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# THE INTERSECTION OF LAW, THEOLOGY, AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE NARRATIVE OF JOSEPH: LINKING THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

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THE INTERSECTION OF LAW, THEOLOGY, AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE  
NARRATIVE OF JOSEPH: LINKING THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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by  
Julie Waters  
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## THE INTERSECTION OF LAW, THEOLOGY, AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE NARRATIVE OF JOSEPH: LINKING THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

This paper seeks to connect the biblical narrative of Joseph, a story of slavery and redemption, to modern day human trafficking through the lenses of current and pragmatic legal and theological implications. The two-fold purpose of the paper is to use Joseph as a case study to better understand US anti-human trafficking laws and then provide victims of human trafficking with biblical hope that can be gleaned through a theological understanding of the narrative of Joseph. To fully understand Joseph's role as a slave and the interplay of modern day implications, the paper first examines the institution of slavery in the ancient Near East. Then, this paper uses the narrative of Joseph as a way to unpack US laws pertaining to human trafficking. Lastly, victims of human trafficking can draw hope from Joseph by understanding the theology underlying Joseph's story.

### INTRODUCTION TO SLAVERY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

#### **Sources of Slavery**

Isaac Mendelsohn provides an overview of slavery in the ancient Near East by discussing sources of slavery, the legal status of slaves, and the role of slaves in the economy.<sup>1</sup> According to Mendelsohn, the first humans to be enslaved in Ancient Babylonia were prisoners of war, typically from other countries. Those spared on the battlefield became prisoners of war,

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Mendelsohn, "Slavery in the Ancient Near East," *The Biblical Archaeologist* IX (1946), 74.

reduced to slavery. The Hammurabi Code illustrated a common practice, which allowed for such prisoners to be ransomed or for their family members to remarry.<sup>2</sup> The fourteenth century BC Tell el-Amarna letters describe prisoners of war being sent as gifts to Egyptian overlords by Syrian and Palestinian princes.<sup>3</sup>

Another source of ancient slaves came from the sale of minors native to their own countries. Impoverished families could sell their children unconditionally or employ the sale-adoption practice.<sup>4</sup> Using the sale-adoption practice, a typical Nuzi contract would consist of the purchaser adopting the girl for a price along with the condition that she must be married when she reaches puberty.<sup>5</sup> Her parents would be paid the negotiated purchase price. This practice of parents selling their children did not die out with the illegalization of slavery. In terms of modern day human trafficking, this type of practice still occurs around the world. Children are being sold by their parents into slavery, primarily due to poverty.

Next, according to Mendelsohn, once the children were sold, poverty or debt drove people to sell themselves into slavery.<sup>6</sup> Rather than starve to death, ancient Nuzi texts show people voluntarily entering into servitude in exchange for food, shelter, and clothing. There are also examples from the Old Testament illustrating this situation. Leviticus 25:39-54 describes a free Hebrew who sells himself because of his impoverished circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Similar to those in this category are the native defaulting debtors. Interest rates in the ancient Near East were exorbitant with average rates of 20-25% on silver and 33.3% on grain in Babylonia.<sup>8</sup> If a debtor

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Mendelsohn, *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

defaulted, his creditor had the right to seize him and sell him into slavery, which resulted in large numbers of free-born people being reduced to slavery.<sup>9</sup> Given this unlimited power, the laws sought to restrain creditors by restricting the number of years that such a slave could serve. The Hammurabi Code freed the defaulting debtor after three years of servitude while the Old Testament released debtors after six years of compulsory labor.<sup>10</sup>

### **Legal Status of Slaves**

Legally, the slaves were considered property or chattel. Slaves could be traded, bought, or leased, much like cars today. Slaves were considered to be so completely inferior to free people that they were stripped of their genealogy. Typically, the name of a person's father was mentioned in conjunction with his own name, but slaves were not afforded this common practice.<sup>11</sup> Slave families could be disrupted for any reason; husbands and wives, children and parents – all relationships could be severed by the selling of a slave. Masters often changed the names of their slaves in order to assert authority over the slaves.<sup>12</sup> Pharaoh changed Joseph's name to Saphenath-Paneah (Genesis 41:45).

During the Neo-Babylonian period, it was customary to mark slaves by tattooing the owner's name on the wrist of the slave.<sup>13</sup> Biblical law prescribes that voluntary slaves pierce their ears with an awl.<sup>14</sup> Today, pimps often tattoo the girls that they prostitute with the pimp's name or brand; this acts as a sign of ownership and humiliates the girls. If they are minors, these girls are victims of sex trafficking.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>11</sup> Mendelsohn, Ibid., 80.

<sup>12</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book, 1961), 46.

<sup>13</sup> Mendelsohn, Ibid., 81.

<sup>14</sup> See Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17.

With regards to runaway slaves, the Hammurabi Code called for the death of those who encouraged slaves to runaway or harbored fugitive slaves.<sup>15</sup> In ancient Babylonia, a runaway slave was put in chains and had his face tattooed with “A runaway, seize!”<sup>16</sup>

### **The Role of Slaves in the ANE Economy**

As Mendelsohn describes the various roles played by slaves, he asserts that even though slavery was widespread, the civilizations of the ancient Near East did not economically depend upon the slave population.<sup>17</sup> The four primary roles that slaves played in the economy were state slaves, temple slaves, and agriculture/industry slaves. State slaves were typically war prisoners, and they constructed roads, dug canals, and built temples. Temple slaves were prisoners of war as well but also included dedications of slaves by private individuals.<sup>18</sup> Their duties were typically menial work. Privately owned slaves were used in agriculture and industry. Mendelsohn contends that the ancient Near East’s economy was not sustained by slave labor. State slaves were employed in non-competitive enterprises, and the temples employed mostly free people for cultivating the land and artisan craftsmanship.<sup>19</sup>

## THE NARRATIVE OF JOSEPH FROM A LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

### **The Background of Joseph**

Joseph is the son of the Hebrew patriarch, Jacob, and his wife, Rachel. Jacob is also referred to as Israel throughout the Bible. Rachel was barren for a long time before she had Joseph (Genesis 30:22-24). She died while giving birth to her second child, Benjamin (Genesis

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<sup>15</sup> Mendelsohn, *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Mendelsohn, *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

35:16-18). Jacob “loved Joseph more than any of his other sons (Genesis 37:3).” Such favoritism invoked the wrath of his brothers and led to his enslavement. Through four wives, Jacob had twelve sons: Reuben (the firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher (Genesis 35:22-26).

Joseph’s narrative begins when he is seventeen years old (Genesis 37:2) and ends at his death at the age of one hundred and ten years old (Genesis 50:26). The average lifespan for an Egyptian during Joseph’s time was between forty and fifty years old.<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Mathews proposes a timeline that includes Joseph spending ninety-three years living in Egypt before he dies.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the time period between the sale of Joseph and his family’s final descent into Egypt is twenty-two years. Mathews attributes this calculation to Joseph’s thirteen years in Egypt<sup>22</sup> plus seven years of plentiful food<sup>23</sup> plus two years of famine.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, approximately twenty-two years go by before Joseph is reconciled with his family.

Commentators place Joseph’s rise to power in Egypt under Pharaoh Senwosret III (also known as Sesotris III).<sup>25</sup> During the Middle Kingdom, Senwosret III of the Twelfth Dynasty reigned for nineteen years approximately from 1837 to 1818 and then possibly served as co-regent with his son, Amenemhet III.<sup>26</sup> It was the Twelfth Dynasty who developed trade

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<sup>20</sup> John Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 77.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*. New American Commentary 1B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 687.

<sup>22</sup> See Genesis 37:2a and 41:46.

<sup>23</sup> See Genesis 41:46-49.

<sup>24</sup> See Genesis 45:6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Hill and John Walton, *Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 29.

<sup>26</sup> Jack Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 742-743.

relations with Syro-Palestine, making this the most likely period for initial contact between Egypt and the Hebrews.<sup>27</sup>

### **Joseph Sold into Slavery**

Genesis 37 is the narrative of Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers. The entire family of Jacob is living in Canaan, and Joseph is seventeen years old (Genesis 37:1-2). As previously noted, the beginning of the chapter emphasizes Jacob's favoritism of Joseph. Jacob's favoritism is displayed through the special creation of a "richly ornamented robe" for Joseph, otherwise known as the coat of many colors (Genesis 37:3). Commentators suggest that the robe is symbolic of royalty and foreshadows Joseph's royal rule in Egypt.<sup>28</sup> Jacob's favoritism, in conjunction with Joseph sharing with his family about two of his dreams, in which his brothers and parents are portrayed as bowing down before Joseph, stirs up the deadly ire of his brothers (Genesis 37:3-11). "They hated him" appears three times within the first eleven verses of this chapter, such emphasis strongly points towards a deeply rooted hatred of their brother, Joseph.<sup>29</sup>

Jacob sends Joseph off to find his brothers who are grazing the family's flocks and to report back to him about their activities (Genesis 37:12-14). Joseph gets rather lost and is guided by an unknown man who says that his brothers have gone to Dothan, which is located in a valley known for its rich pastureland (Genesis 37:15-17).<sup>30</sup> Dothan is near a major trading lane, making for a likely appearance by the Ishmaelite merchants.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hill, *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: a Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 500.

<sup>29</sup> See Genesis 37:4, 5, and 8.

<sup>30</sup> Nahum Sarna, *Genesis. JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 258.

<sup>31</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 697.



The brothers see Joseph arriving from a distance and plot to kill him. Their plan is to kill him, throw him down a well, and tell their father that a ferocious animal devoured him. Reuben, the oldest brother, intervenes and convinces his brothers to not kill Joseph but just throw him down a well alive. Reuben hopes to later rescue Joseph out of the well. As Joseph approaches, they rip off his coat and throw him into the well (Genesis 37:18-24).

As the brothers sit down to eat their meal, they see a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead on their way to Egypt, loaded with spices, balm and myrrh. Judah comes up with the idea to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites so that Joseph's blood would not dirty their hands, "after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood (Genesis 37:25-27)." The brothers carry out the plot without Reuben's knowledge and sell Joseph to the merchants for twenty shekels of silver, who take him to Egypt (Genesis 37:28).

Joseph's brothers sold him for twenty shekels of silver (Genesis 37:28). Joseph was trafficked by his very own brothers into slavery. Twenty shekels of silver is equivalent to eight ounces of silver.<sup>32</sup> Today, twenty shekels is approximately equal to \$143.<sup>33</sup> At the time Joseph was sold, twenty shekels was also the price for one head of oxen.<sup>34</sup> Mathews notes that Joseph's selling price was the average price for a male slave during Old Babylonian times, which was early second millennium BC. By the Persian times of the late first millennium, the cost increased to between ninety to one hundred twenty shekels of silver for a slave, which is the equivalent of \$644 to \$859 today.<sup>35</sup> Today, according to author and leading human trafficking

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<sup>32</sup> *Quest Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 54.

<sup>33</sup> Chicago Mercantile Exchange Group, "Silver Futures," CME Group, [http://www.cmegroup.com/trading/metals/precious/silver\\_quotes\\_settlements\\_futures.html#prodType=undefined](http://www.cmegroup.com/trading/metals/precious/silver_quotes_settlements_futures.html#prodType=undefined) (accessed September 2, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, 84.

<sup>35</sup> Hamilton, *Ibid.*, 422.

expert, Kevin Bales estimates that the average price of a slave today, as a victim of human trafficking, is \$90.<sup>36</sup>

### **Applying the Trafficking Victims Protection Act to Joseph**

In Genesis, it is clear that Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers out of malice. Joseph did not really fit into the four categories of Mendelsohn's sources of slavery, but nonetheless, the Bible is clear that Joseph was a slave. He was sold to the Ishmaelites, who later sold him to Potiphar the Egyptian. Today, victims of human trafficking in the United States are defined under the federal law of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), which was first passed in 2000, to address the problem of human trafficking. The TVPA defines human trafficking in its severest forms as:

(A) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or

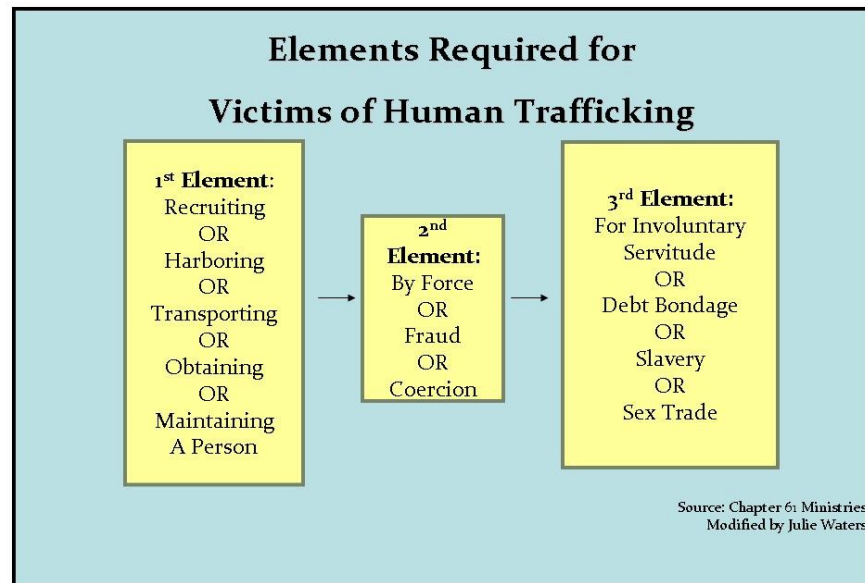
(B) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.<sup>37</sup>

In order for Joseph to be a victim of human trafficking today, he must meet the requirements of the TVPA and fulfill each of the three elements demonstrated in the chart below that summarizes the definitions found in the TVPA.

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<sup>36</sup> Kevin Bales, "We can Put an End to Slavery," CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/03/30/bales.end.slavery/index.html> (accessed April 12, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Public Law 106-386, 106<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess. (October 28, 2000), H.R.3244, Division A, Section 103 (8)(A) and (B).



Joseph would qualify as a human trafficking victim under the TVPA because he meets each of the three elements. Under the first element, Joseph was transported from Canaan to Egypt. Under the second element, this transportation occurred by force. As for the last element, he was taken into slavery. Victims only need one requirement under each element to fulfill that section of the law. For example, under the first element, a person only needs to be harbored not recruited, harbored, transported, obtained, and maintained.

Joseph meets the first element because he was transported by the Ishmaelites from Canaan into Egypt. It is extremely important to note that the transporting of victims is not necessary for human trafficking to occur. The term “human trafficking” can be misleading simply because of the word “trafficking,” but it is widely recognized within the government and nonprofit organizations that victims do not have to be transported anywhere for human trafficking to have taken place. Domestic teenagers lured into prostitution can never leave their city of origin, and they are still considered, by law, to be victims of human trafficking. Additionally, transporting is just one of five possibilities under the first element. Therefore, it is critical to understand that not all human trafficking involves the transportation of individuals across state or country boundaries.

For the second element, it must be demonstrated that Joseph was either forced, coerced, or tricked (fraud) into human trafficking. The strongest argument for the second element is that Joseph was forced to go with the Ishmaelites into slavery by his brothers. His brothers threw him down a well and then sold him to the Ishmaelites. Joseph did not go willingly. Through means of violence, Joseph was forced into slavery by the ones who meant to kill him.

Lastly, for Joseph the third element focuses on slavery. Joseph was transported by force into slavery. He was sold for twenty shekels of silver. He first worked as a slave for Potiphar and then eventually the Pharaoh of Egypt. The Bible clearly portrays Joseph as a slave in the book of Genesis, thus fulfilling the third element required by the TVPA. Therefore, under today's federal laws, Joseph would qualify as a victim of human trafficking because he meets the requirements of each of the three elements.

### **Summary of T-visa**

If Joseph had been trafficked into the US in modern times, he could have qualified for a T-visa to stay in the US as a nonimmigrant if he cooperated with law enforcement in their investigation against his traffickers. The T-visa is a nonimmigrant visa designed to protect international human trafficking victims who come forward in the US to report their victimization by traffickers and assist law enforcement in the investigation and prosecution. The T-visa is available only to victims of severe forms of trafficking and allows them to remain in the US for an authorized stay of three years and provides employment authorization.<sup>38</sup> At the end of three years, the victim can adjust their status from nonimmigrant to permanent resident. Each year, only 5000 T-visas are issued by the Department of Homeland Security. In summary, the narrative of Joseph serves as a useful case study to help the lay person understand the legalities of the TVPA and the T-visa.

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<sup>38</sup> Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, and US Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services, "Guide for Legal Advocates Providing Services to Victims of Human Trafficking," Free the Captives, LLC, [http://www.freethecaptiveshouston.com/resources/guide\\_for\\_legal\\_advocates.pdf](http://www.freethecaptiveshouston.com/resources/guide_for_legal_advocates.pdf) (accessed September 1, 2010), 66-7.

## THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS FROM JOSEPH

Besides helping the lay person to understand federal anti-human trafficking laws, Joseph's narrative carries significant theological implications for human trafficking victims. The implications from Joseph's narratives are that God understands and cares about the plight of human trafficking victims, He is with them in the midst of despair, and forgiveness can facilitate the process of healing. First, Joseph's narrative contains many aspects that make him highly relatable to most victims of human trafficking. Second, victims are able to observe God's close relationship to Joseph throughout his enslavement and witness God's continuing presence in Joseph's life. Last, Joseph forgave his brothers for the crime that they committed against him, thus demonstrating to victims the role of forgiveness in the healing process.

### **Human Trafficking Victims can Relate to Joseph's Circumstances**

Victims of human trafficking can relate to Joseph's story because he has endured much of what they have endured. If victims are able to identify with Joseph, they will better understand the theological implications. First of all, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. Many human trafficking victims around the world are trafficked by their own family members. It is not uncommon for parents to sell one of their children for food or to pay off a debt. "Parents sell their children for a variety of reasons – virtually all linked to poverty," Diana Pinata of Vital Voices, a global woman's advocacy group in Washington, DC says. "Some think the child will have a better life or that their daughter will be able to send money home," she says. "For some, it's just one less mouth to feed."<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, Joseph was sold not just once, but twice. He was first sold to the Ishmaelites, who then sold him to Potiphar. Human trafficking victims are sold repeatedly.

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<sup>39</sup> CQ Researcher, "Human Trafficking and Slavery," Human Rights Resource Center, <http://www.hrusa.org/workshops/trafficking/CQResearcher.pdf> (accessed June 14, 2010), 287.

They can be sold to several traffickers before they reach their final destination. Human trafficking is a lucrative business simply because people can be sold and resold.<sup>40</sup>

Thirdly, Joseph endured sexual harassment in Potiphar's household. In chapter 39 of Genesis, Joseph is described as handsome and well-built, and Potiphar's wife begins to notice his physical appearance. She implores him to sleep with her, but he refuses (39:7-8). Potiphar's wife is persistent. "And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her (39:10)."

There are several interesting points about this particular situation. First of all, human trafficking victims in all areas of trafficking, including domestic servitude, are at high risk for sexual harassment and assault. Once a human being is reduced to the status of property, sexual violence is common and not viewed as a violation of rights. According to the traffickers, victims have no rights. They are items to be used and discarded. Thus far in the narrative, Joseph is fortunate. He has merely been harassed by a persistent housewife. Many human trafficking victims are not so fortunate. They are repeatedly raped or otherwise sexually abused by their employers or traffickers repeatedly. Joseph also illustrates that sexual violence is not limited to the female gender.

Fourth, Joseph is wrongly imprisoned. After refusing to sleep with Potiphar's wife, she cries foul and accuses Joseph of trying to rape her. Potiphar throws Joseph in prison because of his wife's accusations (Gen. 39:20). Joseph was imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Often times, human trafficking victims are imprisoned for crimes that they did not commit willingly. They are arrested as criminals instead of granted aid as victims. "A significant challenge to identifying victims of human trafficking is that many have historically been, and in some instances continue to be, viewed as criminals (e.g., undocumented immigrants, prostitutes)

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<sup>40</sup> Dina Haynes, "(Not) Found Chained to a Bed in a Brothel: Conceptual, Legal, and Procedural Failures to Fulfill the Promise of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act," *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal* 21(Spring 2007): 337.

and subject to arrest, detention, and/or deportation.”<sup>41</sup> For example, if a human trafficking victim is arrested in a foreign country, he or she will often times be imprisoned because he or she is in the country illegally. Instead of viewing the person as a victim of human trafficking, he or she is treated as a criminal without proper documentation.

In summary, Joseph endured many of the circumstances that face human trafficking victims today. He was sold by family members, sexually harassed, and wrongly imprisoned. Joseph was a slave and faced slave-like conditions. Victims today can sympathize with his trials and understand the betrayal, violations, and unfair suffering that he underwent.

### **God is with Joseph**

This section of the paper introduces the first theological implication for human trafficking victims by focusing on how God was continually present with Joseph during his enslavement. The author of the narrative is careful to highlight numerous instances where God is explicitly involved in Joseph’s predicament, thus showing how God never forsake Joseph. God’s continued presence in Joseph’s life should serve as a reminder to victims of God’s promise found in Deuteronomy 31:6 that says, “...[He] will never leave you nor forsake you.”

After Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites, the narrative resumes in Genesis 39 with the Ishmaelites taking him to Egypt and selling him to Potiphar, who is one of Pharaoh’s officials. Immediately after setting up the background, the author states

“The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned (Genesis 39:2-4).”

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<sup>41</sup> Heather J. Clawson et al., “Human Trafficking Into and Within the United States: A Review of the Literature,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/HumanTrafficking/LitRev/index.pdf> (accessed June 3, 2010).

The author wants the reader to know that from the beginning God was watching over and protecting Joseph despite being sold into slavery. These verses show us that God cares about Joseph; He cares about people in enslaved in human trafficking. Even Potiphar could see that God was with Joseph. To Potiphar, it was so evident that God was with Joseph that he decided to entrust his entire household to Joseph.

Furthermore, God is not just with Joseph during times of prosperity but also when Joseph was wrongly imprisoned by Potiphar for allegedly attempting to assault Potiphar's wife. The author states that "the Lord was with Joseph" in prison (Genesis 39:21). God granted Joseph favor before the prison warden, and the warden put Joseph in charge of the other prisoners. "The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did (Genesis 39:23)." Here again, God is watching over Joseph and providing ways of keeping him safe. God helped both Potiphar and the prison ward to look upon Joseph favorably. God was always with Joseph, in both good and bad circumstances.

Although it is clear that God is the one who is elevating Joseph to positions of stature, one must be careful to not assume that God will always do so for all victims of human trafficking. From the narrative of Joseph, it is safe to assume that God is indeed with victims throughout their trials but they will not always be promoted to a high level of responsibility. Nevertheless, victims can be rest assured that just as God was with Joseph during his enslavement and imprisonment, He too is with them. God cares about the oppressed and burdened.

The Bible is clear about how God views the downtrodden. "He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the



ways of the wicked (Psalm 146:7-9).” Human trafficking victims are often aliens, the fatherless, and widows. In essence, God cares about human trafficking victims and desires justice.

The previous examples have been the author of Genesis telling the reader that God cares about Joseph. There are several examples that show Joseph, himself, acknowledging God’s presence in his life. The first example is when Joseph interprets the dreams of two prisoners and then later, the dreams of Pharaoh. Each time he interprets a dream, Joseph fully acknowledges that God is the one who interprets dreams. Pharaoh asks Joseph to interpret his dream, and Joseph’s first response is that, “I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires (Genesis 41:16).” Then, Joseph reveals the meanings of Pharaoh’s dreams, and his revelations come to pass. Egypt experiences seven years of great abundance, followed by seven years of famine. It is through the God-given ability to interpret dreams that finally elevates Joseph to his highest position. He is over all of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:40). Joseph always acknowledged that interpretations were from God.

Secondly, Joseph further honors God for this continuing help and presence by naming his children in such a way that reflects God’s glory. Joseph had two sons in Egypt before the famine. “Joseph named his firstborn, Manasseh, and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” The second son he named Ephraim and said, “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering (Genesis 41:51-52).” By the time Joseph has children, he has been through a great deal. He has been sold by his brothers into slavery, he was imprisoned for at least two years (Genesis 41:1), and now Pharaoh has put him in charge of Egypt. Joseph had been through some very difficult situations, but he knew that God was with him throughout that time. As a way to honor God for his faithfulness and provision,

Joseph named his children Manasseh and Ephraim, keeping in mind at all times what God had done for him.

### **Joseph Forgives his Brothers**

Human trafficking victims endure so much pain, physically, spiritually, and psychologically. The abuse and suffering experienced by victims is almost incomprehensible. Forgiveness is understandably a sensitive topic for victims of crime. The narrative of Joseph closes with Joseph fully forgiving his brothers. During the years of famine, Joseph's brothers come to him seeking food. After a series of tests, Joseph is reconciled to his brothers, and they join him in Egypt. With Pharaoh's blessing, Joseph provides his extensive family with land and food in Egypt. When Jacob, their father, dies, the brothers are concerned that Joseph will now exact revenge upon them. Instead of enacting revenge, Joseph reassures them of his forgiveness and continued provision for them and their families. The book of Genesis ends with Joseph living to the ripe old age of one hundred and ten.

In no way should human trafficking victims ever be forced to forgive their traffickers, but forgiveness does play a role in the healing process. Forgiveness is not an easy process, and it takes time. Harboring anger and resentment towards the trafficker allows the trafficker to continue to exert an influence over a victim that has been physically freed from captivity. Forgiveness does not diminish the offense that occurred nor does it lessen the accountability of the offender. Instead, forgiveness frees the victim from anger, fear and bitterness and sets the victim free from the power of the trafficker.

In conclusion, this paper seeks to examine slavery in the ancient Near Eastern context and through Joseph's narrative to provide a case study for US anti-trafficking laws and provide hope to the victims of human trafficking.

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