

**Episode:** Servant of God Series No. 2

**Narrator:** Eliezer of Damascus

**Primary Scriptures:** Genesis 15:2-3

**Story Summary:** The importance of understanding the nature of a servant

**Location:** Israel

**Time:** Circa 2000 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Genesis 15:3

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament was written in Greek, many of the people in the New Testament primarily spoke Aramaic (i.e. Jesus and his disciples), and you speak another language (probably English). There is no doubt that there are challenges translating words and concepts between languages. One of the most problematic Biblical words/concepts is “servant”. Since being a servant of God should be a high priority of all Christians, it is crucial to have a good understanding of what that means.

In the Old Testament, there appears to have been little difference between servants and slaves. The master or owner told the servant what to do but was responsible for feeding and caring for the servant. Society wasn't designed for a servant to have the alternative of going to a different master. Realistically, a servant was as bound to a master as a slave to an owner.

In the Jewish society, at least according to the laws of Moses, it appears a debtor could sell themselves into slavery to pay off a debt. At the end of a specified period of time, the debtor would be released, but if they were married and had children during the serving time, the wife and children stayed with the master. However, at the end of the serving time, the slave could choose to permanently stay a slave IF he loved the master and the family.<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament was written about countries of the Roman Empire during the time period of approximately 5 BC to 85 AD. During this time, slavery was common because of war, kidnapping, and debt. Up to a quarter of the population of the Empire were slaves. Although there were wealthy people who owned slaves, the majority of the population were poor people who were either in debt to or in obligation to the wealthy people. A slave with a good owner was probably better off than a poor free person.

Although there were Greek words for “servant”, the Greek word, “doulos” undoubtedly meant slave. Almost always in the New Testament, the word used for a person who serves is “doulos”. However, modern translators have chosen to translate the word as “servant” or “bond-servant” in an effort not to invoke images of the times of slavery in the Americas in the 1700 and 1800's.

Regardless of the English word used in the Bible, the concept of servanthood in the New Testament includes these characteristics: the servant makes a decision to serve a master and is bound to keep that decision permanently; the master has complete control over the servant; and, the servant is bound to work in the best interest of the master. The good news is this: if you have a good master like God, you will be well taken care of. That is why the major characters of the Bible all chose to serve God.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 21:6, Deut. 15:17