

# THE FREEING OF GOD'S IMAGE BEARERS

A long time ago, in Israel, a scribe asked Jesus what the most important command of all is. Jesus said: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:29b-31a). Love God and love others. That doesn't sound too hard, does it?



Have you ever ignored a dirty sock on the bathroom floor, stepping around it for days? People do that with sin, too. But sin is much worse than a filthy sock. Sin violates God's laws and separates us from him. Sin hurts other people—it is the opposite of love. We are going to look at an ugly sin that was ignored not just for days, but centuries. However, God's people loved their neighbors—and their neighborly love changed history.

Even though God created us to love each other, some wicked people kidnapped other people and forced them to work. We call that slavery. Slavery hurts human beings. For a while, Christians ignored that slavery is wrong and pretended that people with skin that was a different color than theirs were not their neighbors. Then, God's people remembered they must fight for justice and truth—they must love their neighbors. All people are image bearers—created in the image of God.

Slavery has been around for a very long time. Maybe you remember the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob? Joseph's brothers were jealous of the dreams God gave him, so they attacked Joseph and sold him to Ishmaelite merchants, who then sold Joseph as a slave in Egypt. Eventually, all of Jacob's descendants, the

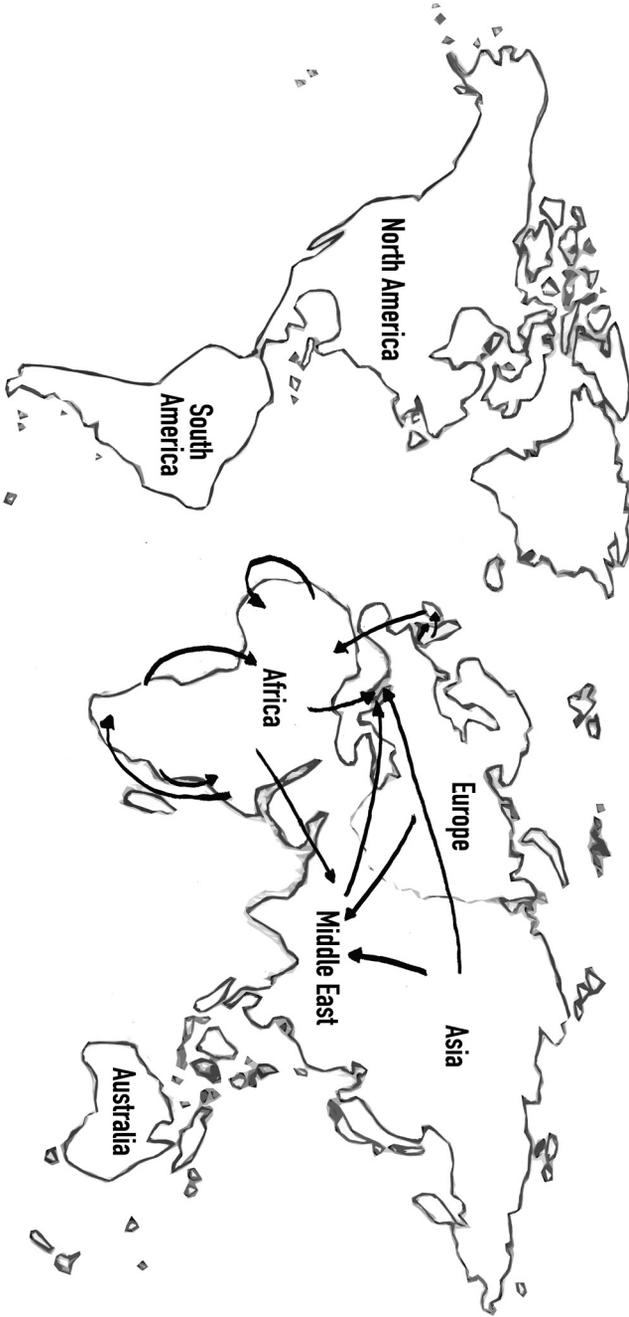


Israelites, were slaves in Egypt until God freed them in the Exodus.

After that, the history of slavery is a bit of a mess, even for careful history detectives like you. Slavery was everywhere. African tribes enslaved each other. North Africans enslaved the British and Irish. Ancient Greeks and Romans took slaves from parts of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Muslims from the Middle East took slaves from Africa, Europe, and Asia. Europeans enslaved each other. Do you know the story of Patrick? He was a slave stolen from England and taken to Ireland.

Then, eleven years before the Gutenberg Bible was printed on the very first printing press, Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal—who had been sailing around growing sugar cane on islands for some twenty-four years—kidnapped two hundred and forty Africans. Prince Henry kept kidnapping Africans, about eight hundred each year. By the time Martin Luther nailed The Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church in Germany, telling people that we are saved in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone, a Roman Catholic bishop in Spain told people to grab free workers in Africa.

# WHY DID SLAVERY END?



When Europeans sailed to the New World—the Americas and the islands of the Atlantic—some people were looking for the freedom to worship Jesus, but others were looking for land, gold, and crops. Of course, anyone who is going to farm a tropical paradise needs workers. At first, no one cared what color skin their slaves had. Black, white, or native men could be explorers or farmers, enslaved or free. Unfortunately, kidnapped laborers died—often. The plantation owners needed to kidnap a lot more free workers.



If you spend time looking at a map, you'll see that Africa is huge, with fifty-four countries on the continent. There were millions of Africans to kidnap. So, that's what the kidnappers did.

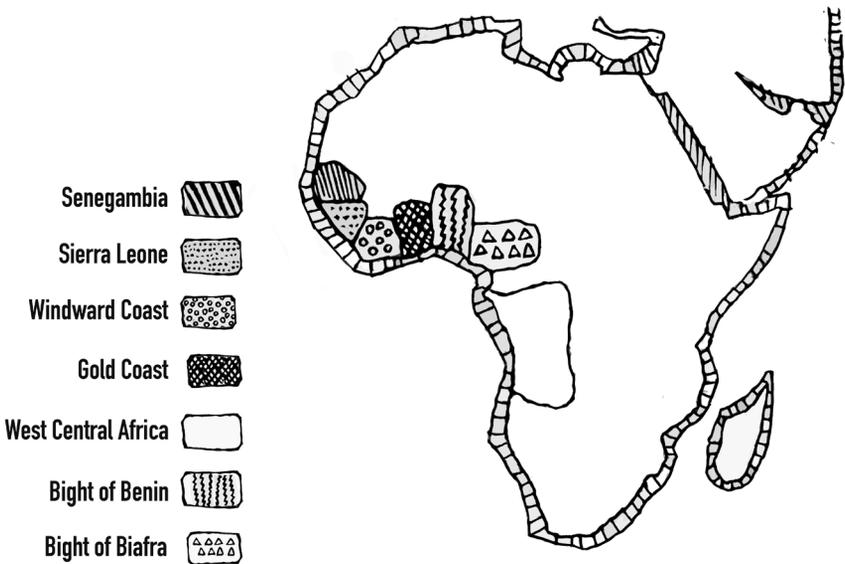
As the Reformer John Knox was telling the people of Scotland about the good news of Jesus Christ, sailors enslaved ten thousand people a year to work in the New World. They sailed from port to port, packing their ships with five hundred Africans, like sardines in a can. By the time Christians began to organize to protest enslavement, over thirty thousand Africans per year were being shipped into lives of forced servitude. Just twelve years later, the number had increased to fifty thousand each year. By the time of the American Revolution, more than seventy-five thousand people were kidnapped each year from Africa and forced to work in fields, stores, and homes in the Americas.

The Americas were colonized—that means settled—by Western European countries like Britain, Spain, Portugal, and France. By 1772—just four years before the American Revolution, if you were free, standing in a room with twenty-three people, you could be the only free person in the entire room. It was a mess.

People were sinning all over the place. They were kidnapping others and buying people as if they were

cows or sheep. Families were separated from each other, people were abused, and slave owners refused to let slaves read God’s Word or pray.

The big fight to end slavery lasted two hundred years—from AD 1688 until 1888. This is the story of how—and why—global slavery ended. It’s the story of Christians who loved their neighbors with their whole lives and brave, enslaved men, women, and children who fought for the freedom of their neighbors.



Places from which enslaved people departed Africa by ship.

# WORKING FOR FREEDOM

We become Christians when we repent—turn away from our sins—and believe in Jesus. Christians are commanded to love biblical justice, to protect others, and to speak for people in need. Freeing the enslaved was a big job. People who loved their neighbors enough to spend their lives working to abolish—or end—slavery are called abolitionists.

For two hundred years, Christians used Scripture to write arguments against kidnapping and abuse. They pressured governments to abolish the slave trade—kidnapping and shipping Africans overseas. Escaped slaves told the story of how God protected and freed them. Lawyers fought to free—or emancipate—enslaved people after the end of the slave trade. In some countries, many people died in battle to end slavery.