Christians share in the…extreme social degradation of Christ.” The “sobering message” of Jesus’s teaching in this passage is “expect no better treatment than I have received.” Here Matthew notes the sufficiency (or appropriateness) for an enslaved person to expect to be mistreated if their master is mistreated. The “slave of Christ” does not receive higher honor as they strive to emulate the master but rather becomes like the Lord through suffering and dishonor. Such suffering would be a familiar experience for the enslaved characters of Matthew’s Gospel. To be a slave of Christ is to expect to be mistreated just as the Master was mistreated.

The First Must Be Your Slave (20:25–28; 23:11–12)

Matthew’s final slavery metaphor appears in 20:25–28, immediately following Jesus’s third passion prediction and shortly before his entry into Jerusalem. The mother of James and John comes to Jesus to request that they be given positions of high esteem in his coming kingdom.
(20:20–21).\textsuperscript{105} The other disciples learn of this request and become indignant (20:24). In response, Jesus says,

\textsuperscript{[25]}And calling them Jesus said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them and the great ones exercise authority over them. \textsuperscript{[26]}It will not be so among you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, \textsuperscript{[27]}and whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave, \textsuperscript{[28]}just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:25–28).\textsuperscript{106}

A similar teaching appears again a few chapters later, in 23:11–12, where Jesus warns his disciples against seeking out positions of privilege and power. There Jesus says,

\textsuperscript{[11]}But the greatest of you will be your servant, \textsuperscript{[12]}for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.\textsuperscript{107}

In both passages, the desire for “greatness” is countered with a call to “servitude.” The follower of Jesus should not pursue honor or privilege but should instead adopt an attitude of humility and a posture of service. Instead of striving toward and then flaunting power, those who belong to the community that Jesus is establishing will strive to serve others.\textsuperscript{108} As this study is focused on Matthew’s explicit use of slave terminology, our focus here will be the first of these two passages, though the latter will figure into the discussion as it progresses.

\textsuperscript{105} Mark’s version tells of a similar request, but in that Gospel it comes directly from the two disciples and not from their mother.

\textsuperscript{106} ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς προσκαλεσάμενος αὐτούς εἶπεν· Οἶδαί τι οἱ ἄρχοντες τῶν ἐθνῶν κατακυριεύοντιν αὐτῶν, καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι κατεξουσίαζοντιν αὐτῶν, οὐχ οὕτως ἔσται ἐν ὑμῖν· ἄλλωστε ἐν θέλη ἐν ὑμῖν μέγας γενέσθαι ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος, καὶ ὅσος ἄν θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι πρῶτος ἔσται ὑμῶν δοῦλος· ὡσπερ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἠλθεν διακονήσει ἀλλά διακονήσαται καὶ ὁ διὸ θέλησεν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν.

\textsuperscript{107} ὁ δὲ μεῖζον ὑμῶν ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος. ὡστε δὲ ὑψώσει ἐαυτὸν ταπεινωθήσεται, καὶ ὡστε ταπεινῶσει ἐαυτὸν ὑψωθήσεται.

\textsuperscript{108} See Harrington, Matthew, 289.
In 20:25–28, Matthew compares the standard of leadership among the Gentiles (ἔθνη) to the ideal of the Christian community (ἐν ὑμίν).\textsuperscript{109} The former is described in terms of domination (κατακυριεύω and κατεξουσίαζω).\textsuperscript{110} Harrington writes, “The prefix kata- implies domination over another; the roots to which they are attached appear in common NT words for ‘Lord’ (kyrios) and ‘power’ (exousia).”\textsuperscript{111} According to Davies and Allison, the obvious first-century referent of ‘the rulers of the gentiles’ and ‘the great ones’ would be the Romans.\textsuperscript{112} Considering the situation of the Jewish population of the eastern Roman provinces in the first century, Keener writes, “Palestinian Jews, oppressed by a colonial situation in both Jesus’ day and Matthew’s, would naturally recognize that most rulers exploited power.”\textsuperscript{113} It is worth noting, however, that Matthew does not reserve such criticism to secular leadership and in 23:6–7 he accuses Jewish religious leaders (“the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees,” v. 2) of

\begin{quote}
Matthew seems to confine to the community what Mark may intend more universally. Where Matthew has “will be your slave” (ἔσται ὑμῶν δοῦλος; 20:27) Mark has “will be slave of all” (ἔσται πάντων δοῦλος; Mark 10:44).

One recognizes in the verb κατακυριεύω the same root as the noun κύριος, a common term throughout Matthew (and the rest of the NT) for “Lord” or “master.” While this text does oppose what it portrays as the typical mode of leadership among the Gentiles, it is probably too much to argue that it also opposes “mastery” more broadly. That is, I do not think that the author of Matthew intends this statement against Gentile rulers’ domination of their subjects (κατακυριεύω) to be read as a direct indictment against slaveholders (κύριοι). As we have seen, the depictions of slavery and slaveholders throughout the rest of the Gospel accept the slaveholders’ perspective as normative without any reservations. This does not mean, however, that modern interpreters cannot or should not read this passage for liberation (and indeed I would encourage them to do so).

Harrington, \textit{Matthew}, 287. Nolland (\textit{Matthew}, 822) notes regarding Matthew’s terms, “Both verbs applied to the rulers here begin with κατα, which generally functions as an intensifier but sometimes loses its force. Earlier scholarship was inclined to find in the uses of κατα a pointer to an abusive and oppressive use of power. But more recent scholarship has accepted the results of Clark’s survey of uses [κατα]κυριεύουσαν that in this verb the intensifier has virtually no significance and the verb simply means to exercise lordship over. But this may be an overcorrection. While abuse of power may not be in the semantic range, pressure and control certainly are. The power realities are very evident as some dominate and others are dominated.” See also Evans (\textit{Matthew}, 354): “Greatness in Jesus’ day was defined as coercive power.”

Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew}, 3:93.

Keener, \textit{Matthew}, 487.
\end{quote}
flaunting their positions of power as well. Here again, as we saw above, the response from Jesus is “the greatest of you will be your servant” (23:11).

In contrast to the terms of domination that define secular leadership, Matthew writes that Jesus’s followers should be “servants” (διάκονοι) and “slaves” (δοῦλοι) to one another.114 Harrington writes that even though this teaching uses humiliating terms, “there [has consistently been] a temptation to turn even humble words like diakonos and doulos into honorific titles, despite their most basic meanings.”115 What is more, this passage is frequently understood as offering a Christian approach to leadership structures rather than a Christian alternative to leadership structures. Harrington, for instance, despite his insistence that these words are not honorific, talks throughout his discussion of this passage about the ideals of “servant-leadership.”116 He writes, “Leadership in Jesus’ community means service to others.”117 Luz offers a compelling (and more radical) alternative to this interpretation. He writes that the core issue in this passage is not just that worldly leaders exercise their authority in repressive and unjust ways which must not be emulated by Jesus’s followers. More than this, he argues, Matthew’s teaching imagines a community in which there is no “being great” or “being first” at all.118 In other words, when Matthew writes “whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave,” he is not saying that one becomes “first” by taking up the role of “slave.” Instead,

114 For the intensification in the parallel from διάκονοι to δοῦλοι, see our discussion of these terms in chapter 4.
115 Harrington, Matthew, 289.
116 Harrington, Matthew, 287, 289.
117 Harrington, Matthew, 289.
118 Luz, Matthew, 2:544.
he argues that the *desire* to be first should be replaced with the *desire* to serve.\(^{119}\) Thus, servitude is not to be understood as a novel way to achieve and then exercise leadership. It is seeking out and accepting a position of “lowness, not self-assertion, that is important in the kingdom” that Jesus is establishing throughout Matthew.\(^{120}\) As John Chrysostom wrote, “Not only does he forbid desiring after the first things but [he requires] chasing after the last things.”\(^{121}\)

The metaphor of the dominated, dishonored slave is an obvious image to invoke in order to make such a point. This call to enslavement, according to Keener, would likely have been “offensive” to Matthew’s audience.\(^{122}\) Cranfield suggests that even διάκονος, used in this context, would have an “ignoble ring,”\(^{123}\) perhaps especially so in a society obsessed with status and honor. Enslaved individuals are “at the bottom of the pecking order; they are the last.”\(^{124}\) A call to become one of them is an invitation to become what Meier calls a “non-person who has no rights or existence of [their] own, who exists solely for others.”\(^{125}\) This is what Matthew’s Jesus calls his followers to. Instead of exercising authority (κατεξουσίαζω), they will become

\(^{119}\) Luz (*Matthew*, 2:545) writes, “Thus the purpose of the two ὃς ἐὰν (‘whoever’) sentences of vv. 26–27 is not to show the church a new way of becoming great but to call her away from her natural desire and to turn this desire upside down.”

\(^{120}\) Morris, *Matthew*, 511.

\(^{121}\) οὐ γὰρ δὴ μόνον τῶν πρωτείων ἄρῃν κωλύει, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐσχάτα διώκειν (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 72.3).

\(^{122}\) Keener, *Matthew*, 486.


\(^{124}\) France, *Matthew*, 760.

\(^{125}\) Meier, *Matthew*, 228.
servants (διάκονοι). Instead of acting as masters (κατακυριεύω), they will become slaves (δοῦλοι).

The rulers of this world, writes Matthew, cannot provide the model for this sort of behavior. Instead, Matthew offers Jesus as the ultimate example of such self-lowering; he came to serve (διακονέω) and to give up his own life as a ransom (λύτρον) for others.\(^{126}\) It is tempting for the interpreter of this text to take a Pauline leap at this point—Jesus humbled himself to the point of death “therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:9)—but that is notably absent here in Matthew. Jesus’s exemplary servitude—his willing enslavement—does not lead to his exaltation in the present context, but only to his execution. He is not proclaimed as authoritative Lord (“that every knee should bow…and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,” Phil 2:10–11) but simply as the one who has given up his life. Similarly, in this passage the follower must pursue humble service for its own sake, not as an innovative pathway toward ultimate success. The desire for primacy, greatness, authority, and lordship must be abandoned entirely and the follower of Jesus must instead become a humble “slave.”

The specific language of humble service is repeated in 23:11–12, which has already been referenced above. There Matthew repeats “the greatest among you will be your servant” (ὁ δὲ

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\(^{126}\) The term λύτρον is enticing in this passage because of its connection to manumission (POxy. 84.6) though it can also be used more generally for the price paid to secure the release of a captive or hostage (eg., Demosthenes, Against Nicostratus, 53.11; Xenophon, Hellenica, 7.2.16). Also relevant is the usage in the LXX, where the term may refer to a payment that is offered in place of a death (of an animal in Exod 21:30; of persons in Num 35:31, 32 and perhaps in Prov 6:35 and 13:8; of the nation to God in Exod 30:12) or to a price that is paid to secure freedom (of slaves in Lev 19:20; 25:51, 52; of captives in Isaiah 45:13). The proximity of τὴν ψυγήν in our passage (and in the LXX passages that refer to the payment offered in place of death; see Exod 21:30, Exod 30:12, Num 35:31, Prov 13:8) would suggest that it is this usage, rather than a specific reference to manumission, that is intended here.
μείζων ὑμῶν ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος) and qualifies this statement with the common expectation of eschatological reversal when God will humble the exalted and exalt the humble. Here this belief (recognizable from the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish sources) “is applied to the self-humbling service of brothers and sisters” in the Christian community.\(^{127}\) Of particular note is that here in 23:12, God is said to exalt not simply “the humble” but instead “whoever humbles him/herself” (ὅστις ταπεινώσει ἑαυτόν).\(^{128}\) It is the active pursuit of humility—claiming the despised, dishonored position as one’s own—that is in mind here and which is central to Matthew’s third slave metaphor.

The emphasis on humility (rather than on service as a new path to greatness) picks up on a common theme of Jesus’s teaching in Matthew. In 18:3–4, again in response to the disciples’ concern for “greatness,” Jesus says, “Amen I say to you, unless you turn and become like children you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever will humble himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”\(^{129}\) Nolland writes that this passage is “clearly related” to the slave metaphor of chapter 20 but that in the latter the language of service has replaced the language of humility.\(^{130}\) It is better to say that all of these passages emphasize


\(^{128}\) Cf. Psalm 138:6, “For the Lord is exalted yet he sees the lowly…”; Proverbs 3:34, “To the scorners he is scornful but to the lowly he gives favor”; 29:23, “…the one lowly in spirit will gain honor”; Luke 1:52, “He brought down rulers from [their] thrones and exalted the lowly”; James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5, “…God opposes the proud but gives grace to the lowly.”

\(^{129}\) καὶ ἐλεγεν· Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν· ἐὰν μὴ στραφήτε καὶ γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδία, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν. ὅστις οὖν ταπεινώσει ἑαυτὸν ὡς τὸ παιδίον τούτο, οὐτός ἔστιν ὁ μείζων ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.

\(^{130}\) Nolland, *Matthew*, 823.
the importance of humility for the follower of Jesus but that 18:3–4 illustrates this using the metaphor of a child while 20:25–28 and 23:11–12 utilize the slave metaphor. The follower of Jesus is called to be humble like a child and to serve humbly like a slave (as Christ demonstrated).

While the specific contexts of 20:25–28 and 23:11–12 are distinct, both passages employ Matthew’s third slave metaphor to highlight the preeminence of humility as a virtue for the follower of Christ. One should not seek authority or dominance as the “rulers of the Gentiles” do (20:25), nor should one pursue honor and prestige as the “scribes and Pharisees” do (23:2–10). Instead, the desire for “greatness” should be replaced with the humble attitude of the servant (διάκονος) and slave (δοῦλος) who seeks “not to be served but to serve” (20:28). For Matthew, being a “slave” to others means accepting Jesus’s call to active humility, following his example of selflessness and service.

Conclusion

Reading the slave metaphors of Matthew in light of the portrayal of slavery and enslaved persons elsewhere in that Gospel leads us to a particular understanding of each of these metaphors. Although the use of slavery as a metaphor is grounded in traditional Jewish language, the contemporary reality of the Roman slave system exercised an undeniable influence over the way Matthew utilizes slavery to describe the human relationship to God, to Christ, and to others. The domination and dishonor which characterized enslaved existence, as well as the expectation of

131 Note especially the nearly verbatim agreement between 18:4 (ὅστις οὖν ταπεινώσει ἑαυτὸν) and 23:12 (ὅστις ταπεινώσει ἑαυτὸν).

132 For other references to the humility of Christ in Matthew, see 11:29 (where Jesus is “gentle and humble in heart”) and 21:5 (where Jesus enters Jerusalem “gentle and mounted on a donkey”).
humble, obedient service, provide the necessary background for understanding these texts correctly.

Being a slave of God (6:24) is not simply a matter of preference or properly aligned priorities. Rather, it is a call to complete submission to one Lord to the exclusion of all others. It is impossible to serve God and mammon (or any other competing master) because their claims to allegiance are incompatible. As the master, God’s claim on the life of his “slave” is absolute. Choosing loyalty to God as master necessarily means forsaking any other lord. To attempt to serve another master would be to reject God’s dominion.

Being a slave of Christ (10:24–25) is to accept dishonor and mistreatment just as Christ (the Lord and Master) was mistreated. The parallel in this passage with the metaphor of the student and teacher introduces the temptation to read into both images a desire for self-improvement (much like the student strives to become “like the teacher” in skill or knowledge). Instead, both metaphors hinge on the power dynamics involved in the asymmetrical relationships pictured. As the subordinates in such relationships, students and slaves should not expect better treatment than their superiors receive. The “slave of Christ” does not receive greater honor but rather should expect dishonor as they “share in the… extreme social degradation of Christ.”

Being a slave of others (20:25–28; 23:11–12) is not a model for Christian leadership or an innovative path to greatness. Instead, it is a call to active humility as the individual’s desire to be “great” or to be “first” is replaced entirely with an impulse to serve others. This radical call to selflessness is ultimately exemplified by Jesus’s sacrificial death, specifically without his

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subsequent exaltation in view. Similarly, the follower of Jesus is called to humble service for its own sake, without any mention of recompense.

For our author, the distinguishing marks of slavery are violent domination and dishonor. Enslaved existence is characterized in Matthew by unquestioning obedience, bodily vulnerability, and humiliation. It is precisely these marks and these characteristics which, for Matthew, shape the way that followers of Jesus should understand their relationships to God, to Christ, and to one another. To miss the realities of ancient slavery that stand behind these texts is to miss the point entirely.
CHAPTER 7
SLAVERY, THE ENSLAVED, AND THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

“Slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons.”¹ This definition from Patterson has served throughout our study as the model for understanding ancient slavery in general terms. We have seen that Matthew’s references to slavery and enslaved persons conform to this model in a consistent way. The institution of slavery as it is encountered in Matthew is violent and coercive, maintained solely for the benefit of the slaveholding class. Enslaved persons are expected to be faithfully obedient to their masters, following their commands and anticipating their will, and are punished severely when they fail to meet these expectations. The asymmetrical relationship between enslaved person and enslaver, characterized by domination and often times by violence, is understood as normative.

(1) Slavery in Matthew is characterized by complete domination. The enslaved must be wholly devoted to their master (6:24), obeying all orders without question (8:5–13) and even anticipating and fulfilling their master’s will when no specific instructions are given (25:14–30). As a representative of the master, they are to act as the master would in all circumstances (18:23–35).

(2) Slavery in Matthew is characterized by absolute dishonor. Enslaved persons are often so insignificant that the narrative nearly passes them over (13:24–30; 14:1–2; 26:47–56). They

¹ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 13.
must remember their place, not expecting preferential treatment (10:24–25). Their attitude should be one of humble service without the expectation of reward (20:25–28). They are excluded even when other “outsiders” are invited in (22:1–14). They represent the very lowest end of social scale (26:69–75).

(3) This domination and dishonor is often demonstrated in Matthew by the physical violence which the enslaved are made to endure. They are slandered, assaulted, and killed by their master’s free clients (21:33–46; 22:1–14). They are attacked by their master’s enemies (26:47–56). They are beaten and imprisoned by other enslaved persons (18:23–35). They face punishment (25:14–30), torture and imprisonment (18:23–35), and even execution (24:45–51) at the hand of their masters when they do not prove “faithful.”

This project has taken as its focus only those passages which refer explicitly to slavery or enslaved persons. An appropriate question for further research would be “Does Matthew contain texts that refer implicitly to slavery or enslaved persons?” Recent scholarship has answered this question in the affirmative.

In 2015, Mark Allan Powell published an article entitled “Jesus and the Pathetic Wicked” in which he argues that the “tax collectors and sinners” with whom Jesus consistently associated may have been enslaved persons. This explains, for Powell, why Jesus does not call these individuals to repentance (following the argument of E. P. Sanders). They are “‘the pathetic wicked,’ people whose wickedness was not in doubt, but whose lives were such that they could be pitied as well as despised. Because Jesus was an extraordinarily compassionate man, pity

triumphed.” Powell’s central concern is historical, but his article can lead us to literary questions like those we have asked throughout our study. If “tax collectors” in Matthew are understood as enslaved persons, how might we understand Jesus’s association with tax collectors (9:11; 11:19) or his statement that tax collectors believed John the Baptist and would enter the Kingdom of God (21:31–32)?

We have already mentioned the work of Mitzi Smith which argues that the ten virgins of 25:1–13 are best understood as enslaved brides and that this parable “reinscribes oppressive structures, stereotypes, and tactics, including torture, particularly in the form of sleep deprivation.” These enslaved women are portrayed as “inherently lazy, evil, worthless, and foolish.” Smith places this parable in the midst of a trilogy of slave parables (the Faithful/Wicked Slave of 24:45–51 and the Talents of 25:14–30), all of which reflect on similar themes: “lack of knowledge of the parousia, the unexpected arrival, marriage, careless and wasteful behavior, watchfulness, staying awake, ownership, and preparedness.” If the virgins of this parable are understood as enslaved persons, how might this impact our understanding of enslavement in Matthew? Perhaps more difficult, would such a reading suggest tacit approval from our author of the sexual exploitation of such enslaved women?

One might also detect a metaphorical (though perhaps somewhat tangential) reference to slavery in Jesus’s command that his followers “take up their cross” (10:38; 16:24) and in the

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4 Smith, Insights, 80.
5 Smith, Insights, 83.
6 Smith, Insights, 84.
narrative of Jesus’s own crucifixion. While Cicero attests to the crucifixion of free persons in extreme (and potentially suspicious) circumstances, Tacitus still refers to it as the servile supplicium: the slave’s punishment. Appian, writing in the century after Matthew, still recalls the story of 6,000 enslaved fighters captured and crucified along the Via Appia after the failure of Spartacus’s rebellion in 71 BCE. Given Matthew’s harsh depiction of enslavement, is it significant for Matthew that Jesus dies the death of a slave? How would Matthew’s intended audience understand the call to “take up the cross” themselves?

A similar methodological approach would prove fruitful for studies outside the Gospel of Matthew as well. Patterson’s model could be helpfully applied to readings of other early Christian texts where they rely, both explicitly and implicitly, on images of enslavement. One could ask, for instance, whether the Lukan parallels to the Matthean texts we have examined similarly uphold Patterson’s model or whether they deviate from it in some way. Do Luke’s several unique slave passages indicate a particular understanding of slavery (real and metaphorical) that compares to what we have seen in Matthew?

Does Jesus’s message in Luke

7 Cicero, In Verrem, 2.5.72.

8 Tacitus, Historia, 4.11. Note also the Roman legal tradition, recounted by Tacitus, that the appropriate punishment when an enslaved person killed his/her master was the crucifixion of all the enslaved persons of that household (Tacitus, Annals, 14.42–45).

9 Appian, Civil Wars, 1.120.

10 Glancy asks a similar question, noting, “A final, counterline of inquiry into the parabolic ideology of slavery would ask whether the crucifixion of Jesus prompts us to reconsider our interpretation of the slaves whose representations prefigure the Gospels’ climactic scenes of torture” (Glancy, Slavery in Early Christianity, 129).

of “release for the captives and the oppressed” (Luke 4:18) have a meaningful impact on how that Gospel portrays enslavement?

Such work in Luke may lead naturally into a similar exploration of the Acts of the Apostles.\(^\text{12}\) How do the enslaved characters in Acts function in its narrative? Do they similarly conform to Patterson’s model? Do the enslaved characters in Acts parallel the enslaved characters in Luke in some way?\(^\text{13}\) How might this impact our reading of these characters? Do the similarities (or differences) in these two books’ portrayal of enslaved characters have any bearing on the question of authorship?

A similar study undertaken on the Gospel of John may well produce a very different outcome as that Gospel’s use of slave language is quite distinct from the Synoptics, as one might expect. How might we understand John’s use of the metaphor of enslavement to Christ, which is both similar and dissimilar from the use of that metaphor in Matthew? Perhaps most curious, what does it mean for the Johannine Jesus to say, “I no longer call you slaves…but have called you friends” (John 15:15)? Does such a statement conform to or deviate from the norms expressed by Patterson?

These important questions for future research are well beyond the purview of this study. The purpose of this dissertation has been two-fold. First, it has demonstrated that Patterson’s model for slavery (and the “new consensus” that it represents) is the most appropriate way for modern readers to understand the ancient institution of slavery as it is found in the Gospel of

\(^{12}\) Regardless of one’s take on the authorship issues involved with pairing Luke and Acts, the latter intentionally positions itself to be read as a sort of sequel to the former.

\(^{13}\) It seems to me that they may.
Matthew. Second, it has argued that this understanding of slavery stands behind and is indeed the foundation of Matthew’s three slave metaphors. As difficult as it may be for modern readers with modern moral sensibilities, the realities of ancient slavery present in Matthew must be acknowledged for what they were if we are to understand this Gospel in its original context. Such an acknowledgement is also the first crucial step toward confronting the slaveholding biases present in the text and preventing ourselves from repeating them in our own time and place.
APPENDIX A

SLAVE VOCABULARY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT
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APPENDIX B

TABLE OF SYRIAN LEGIONS
At the beginning of the reign of Tiberius, Syria was home to four legions: III Gallica, VI Ferrata, X Fretensis, and XII Fulminata. An additional legion (IV Scythica) was transferred to Syria in approximately 60 CE to reinforce the province while Gallica and Ferrata were fighting in Armenia. When the First Jewish War began in 66, X Fretensis was transferred to Judaea. XII Fulminata also went to Judaea to fight in the war, along with portions of IV Scythica and VI Ferrata. (Around this same time, III Gallica was transferred for a short time to Moesia, but it returned to Syria before 71.)

After the First Jewish War ended, IV Scythica and VI Ferrata returned their full strength to Syria, rejoining III Gallica there. XII Fulminata returned for a time but was presently transferred to Cappadocia (in approximately 80). VI Ferrata was returned to Judea by Hadrian to deal with unrest. It was replaced in Syria by XVI Flavia Firma (transferred from Cappadocia).\(^1\)

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\(^1\) All data taken from J. Brian Campbell, “Legio,” BNP, accessed online.
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VITA

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