

# Constructing ancient slavery as socio-historic context of the New Testament

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Considering the vast scope of material on slavery in antiquity, this article aimed to design a search filter that delimits the scope of socio-historical aspects specifically relevant to the New Testament passages dealing with slavery. The term 'search filter' was borrowed from Information Technology, denoting defined search terms aimed at more efficient and effective searches of vast amounts of data. The search filter designed in this article made use of the following search terms: the period under investigation; the geographical region under investigation; various definitions of slavery; ancient terminology for slavery; and aspects arising from the New Testament passages themselves. Each of these criteria were considered in turn, and the results were used to define the search filter. Finally, the search filter was represented schematically.

## Introduction

When constructing the socio-historic context of the New Testament passages referring to slavery<sup>1</sup>, the researcher is faced with an avalanche of both primary and secondary source material. Secondary works on Greco-Roman slavery<sup>2</sup> can be categorised as seen in Table 1.

This categorisation illustrates the vast scope of available material. Yet not all of this material is necessarily relevant to the interpretation of the New Testament passages referring to slavery. The same applies to an even greater extent to the Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Aramaic primary sources available to the researcher interested in ancient slavery. This article aims to define a search filter to delimit the available material on Greco-Roman slavery to those aspects of slavery that may constitute the socio-historic context of the New Testament passages referring to slavery.

The concept of a search filter is well known in Information Technology as a method to provide more efficient and effective searches of vast amounts of data. The main crux of developing a successful search filter is identifying potentially useful search terms (Jenkins 2004:155). Such terms may be defined with regard to time (e.g. dates), language (e.g. grammatical forms or key words), geography (e.g. place), or any other relevant aspect. For purposes of the search filter defined in this article, the following search terms will be considered, namely, the period under investigation; the geographical region under investigation; various definitions of slavery; ancient terminology for slavery; and aspects arising from the New Testament passages themselves. The article concludes with a schematic representation of the findings.

## Period under investigation

One might assume that the relevant period to be studied would be limited to the events narrated by the New Testament in so far as they relate to the topic of slavery, namely approximately 29 BCE (the start of Jesus' public ministry) to approximately 180 CE (to allow for earlier or later dating of the New Testament writings) (cf. Van der Watt 2003:584–585). Considering the pitfalls in the dating of the available evidence,<sup>3</sup> the following grounds substantiate a broader period of investigation:

- The confluence of Greek and Roman traditions and customs in the time of the New Testament merits the inclusion of Greek slavery in the search filter. This would extend the beginning of the period of investigation to the classical Athenian period (c. 480–330 BCE) (Hornblower 2003:651–652).

1. The passages under investigation are limited to those referring to actual slavery to the exclusion of those using slavery as a metaphor. Although the final search filter may also be useful in the interpretation of the latter passages, the metaphoric use may in itself delimit the relevant socio-historic context even further. The passages referring to actual slavery are: Matthew 8:5–13; 10:24–25; 24:45–51; 25:14–30; Luke 16:1–8; John 8:35; Acts 12:13–16; 1 Corinthians 7:21–23; Ephesians 6:5–8, 9; Colossians 3:22–25, 4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1–2b; Titus 2:9–10; Philemon 1–25; 1 Peter 2:18–25.

2. For purposes of this article, I limited computer-based database searches to sources referring to the period starting with the origin of the New Testament, that is, approximately 49 BCE until approximately 95 CE (cf. Van der Watt 2003:592–593).

3. See, for example, Crook (1984:9–13), Wiedemann (1987:11–21), Robinson (1997:102–103), Harrill (1998:30), Watson (1998:1–4) and Johnston (1999:24–29).

- The influence of Jewish tradition in New Testament times merits the extension of the period of investigation to the rabbinic period (c. 70–200 BCE) (Goodman 2003:1292).
- The codification of the most important sources of Roman law took place during the reign of Justinian in approximately 535 CE (Johnston 1999:14ff.).

Thus the first search term of the search filter is defined as the period from approximately 480 BCE to approximately 535 CE.

## Geographical region under investigation

The New Testament texts concerning slavery point to various geographical areas of interest for example Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, North Africa and Spain (Du Plessis 1998:34). The specific passages under investigation provide geographical references according to where the events described took place and the addresses of the addressees (see Table 2).

The geographical focus of the New Testament passages under investigation is thus Palestine, Asia Minor, Achaia, and Crete. The second search term of the search filter is defined accordingly.

## Definitions of slavery

The socio-historical approach described by Harrill (1998:4–6) and Janse van Rensburg (2000) are followed in determining the socio-historic contexts of the passages to be researched.

According to this approach, the events described in the text are perceived as interwoven with the social and political realities of the time (Janse van Rensburg 2000:567). It presupposes an emic approach, namely that data and phenomena are described in terms of its functions in ancient society, rather than in terms of modern theories and models (an etic approach) (Janse van Rensburg 2000:569–570). The aim is thus to construct the typical situations in which early Christians lived by allowing the text to present the categories, et cetera, rather than to use modern abstractions on ancient texts (Harrill 1998:5). Such an approach does not, however, completely ignore the contributions of modern historians, sociologists, and ethicists building history ‘from the ground up’ (Harrill 1998:6).

There is currently no general theory of slavery that allows a single definition of slavery for all cultures and times (Garlan 1988:24; Harrill 1998:14). Slavery is colloquially understood to refer to the buying, selling and owning of human beings as mere objects. Yet the matter is far more complex. No legal and coherent definition of slavery can be found in Greek sources, probably because of the absence of jurisprudence (Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005:35). A survey of the evidence suggests that any attempt to detect such a definition is futile. Freedom and slavery (or ‘unfreedom’) should rather be seen as concepts relative to one another based on dependence or independence (Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005:38).

Definitions found in Aristotle and Roman private law declare a slave to be property that is essentially no different from a farm implement or domesticated animal (Harrill 1998:14).

**TABLE 1:** Categorisation of secondary works on Greco-Roman slavery.

Categorisation	Examples
Slavery as ethical question • These works discuss the ethical foundations and implications of slavery.	Davies (1995)
Slavery as social phenomenon • These works typically ask questions like how slavery as an institution truly functioned and how it was experienced by slaves and slave-owners, and what effect slavery as an institution had on all other aspects of society, and especially its effect on ideologies of members of society at the time (Fisher 1993:v).	Barrow (1928), Westermann (1955), Sherwin-White (1967), Wiedemann (1981, 1987), Patterson (1982), Massey and Moreland (1992), Fisher (1993), Bradley (1987, 1989, 1994), Saller (1996), Turley (2000)
Slavery as cultural phenomenon • These works study the cultural representations of slaves in antiquity.	Joshel and Murnaghan (2001)
Slavery in historical perspective • These works investigate the historical development of slavery.	Westermann (1955), Finley (1980), Phillips (1996), Drescher and Engerman (1998), Turley (2000), Vlassopoulos (2011)
Slavery and philosophy/religion • These works study the influence of philosophical and/or religious traditions on slavery.	Vogt (1974), Garnsey (1996), Turley (2000), Harvey (2001), De Wet (2010)
Slavery as part of New Testament studies • These works study slavery as an aspect of the socio-historical context of the New Testament.	Bartchy (1973), Sherwin-White (1963), Beavis (1992), Garnsey (1996), Callahan, Horsley and Smith (1998), Harrill (1998, 2006), Glancy (2006), Marchal (2011)

**TABLE 2:** Geographical references of the New Testament passages under investigation.

Passage	Geographical reference(s)	Scriptural reference(s)
Matthew 8:5–13; 10:24–25; 24:45–51; 25:14–30	Palestine	Matthew 8:28; 9:1; 24:3
Luke 16:1–8	Palestine	Luke 13:22; 17:11
John 8:35	Palestine	John 8:2
Acts 12:13–16	Palestine	Acts 11:2
1 Corinthians 7:21–23	Corinth, province of Achaia	1 Corinthians 1:2
Ephesians 6:5–8, 9	Ephesus, Asia Minor	Ephesians 1:1
Colossians 3:22–25, 4:1	Colossae, Asia Minor	Colossians 1:2
1 Timothy 6:1–2b	Ephesus, Asia Minor	1 Timothy 1:3
Titus 2:9–10	Crete, Mediterranean Sea	Titus 1:5
Philemon 1–25	Colosae, Asia Minor	Philemon 2; cf. Colossians 4:17
1 Peter 2:18–25	Provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia	1 Peter 1:1

**TABLE 3:** Greek terminology for slaves.

Term	Possible English equivalents	Remarks on usage
ἀνδράποδον	'One taken in war and sold as a slave, whether originally slave or free' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	The only term that never leads to confusion (Garlan 1988:20).
αἰχμάλωτος	'Taken by the spear, captive, prisoner ... = ἀνδράποδον' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Used by Josephus to denote slaves (Wright 1998:98).
δοῦλος, δουλεία	'Born bondman or slave', 'slavery, bondage' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Most commonly used from the 5th century onwards (Fisher 1993:6).
οικέτης	'Household slave' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	The most frequently used term (Garlan 1988:21).
θεράπων, θεραπαινά	'Servant (whether slave or free)' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Used in contexts where no precise indication of origin or function is required (Garlan 1988:21).
ἀκολούθος	'Follower, attendant' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	
ὑπηρέτης	'Underling, servant, attendant' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	
παῖς	'Child'; 'slave, servant, man or maid (of all ages)' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	
ἀνθρώπος, γυνή	'Man', 'slave', 'woman' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996). Used with a demeaning implication (Fisher 1993:7)	
σῶμα	'Body' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Used from the 4th century onwards as synonyms for δοῦλος, ἀνδράποδον and οικέτης (the latter three terms being used as synonyms themselves) (Garlan 1988:21).
παῖς (in diminutive forms)	'Child', 'slave, servant, man or maid (of all ages)' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996). Used with a demeaning implication (Fisher 1993:7)	
λάτρις	'Hired servant', 'slave' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Terms less widely used, the latter two more commonly (Garlan 1988:21–22).
ἀμπίπολος, πρόσπολος	'Servant, attendant' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	
δμῶς, δμωή	'[Female] slave taken in war' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	

Such legal definitions must, however, be approached with circumspection since the law only provides inexact knowledge about social practice. Rabbinic sources share the fundamental ambiguity of Roman law with regard to the legal definition of slavery: slaves are perceived as mere objects, yet as human beings responsible for their actions (Hezser 2005:63). The classification of slaves as property is implied in rabbinic sources but rarely stated explicitly. According to the Mishnah, slaves are defined as persons subject to a householder's (owner's) full control (Flesher 1988:102–103). The slave's inherent features, namely being male and having the full power of reason, have no bearing on his classification as slave.

In the narrow sense, 'slave' can refer to chattel slaves of the classical Athenian type (De Sainte Croix 1981:133; Garlan 1988:201). In the broad sense it includes 'all types of legally defined personal dependency to which the Greeks sometimes referred as δουλεία' (Garlan 1988:201). De Sainte Croix (1981:134–136) refers to this broad sense as 'unfree labour' being 'the extraction of the largest possible surplus from the primary producers.' One must, however, recognise that these categories were not used by the Greeks and Romans since they divided humankind into two groups, namely free and slave, among other distinctions. There is no doubt that in the Greek and Roman world, chattel slavery was the dominant form of unfree labour (De Sainte Croix 1981:173).

Whilst the abovementioned definitions of chattel slavery focus on its legal foundation,<sup>4</sup> alternative definitions emphasise other aspects common to most forms of chattel slavery. Patterson (1982) defines slavery in terms of power relations. The following aspects are inherent in every power relation (Patterson 1982:1–2):

- The social aspect, namely the use or threat of violence in the control of one person by another.
- The psychological aspect of influence, namely the capacity to persuade another person to change the way he perceives his interests and circumstances.

4. Modern definitions of slavery also focus on its legal aspect. The United Nations, for example, defines chattel slavery as 'the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised' (League of Nations 1926).

- The cultural aspect of authority, namely the means of transforming force into right and obedience into duty.

Applying these principles to slavery, it may be defined as 'the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonoured persons' (Patterson 1982:13). Slavery is (except in the case of manumission) a life-long state of being violently dominated and dishonoured with no birthrights and no sense of belonging (Fisher 1993:5–6). Ultimately, slavery could mean social death (Patterson 1982:5).

Read together, these two definitions of chattel slavery, the one legal and the other social, emphasise the completeness of the power exercised by slave-owners and the dishonour and disorientation inflicted on slaves (Fisher 1993:6). Wiedemann (1987) attempts to combine these elements into one definition:

The slave was someone who had lost, or never had, any rights to share in society, and therefore to have access to food, clothing, and the other necessities of physical survival. (p. 22)

Chattel slavery thus was (and is) a multifaceted social phenomenon that must be defined and studied in terms of its legal and social foundations and consequences. The third search term defining the search filter is thus chattel slavery.

## Ancient terminology for slavery

A comparison of Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Aramaic terminology with regard to slavery may provide guidelines with regard to shared socio-historic contexts, since words are generally used and borrowed within their contemporary socio-cultural environment (Wright 1998:84, 107). This becomes especially apparent in the Jewish-Greek biblical translations.

### Greek terminology

The basic terminology describing slavery (Tables 3–6) in ancient Greece was extremely complex and generally ambiguous (Garlan 1988:20; Fisher 1993:6–7). This complexity and ambiguity came about because of the borrowing of terms from traditional systems of dependency such as the household and the family, and continued into the Hellenistic

**TABLE 4:** Greek terminology for slave-owners.

Term	Possible English equivalents	Remarks on usage
δεσπότης	'Master, lord ... in respect of slaves ... owner' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Sometimes entails harshness and caprice (Bietenhard 1976:508).
κύριος	'Lord, master ... head of a family ... master of a house – owner or secure possessor' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Carries overtones of legality and acknowledged authority (Bietenhard 1976:508).

**TABLE 5:** Greek terminology for the family unit.

Term	Possible English equivalents	Remarks on usage
οἶκος	'Family' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	As Greek has no word for the small social unit called 'family' in English, οἶκος acquired the meaning of household being those bound together by sharing the same dwelling place and therefore being under the authority of the same κύριος (Goetzmann 1976:247, 250). The family included the slaves.
οἰκονόμος	'One who managed a household ... house-steward being a slave' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Οἰκονόμος refers to all domestic officials who were mostly recruited from among the slaves (Goetzmann 1976:254).

**TABLE 6:** Greek terminology for manumitted slaves.

Term	Possible English equivalents	Remarks on usage
ἀφαιεῖς, ἀφιέναι	'Let go, loose, set free ... of manumission' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	This term explains nothing about the actual status of the slave with regard to the state or his or her former owner after manumission. It does, however, indicate that freed persons in ancient Greece had their particular status.
ἀπελευθεροῦν, ἀπελεύθερος	'Emancipate a slave', 'restored to freedom, emancipated slave, freedman' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Most commonly used appellation for manumitted slaves. Most scholars consider it to be a synonym for ἐξελευθεροῦν (cf. Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996) but these two terms represent different statuses or sub-statuses of manumitted slaves. A suitable translation of ἀπελευθεροῦν would be 'freed from (someone)'. The term seems to denote a continuing bond between owner and manumitted slave, signifying a specific status (Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005:120).
ἐξελευθεροῦν, ἐξελεύθερος	'Set at liberty', 'freedman' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996).	Rarely used. Most scholars consider it to be a synonym for ἀπελευθεροῦν (cf. Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996) but these two terms represent different statuses or sub-statuses of manumitted slaves. A suitable translation of ἐξελευθεροῦν would be 'thoroughly free' since the ἐξελεύθεροι formed a distinct status-group of manumitted slaves, free from any obligation to their former owners (Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005:125)
ἀνατιθέναι	'Set up as a votive gift, dedicate' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Used in sacral manumission with an indication of purpose of the action.
ἀποδιδόναι	'Deliver over, give up', 'sell' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996).	Used in sale-manumission with an indication of purpose of the action.
ἐλευθεροῦν	'Set free, release from, manumit' (Liddell <i>et al.</i> 1996)	Very rarely used.

period despite the fixed juridical definitions that existed at that time. Terminology describing slavery in Greek literature must thus be considered strictly contextually (Box 1).

## Latin terminology

In Tables 7–10 the Latin literature describes slavery terminology (Box 2).

## Hebrew terminology

Jewish involvement in the Hellenistic-Roman world meant an assimilation of Graeco-Roman practices and Greek and Latin terms for slaves and slavery (Wright 1998:84). This process involved a transformation of the Hebrew Bible's notion of servanthood.

Words signifying slaves (Box 3) occur in patriarchal stories, law codes, historical narratives, prophetic revelations and wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible (Flesher 1988:12) and presented in Tables 11–14.

עֶבֶד refers to any subservient relationship and does not necessarily imply ownership (Wright 1998:85; Bartchy 1992:62). It is used for both Hebrew and foreign slaves although the latter were treated to some extent as property. In the vast majority of cases עֶבֶד is rendered δοῦλος or παῖς in the Septuagint with a distinct preference for the latter in the

Pentateuch (Wright 1998:90–92). Οἰκέτης and θεράπων are also used and all these terms are used as synonyms or at least seem interchangeable.

Josephus prefers the term δοῦλος referring to chattel slaves (Wright 1998:98). He also uses other Greek words not used in the Septuagint, namely ἀνδράποδον and αἰχμάλωτος. Again, all these words seem to be used as synonyms. A striking feature of Josephus's writing is however his decreasing use of παῖς as meaning 'slave' even in contexts generally referring to slavery (Wright 1998:100). Philo follows roughly the same pattern with δοῦλος dominating, and other terms used as synonyms for it (Wright 1998:102). Philo employs παῖς as a play on its meanings of 'slave' and 'child' (Wright 1998:104–105). Also in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, slave terms are used interchangeably without any clear distinctions even in religious contexts (Wright 1998:107). One may conclude that the Jews in the Second Temple Period used Greek slave terms as they were used in their socio-cultural environment (Wright 1998:108).

## Jewish-Palestine Aramaic terminology

Tannaitic and Amoraic rabbinic documents are especially relevant to Jews and slavery in antiquity (Hezser 2005:14).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Tannaitic writings contain traditions dating from the 1st and 2nd centuries CE whilst Amoraic writings contain traditions dating from the 3rd to 5th centuries CE (Hezser 2005:14 fn. 57).

Thus an examination of Jewish-Palestine Aramaic terminology (Box 4) relating to slavery is necessary and is presented in Table 15–18.

## Summary

The Greek and Latin terminology clearly refer to chattel slavery as defined above. The Jewish terminology also conforms to this during the time of the New Testament despite legacies from the Old Testament laws on slavery. This is also reflected in the rabbinic literature. Thus the fourth search filter is defined as the Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Aramaic terminology listed above.

### BOX 1: Terminology describing elements of Greek literature.

Table 3	Slavery terminology	cf. Brown (1976–1978:589–599; Garland (1988:20–22); Fisher (1993:6–7)
Table 4	Slave-owners	Bietenhard (1976:508)
Table 5	Slaves family unit belonged to	Goetzmann (1976:247ff.)
Table 6	Slaves manumitted	Zelnick-Abramovitz (2005:51–52, 99–126)

### BOX 2: Terminology describing elements of Latin literature.

Table 7	Slavery terminology	cf. Wiedemann (1981:15); Bradley (1994)
Table 8	Slave-owners	
Table 9	Slaves family unit	
Table 10	Slaves manumitted	cf. Bradley (1987, 1994)

### BOX 3: Terminology describing elements of Hebrew Bible.

Table 11	Slavery terminology	VanGemeren (1997:36, 98, 123, 170, 177)
Table 12	Slave-owners	VanGemeren (1997:125)
Table 13	Slaves family unit	VanGemeren (1997:105); see also Hezser (2005:126)
Table 14	Slaves manumission	cf. VanGemeren 1997:87)

### BOX 4: Terminology describing elements of Jewish-Palestine Aramaic terminology.

Table 15	Slavery terminology in rabbinic sources	cf. Flesher (1988:209–212)
Table 16	Slave-owners	
Table 17	Slaves family unit	cf. Hezser (2005:126)
Table 18	Slaves manumission in rabbinic literature	

TABLE 7: Latin terminology for slaves.

Term	Possible English equivalents
<i>servus/serva</i>	'Slave'; 'Female slave' (Morwood 2005:173)
<i>verna</i>	'Slave born in the master's household' (Morwood 2005: 202)
<i>famulus/famula</i>	'[Female] slave, [maid]-servant, attendant' (Morwood 2005:73)
<i>mancipium</i>	'Formal mode of ownership; property; right of ownership; slave' (Morwood 2005:111)
<i>ancilla</i>	'Maid-servant, female slave' (Morwood 2005:13)
<i>puer</i>	'Young male slave' (Morwood 2005:152)

TABLE 8: Latin terminology for slave-owners.

Term	Possible English equivalents
<i>dominus</i>	'Master of the house; owner; lord, ruler' (Morwood 2005:61)
<i>possessor</i>	'Owner' (Morwood 2005:143)
<i>erus</i>	'Master; owner' (Morwood 2005:66)

TABLE 9: Latin terminology for the family unit.

Term	Possible English equivalents
<i>familia</i>	'Household, all persons under the control of one man, whether relations, freedmen, or slaves; family; servants or slaves belonging to one master' (Morwood 2005:73)
<i>domus</i>	'Household; family' (Morwood 2005:61)
<i>genus</i>	'Family' (Morwood 2005:81)
<i>gens</i>	'Family' (Morwood 2005:81)

TABLE 10: Latin terminology for manumission.

Term	Possible English equivalents
<i>manumitto</i>	'Set at liberty, emancipate, free' (Morwood 2005:112)
<i>libertus/liberta</i>	'Freedman, freedwoman' (Morwood 2005:106–107)

TABLE 11: Hebrew terminology for slaves.

Term	Possible English equivalents
גֵּלִיד (בית)	'Slave born in the house(hold)' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:382)
אִמָּה	'Handmaid, maidservant' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:59)
שִׁפְחָה	'Maidservant (not strictly distinguished from אִמָּה)' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:59)
נְתִין	'Temple slave' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:641)
עֶבֶד	'Slave (held in bondage)' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:671)
עֲבֻדוֹת	'Servitude' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:674)
עֲבָדָה	'Slaves, servants (as body)' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:673)

TABLE 12: Hebrew terminology for slave-owners.

Term	Possible English equivalents
אֲדוֹן	'Lord, master of slaves' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:11)

TABLE 13: Hebrew terminology for the family unit.

Term	Possible English equivalents
בֵּית	'House ... inmates of a house, family, the wife(s), children and servants' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:122–123). The term can be considered the Hebrew equivalent of the Latin <i>domus</i> (Hezser 2005:126). Children and slaves were viewed as members of the family

TABLE 14: Hebrew terminology for manumission.

Term	Possible English equivalents
יָצָא	'See יִקְפְּשֵׁי' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:393); 'Of emancipation' (Brown, Driver & Briggs 2000)
חָפַשׁ	'(To) free ... be freed (she-slave)' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:323)
יִקְפְּשֵׁי	'Freeman ... released, emancipated ... from slavery' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:323)
חֲפֻשֵׁי	'Freedom (from slavery)' (Koehler & Baumgartner 1998:323)

TABLE 15: Hebrew terminology for slaves in rabbinic sources.

Term	Possible English equivalents
גֵּלִיד (בית)	'A slave born in the owner's house' (Jastrow 1950:578)
אִמָּה	'Handmaid' (Jastrow 1950:75)
שִׁפְחָה	'[Attached to the household,] handmaid, slave' (Jastrow 1950:1614)
נְתִין	'[Donated, dedicated to the Temple service,] Nathin' (Jastrow 1950:943)
עֶבֶד, עֲבָדָה, עֲבֻדוֹת	'Slave, servant' (Jastrow 1950:1035)
עֲבֻדוֹת, עֲבָדוֹת, עֲבָדוֹתָא	'Slavery, servitude; status of a slave' (Jastrow 1950:1035)

TABLE 16: Hebrew terminology for slave-owners.

Term	Possible English equivalents
בְּעֵל, בְּעֵלָה	'(mostly in compounds) owner of, master of, possessed of, given to ...'; 'mistress, owner' (Jastrow 1950:182)

## Aspects arising from the New Testament passages

A perfunctory reading of the relevant New Testament passages<sup>6</sup> suggests that the following socio-historic delimitations can be utilised:

- Slavery in the New Testament is delimited to urban or domestic slavery based on the inclusion of the exhortations directed at slave-owners in the household codes (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1). One might also assume a primarily urban audience in the urban Christian congregations of the New Testament.
- The use of the following terms for slavery, *παῖς, δοῦλος, οἰκέτης* and their Latin, Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents.
- The use of the following terms for slave-owners: *κύριος, δεσπότης* and their Latin, Hebrew, and Aramaic equivalents.
- The relationship between slave-owner and slave indicated by the owner's treatment of his slave(s) (Mt 8:5–13; 10:24–25; Ac 12:13–16; Eph 6:5–8, 9; Col 3:22–25, 4:1; 1 Tm 6:1–2b; Tt 2:9–10; Phlm 1–25; 1 Pt 2:18–25).
- The slave's economic usefulness and loyalty towards his owner (Mt 24:45–51; 25:14–30; Lk 16:1–8).
- The slave as a member of the owner's household (Jn 8:35).
- The slave's participation in their master's or their own religious activities (Phlm 1–25).
- Manumission of slaves by their owners (1 Cor 7:21–23).

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to define a search filter to delimit the available material on Greco-Roman slavery to those aspects of slavery that constitute the socio-historical context to the New Testament passages referring to slavery. Five search terms were defined, namely, the period under investigation; the geographical region under investigation; various definitions of slavery; ancient terminology for slavery; and aspects arising from the New Testament passages themselves. Applying these search terms, a useful search filter will consist of the following elements:

- Domestic chattel slavery as defined in paragraph 4:
  - during the period 480 BCE – 535 CE
  - in Palestine, Asia Minor, Achaia, and Crete
  - indicated by commonly used vocabulary, *δοῦλος, οἰκέτης, παῖς, κύριος, δεσπότης, οἶκος, servus, verna, dominus, familia, דַבְרָא, תַבְרָא, וְדָבָר* (including related forms in Hebrew and Aramaic)
  - delimited by the aspects highlighted by the New Testament passages to be studied, namely the legal, economic, social-familial, and religious relationship between slave-owner and slave with the emphasis on the rights and duties of the slave-owner in such relationship.

This search filter is schematically represented (see Figure 1).

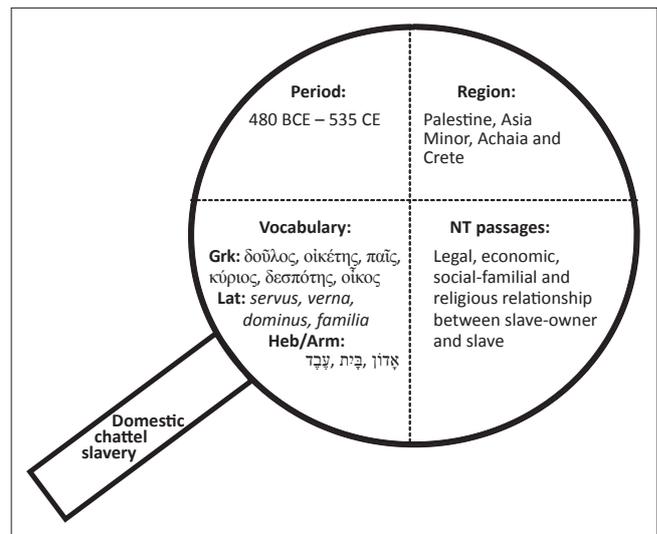
6. Matthew 8:5–13; 10:24–25; 24:45–51; 25:14–30; Luke 16:1–8; John 8:35; Acts 12:13–16; 1 Corinthians 7:21–23; Ephesians 6:5–8, 9; Colossians 3:22–25, 4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1–2b; Titus 2:9–10; Philemon 1–25; 1 Peter 2:18–25.

TABLE 17: Hebrew terminology for the family unit.

Term	Possible English equivalents
בַּיִת	'House, household, home' (Jastrow 1950:167–168)

TABLE 18: Hebrew terminology for manumission in the rabbinic literature.

Term	Possible English equivalents
לְפָא	'Exempt ... to be freed' (Jastrow 1950:587)
חֶפְשׁ	'To be set free ... this implies that he is a freedman' (Jastrow 1950:493)
חֶפְשִׁי	'Freedom ... free, exempt' (Jastrow 1950:493)



Grk, Greek; Lat, Latin; Heb/Arm, Hebrew, Armenian; NT, New Testament.

FIGURE 1: Schematic representation of the search filter.

Practically speaking, one would survey the available material through the lens of the search filter. A book or journal paper on slavery must therefore deal with slavery during the period 480 BCE – 535 CE in the regions of Palestine, Asia Minor, Achaia and Crete with reference to legal, economic, social-familial and religious relationship between slave-owner and slave. In ancient sources the vocabulary identified as relevant search terms must be present (made easier by computerised versions of these sources for example the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* [TLG]). Thus, by way of illustration, material on American and colonial slavery would be excluded by the application of the search filter but material dealing with the social-familial relations of slaves in Ephesus in the 1st century would be included.

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