

# Agricultural Slavery and the Parable of the Loyal and Wise Slave in Q 12:42-46

Llewellyn Howes  
University of Johannesburg

## Abstract

This article examines the parable of the loyal and wise slave in Q 12:42-46 by considering the ancient institution of agricultural slavery. Particular attention will be given to the managers of ancient slave-run farms, who were at times also slaves themselves. Methodologically, each verse of the parable will be read against the background of the ancient institution of agricultural slavery. The aim is not to interpret the metaphorical meaning of the parable, but merely to contextualise and illuminate its literal meaning.

## Introduction

The parable of the loyal and wise slave, as I prefer to call it, appears in both Matthew (24:45-51) and Luke (12:42-46). There is enough verbal and grammatical overlap between the two versions to justify its place in the Sayings Gospel Q.<sup>1</sup> In their Critical Edition of Q, the International Q Project offers the following reconstruction and translation of Q 12:42-46:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>42</sup>τίς ἄρα ἐστὶν ὁ πιστὸς δοῦλος [καὶ] φρόνιμος ὃν κατέστησεν ὁ κύριος ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκετείας αὐτοῦ τοῦ δοῦναι [αὐτοῖς] ἐν καιρῷ τὴν τροφήν; <sup>43</sup>μακάριος ὁ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος, ὃν ἐλθὼν ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ εὐρήσει οὕτως ποιοῦντα· <sup>44</sup>[ἀμὴν] λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπάρχουσιν αὐτοῦ καταστήσει αὐτόν. <sup>45</sup>ἐὰν δὲ εἴπῃ ὁ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ· χρονίζει ὁ κύριος μου, καὶ ἄρξεται τύπτειν τοὺς [συνδούλους αὐτοῦ], ἐσθί[η] δὲ καὶ πίνη [μετὰ τῶν] μεθυ[όντων], <sup>46</sup>ἥξει ὁ κύριος τοῦ δούλου ἐκείνου ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἣ οὐ προσδοκᾷ καὶ ἐν ᾧ ἣ οὐ γινώσκει, καὶ διχοτομήσει αὐτόν καὶ τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀπίστων θήσει.

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<sup>1</sup> Dodd 1958:158; Marshall 1978:533; Crossan 1974a:22; Scott 1989:208-209; Taylor 1989:138; Funk & Hoover 1993:253; Luz 2005:221; see Bock 1996:1171 n. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, Hoffmann & Kloppenborg 2000:366-375; 2002:124-127.

<sup>42</sup>Who then is the faithful [and] wise slave whom the master put over his household to give [them] food on time? <sup>43</sup>Blessed is that slave whose master, on coming, will find so doing. <sup>44</sup>[Amen], I tell you, he will appoint him over all his possessions. <sup>45</sup>But if that slave says in his heart: My master is delayed, and begins to beat [his fellow slaves], and eats and drinks [with the] drunk[ards], <sup>46</sup>the master of that slave will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him to pieces and give him an inheritance with the faithless.

For the most part, the comments and observations that make up the current article apply to the Matthean and Lukan versions as well, so that the content remains valid even if the reader does not acknowledge the existence of Q. Some time ago, Crossan lamented the fact that scholars are not always able to separate the literal and metaphorical levels of Jesus' parables.<sup>3</sup> Methodologically, he argued, one should first give full consideration to the literal or 'image' part of the parable, before jumping to the metaphorical or 'meaning' part of the parable.<sup>4</sup> Essentially, the present article is concerned with this crucial first step of parable interpretation. In order to understand any parable like it was understood by those who heard it for the first time, it is important to be entirely familiar with the historical and narrative world of the parable itself.<sup>5</sup> Such familiarity is generally taken for granted by the parables, but often entirely lacking on the part of today's hearers and readers.<sup>6</sup> Kloppenborg speaks of a parable's 'verisimilitude', which is the ability of a parable to be understood as a realistic story in its original socio-historical context.<sup>7</sup> When it comes specifically to the parable of the loyal and wise slave, the narrative world to which it refers is that of agricultural slavery.<sup>8</sup> This article therefore examines the parable in Q 12:42-46 by considering the ancient institution of agricultural slavery. Whenever the word 'agriculture' is used, it refers primarily to crop growing, but does not exclude possible reference to animal husbandry.

Before (con)textual analysis may begin, one or two preliminary considerations deserve our attention. Throughout this article, the term '(estate / farm) manager' refers to the Roman, Greek, Egyptian and/or Jewish person who managed a farming estate during the landowner's absence. I prefer this title over English alternatives like 'steward' or 'bailiff'.<sup>9</sup> It was not uncommon for the managers of slave-run farms to be slaves themselves, although

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<sup>3</sup> Crossan 1974b:86-88; cf. Zimmermann 2009:172.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hunter 1971:11-12.

<sup>5</sup> Via 1967:91; cf. Zimmermann 2009:163; see Van Eck 2015:5-9.

<sup>6</sup> Via 1967:18.

<sup>7</sup> Kloppenborg 2006:278; see Van Eck 2015:10-11.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Harrill 2006:113.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aubert 1994:118 n. 3.

they could also be day-labourers, freedmen or freeborn citizens.<sup>10</sup> The Roman 'estate manager' was known as a *vilicus*, although this term could refer to various types of urban managers as well.<sup>11</sup> The Greek 'estate manager' was known by a number of terms, including οἰκονόμος, ἐπιμελετής / ἐπιμελητής, ἐπίτροπος, διοικητής, πραγματευτής and χειριστής. In classical Greek literature, these terms are used somewhat interchangeably for both estate managers (like the Roman *vilici*) and general administrators (like the Roman *procuratores*), although the former was most commonly designated by ἐπίτροπος and οἰκονόμος.<sup>12</sup> In Egyptian papyri, estate managers are for the most part referenced as φροντισται.

In the Hebrew Old Testament, the Jewish manager is often identified by use of the technical term 'over the house' (עַל־הַבַּיִת).<sup>13</sup> That this phrase has a manager in mind is confirmed by the Septuagint's translation thereof in each case with οἰκονόμος. Managers are also referenced in the Old Testament by longer clauses, such as the one in Genesis 24:2 (my translation): 'the one who ruled over everything he had' (הַמְשָׁל בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ), although the latter phrase could also imply a general administrator, in the sense of a Roman *procurator*. In later Jewish tradition, the phrase 'son of the house' (בֶּן־בַּיִת) and the loanword 'oikonomos' (אֵיקוֹנוֹמוֹס) are preferred as designations for a manager.<sup>14</sup> In the pre-rabbinic Jewish tradition, it is not always easy to distinguish between royal and private estate managers, or between royal estate managers and royal administrators.<sup>15</sup> In the Jewish tradition *in toto*, the same terms are used interchangeably for both rural estate managers and urban household managers. With each usage, the intended meaning must be determined from the literary context.

As a parable of (Q's) Jesus, the historical setting is Palestine during the first century AD.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, ancient texts from Palestine have next to nothing to say about the daily operations of farming estates, especially those cultivated primarily or entirely by slaves under the watchful eye of a farm manager. Our most direct sources for the daily management of ancient farms in the Roman provinces are the papyri from Roman Egypt, but unfortunately it seems that Egyptian estates were mostly cultivated by tenants and/or hired labourers, and were not run primarily or exclusively by slaves.<sup>17</sup> More importantly for our purposes, farm managers are only mentioned in passing in Palestinian and Egyptian

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<sup>10</sup> Toutain 1951:277; Massey & Moreland 1992:29; Harding 2003:241; Harrill 2006:231 n. 4; Joshel 2010:57; cf. Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:209, 210; see Aubert 1994:118 n. 3, 149-157; Chandezon 2011:100, 101, 105-106.

<sup>11</sup> Harrill 2006:103.

<sup>12</sup> Harrill 2006:104; cf. Michel 1967:149; see Chandezon 2011:102-108.

<sup>13</sup> Michel 1967:149; cf. 1 Kgs 4:6; 16:9; 18:3; 2 Kgs 18:18, 37; 19:2; Isa 36:3, 22; 37:2.

<sup>14</sup> See Michel 1967:149-150.

<sup>15</sup> See Layton 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Dodd 1958:21; Funk 2006:44, 61, 62.

<sup>17</sup> Rathbone 2007:712; see Bagnall 1993:220-221, 229, 230-232, 237. Although there is evidence of smallholders owning a small number of personal slaves (see Bagnall 1993:227-230). The absence of evidence for slave-run estates or servile managers in ancient Egypt might at least to some extent be due to the nature of the evidence (see Bagnall 1993:224-225, 230).

texts.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, Greco-Roman writings discuss agricultural slavery, the management of slave-run farms, and the daily operations of farm managers directly and in some detail. It follows that most of our information about these topics come from Greco-Roman literature, especially the writings of Greek historian Xenophon and the Latin agronomists Varro, Cato and Columella.<sup>19</sup>

Bradley is certainly correct when he asserts, referring specifically to the Latin agronomists, that 'these sources cannot automatically be taken to apply to the [Roman] provinces or to give evidence of provincial conditions.'<sup>20</sup> In my view, it is nonetheless methodologically and historically appropriate to appeal to these sources when examining a parable that was told in Palestine during the first century AD. Sociologists have drawn our attention to the fact that a significant number of common aspects are shared by all ancient slave-owning peoples.<sup>21</sup> Although there were no doubt differences between Jewish and Greco-Roman attitudes and practices surrounding (agricultural) slavery, there were also similarities, some of which applied to the ancient world in general. After comparing Jewish and Roman material on farm management specifically, Harrill speaks of 'an overarching ideology on slave management diffuse throughout the ancient Mediterranean.'<sup>22</sup>

This is not to say that slavery in rural Palestine was a carbon copy of its Greco-Roman counterpart. As Hezser explains, '[s]imilarities may indicate to what extent Jews had adopted the customs and values of the surrounding Graeco-Roman culture; differences may be based on the particular religious and moral values and the social, economic, and political circumstances under which Jews lived.'<sup>23</sup> For a variety of reasons, including chiefly military and political success, there were a lot more slaves on Roman farms than on the farms of other nations of the first century AD.<sup>24</sup> Unlike Roman Italy, mass slavery was simply not a feature of Roman Palestine.<sup>25</sup> Individual Roman farms (*fundi* & *latifundia*) were generally also much larger than their Palestinian (and Greek) counterparts.<sup>26</sup> Yet, neither of these factors imply that (agricultural) slavery was absent or insignificant in first century

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<sup>18</sup> Examples of Egyptian papyri that only mention managers in passing: *P.Cair.Zen.* 2.59150; *P.Enteux.* 75; *P.Mich.* 11.620; 12.657; 15.733, 741/742; *P.Mich.inv.* 4.224; *P.Col.* 3.12; 10.280; *P.Corn.* 1; *P.Oxy.* 72.4859; 74.4998, 5014-5016; 75.5050; *P.Princ.* 2.74; *P.Ryl.* 2.169; *O.Mich.* 1.68; *P.NYU* 2.36; *P.Petaus.* 92; *P.Theon.* 13; *P.Tebt.* 3.1.773; *P.Col.* 3.20, 21; *P.Duke.inv.* 920, 983; *P.Fay.* 110-124, 248-277; *P.Wisc.* 1.1; *P.Zen.Pestm.* 6; *SB* 16.12657. A number of these Egyptian references do not indicate whether the manager was in charge of a rural estate or an urban household.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Massey & Moreland 1992:26-27; Joshel 2006:171; Dal Lago & Karsari 2008:189; Chandezon 2011:100; see Harrill 2006:97, 101-103.

<sup>20</sup> Bradley 1994:61.

<sup>21</sup> Hezser 2005:8.

<sup>22</sup> Harrill 2006:109; cf. Chandezon 2011:97.

<sup>23</sup> Hezser 2005:3.

<sup>24</sup> De Vaux 1965:80, 84; White 1970:411; Hezser 2005:85; cf. Fiensy 1991:90, 91; see Joshel 2010:8, 53-56, 65-69.

<sup>25</sup> Hezser 2005:295.

<sup>26</sup> Andrews 1967:89, 137-138; Chandezon 2011:96; cf. Joshel 2010:56.

Palestine.<sup>27</sup> Older positions and arguments to that effect are frankly and respectfully mistaken.<sup>28</sup>

Nor should one conclude from a comparison with Rome that there were no wealthy landowners or large estates in Palestine.<sup>29</sup> The material from Roman Egypt provide evidence for the existence of wealthy landowners and large estates in Roman provinces during the relevant time period.<sup>30</sup> Some of these papyri provide evidence of large estates existing in Palestine, including Galilee, as early as the third century BC.<sup>31</sup> The gospels themselves assume and describe the existence of large-scale farms in Palestine.<sup>32</sup> Josephus further tells us of large estates held by himself in Judea and the coastal plain, by Ptolemy, Herod's friend, in Samaria, by Costobar, Herod's governor, in Idumaea, by Crispus, Agrippa's former *eparch*, in the Transjordan, and by Philip, Agrippa's lieutenant, near Gamla.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, Fiensy has argued conclusively for the existence of large estates in Palestine during the Herodian period.<sup>34</sup> Although archaeology suggests that there were no large estates in the area between Nazareth and the tip of the Galilean Sea, literary and archaeological evidence combine to indicate that large farming estates existed on the great plain directly south of Nazareth.<sup>35</sup>

The institution of slavery was a trademark feature of Israelite society from the very beginning.<sup>36</sup> The Elephantine papyri indicate that certain Egyptian Jews of the fifth century BC owned slaves.<sup>37</sup> The biblical patriarchs are described as wealthy nomadic animal farmers, who owned large numbers of slaves, and even appointed managers.<sup>38</sup> Some of the legendary Israelite judges owned their own slaves, and sometimes utilised them in military campaigns.<sup>39</sup> During the monarchic period, Israelite kings are similarly portrayed as owning huge numbers of slaves, with prominent slaves at times even owning their own slaves.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that war captives were utilised by David and Solomon as slaves in smelter refineries. Regardless, the Israelite kings made productive use of state slaves for a host of religious, commercial, industrial, political and personal projects.<sup>41</sup> 1 Chronicles 27:25-31 indicates that king David had many farms, and that he appointed managers, each of them

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<sup>27</sup> Hezser 2005:300; cf. Fiensy 1991:91.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Mendelsohn 1949:111-112.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Fiensy 2010:196; Chandezon 2011:96-97.

<sup>30</sup> Kloppenborg 2006:284.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. *Papiri Greci e Latini* 6.554; *P.Lond.* 7.1948; cf. Kloppenborg 2006:285, 297.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Mat 13:24-30; 18:21-35; 20:1-15; 25:14-30; Mark 10:17-22; 12:1-9; Luke 7:41-43; 12:16-21; 15:11-32; 16:1-12; 17:7; 19:11-27; cf. Kloppenborg 2006:279; Fiensy 2010:197; see 1991:55-56.

<sup>33</sup> Kloppenborg 2006:286-287; cf. *A.J.* 15.264; 17.289; *B.J.* 2.69; *Vita* 33, 47, 422, 429.

<sup>34</sup> Fiensy 1991:21-73.

<sup>35</sup> Fiensy 2010:196.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. DuBois 2009:52.

<sup>37</sup> See Hezser 2005:289-291.

<sup>38</sup> See Hezser 2005:286-287; cf. Gen 12:16; 15:2-3; 16:4; 24:2; 26:12, 15, 19; 32:5.

<sup>39</sup> De Vaux 1965:83-84; cf. Judg 6:27.

<sup>40</sup> See Hezser 2005:287-288; cf. 2 Sam 6:20-22; 9:2, 10; 1 Kgs 9:22; 11:26; 2 Kgs 21:23.

<sup>41</sup> See De Vaux 1965:88-90.

mentioned by name, to oversee his estates. Job, the pre-eminent human symbol of Jewish wisdom, is depicted as an extremely wealthy slave-owner.<sup>42</sup> After returning from the Babylonian exile, a census counted 7,377 slaves for 42,360 freepersons.<sup>43</sup> The legislative, sapiential and prophetic traditions of the Old Testament address a number of regulations and recommendations concerning the treatment of slaves to Jewish slave-owners.<sup>44</sup>

Slavery continued to be an integral ingredient of Jewish society during Hellenistic and Roman times.<sup>45</sup> Against the estimations of Josephus and Philo that slavery was not a feature of the communities behind the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Damascus Document and Khirbet Qumran ostracon provide evidence that (some of) these groups did indeed own slaves. The apocryphal book of Judith informs us that Judith owned a number of slaves, including a manager who oversaw her property on a daily basis.<sup>46</sup> According to the apocryphal book of Tobit, Raguel also owned many slaves.<sup>47</sup> Josephus describes on a number of occasions how Jewish leaders would enslave fellow Jews who opposed them, and who were unwilling to accept their authority.<sup>48</sup> The Hasmonean wars resulted in the enslavement of fellow Jews, who were undoubtedly put to work in wealthy Jewish homes and on large Jewish farmlands. Josephus also informs us that king Herod had many royal slaves. Although Philo trivialises the institution of slavery by subordinating it to Stoic paradigms, his treatment of the subject matter leaves the impression that it was common for wealthy Jews to own many slaves.<sup>49</sup> These sources indicate that wealthy Jewish landowners of first century Palestine made use of Jewish and gentile slaves alike in their houses and on their estates.

Although the nature and extent of Hellenisation and Romanisation was different for the two Palestinian provinces of Judea and Galilee, there is no doubt that they were both profoundly affected by Greece and Rome. Such influence encroached also the economic sphere, including agriculture. It goes beyond the scope of the current study to discuss the extent of Hellenisation and/or Romanisation in Palestine. One interesting archaeological find will suffice. A jar fragment found at Sepphoris in Galilee around the second century BC bears seven Hebrew letters (אפמלסלש), of which the first five might represent a transliteration of the Greek term for 'manager' or 'overseer' (ἐπιμελετής / ἐπιμελητής).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Job 1:3; 31:13; 19:15-16; 42:12.

<sup>43</sup> De Vaux 1965:84; cf. Ezra 2:64; Neh 7:66.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Exod 21:7-11, 20-21, 26-27; Lev 25:44-46; Neh 5:4-5; Prov 29:19.

<sup>45</sup> See Hezser 2005:94-96, 291-293, 300.

<sup>46</sup> Judith 8:7-10; 16:23; cf. Add Esth 15:2; Sus 15-43; *Jos. Asen.* 2:10-11.

<sup>47</sup> Tobit 8:9-14; 9:1; 10:10.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. *Vita* 1.65, 88, 222; 4.33; *A.J.* 14.275, 429.

<sup>49</sup> See DuBois 2009:63-66.

<sup>50</sup> Chancey 2002:77.

Starting with the establishment of the monarchy, peasant smallholdings became increasingly threatened by rich landholders.<sup>51</sup> By no means did this situation get any better during the Greco-Roman period.<sup>52</sup> Even if not widespread,<sup>53</sup> it is certainly possible to imagine the existence of a few agricultural estates in rural Palestine that were run *entirely* by slaves, bar the occasional visit by the urban landowner or his general administrator.<sup>54</sup> There might be archaeological support for the latter suggestion from excavations of rural farmsteads outside Roman Italy.<sup>55</sup> The Roman system of making exclusive or predominant use of slaves on agricultural estates spread all over the ancient world.<sup>56</sup> In fact, if one would excuse the circular argument for the moment, the parable of the loyal and wise slave in Q 12:42-46 offers evidence of the latter scenario for rural Galilee at least.<sup>57</sup> The best evidence, however, that there were indeed Palestinian estates run *entirely* by slaves comes from the Old Testament.<sup>58</sup> In 2 Samuel 9:10, king David confers all Saul's property to Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, and orders Ziba, a slave, to oversee the tilling of his estates by all the slaves who used to belong to Saul.<sup>59</sup>

During laborious periods, especially at harvest time, large estates, including self-efficient slave-run estates, usually supplemented their workforce with day-labourers.<sup>60</sup> Since Palestinian farms would on average have been smaller than Roman farms, it is likely that some of these slave-run farms operated mostly, if not entirely, without a need for outside labour.<sup>61</sup> The necessity for occasional outside labour would have depended on a variety of factors, including the size of the estate, the number of slaves and the amount of work at any given time.

One aspect of slavery that applied to all ancient peoples was the practice of deliberate desocialisation and denationalisation, which entailed the physical or representational removal of a newly enslaved person from the social group of her birth.<sup>62</sup> The traditional scholarly view that Second Temple Judaism followed biblical regulations by treating their

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<sup>51</sup> De Vaux 1965:167; cf. Kloppenborg 2006:284.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Harding 2003:241; see Kloppenborg 2006:284-290.

<sup>53</sup> Fiensy 1991:91; Kloppenborg 2006:314 n. 136; cf. White 1970:411; Joshel 2010:8, 74; see Glotz 1926:202-203.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Toutain 1951:275; Kloppenborg 2006:290, 292, 314. Although the Zenon papyri attest to the presence of slaves (together with tenants and farm managers) on some of Apollonios's estates in Egypt and Palestine (Kloppenborg 2006:297), none of these provide evidence of farms run *entirely* by slaves, including a servile farm manager.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Bradley 1994:61.

<sup>56</sup> Joshel 2010:74; cf. Toutain 1951:275.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Kloppenborg 2006:314 n. 136.

<sup>58</sup> See De Vaux 1965:167.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. 1 Sam 8:12.

<sup>60</sup> Toutain 1951:278; White 1970:335, 348-349, 355-356; Fiensy 1991:76; Burford 1993:183; Aubert 1994:163; Kloppenborg 2006:288, 289; cf. Varro, *Rust.* 1.17.2-3; Egyptian papyri *P.Cair.Zen.* 4.59748, 59827; *P.Mich.* 3.200.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. White 1970:349.

<sup>62</sup> See Hezser 2005:8-12, 26-54.

(Jewish) slaves as day-labourers or debt-bondsmen, and by manumitting them in the seventh or Jubilee year, has not stood up to subsequent investigation.<sup>63</sup> In earlier times, Jews distinguished in principle (not always in practice) between Jewish and gentile slaves, treating the former more humanely and manumitting them in the seventh or Jubilee year. Yet, prophetic warnings against slaveholders who abstained from manumitting their slaves indicate that these biblical rulings were not always representative of experienced reality.<sup>64</sup>

By the first century, due to Greco-Roman influence, the distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish slaves was underemphasised and practically replaced by a rigid distinction between slave and free.<sup>65</sup> Evidence of this shift comes not only from Josephus and Philo, but also from rabbinic literature.<sup>66</sup> The boundaries between Jewish and gentile slaves became blurred by certain practices, like the renaming of newly acquired slaves, the tolerance of mixed procreation, the circumcision of gentile slaves, and the requirement to adopt the master's religion and culture.<sup>67</sup> Due to the processes of desocialisation and denationalisation, Jewish slaves were no longer viewed as genuine members of the Jewish community, which in turn enabled and justified not only their permanent enslavement, but also their equally harsh treatment by Jewish masters if compared to other slaves.<sup>68</sup> Hence, the biblical regulations regarding the enslavement of fellow Jews and the treatment of Jewish slaves were no longer observed in the Roman period.<sup>69</sup> In any case, even if these regulations were indeed observed to some extent, they did not prevent the enslavement or abuse of gentile slaves, whose treatment by Jewish masters must have been similar to the treatment of slaves in the ancient world generally.<sup>70</sup>

An appeal to Greco-Roman sources does not mean that Jewish and Egyptian sources will be ignored. Instead, the following analysis will draw upon Jewish, Egyptian, Greek and Roman sources, depending in each case on the subject matter under discussion and the availability of information.

## Verse 42

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<sup>63</sup> See De Vaux 1965:82-83, 86; Hezser 2005:3-8, 17, 90; 2009:131; cf. Fiensy 1991:90, 91-92; cf. Exod 21:2; Lev 25:26, 39-41; Deut 15:12.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. Jer 34:8-11, 14-16.

<sup>65</sup> Hezser 2005:93-99; 2009:131-132.

<sup>66</sup> It should be noted that there are individual rabbinic traditions that advise Jews not to treat Hebrew debt-slaves harshly or unfairly (see Hezser 2005:99). The value of these texts for the current discussion is uncertain. On the one hand, it is unlikely that the Hebrew debt-slaves referred to by these rabbis represent all Jewish slaves. In any case, the reason for and occasion of a slave's initial enslavement was presumably soon forgotten; by the slave-owner, that is. On the other hand, it is unlikely that these texts represent actual practice. The reason why rabbis would place such restrictions on Jewish slave-owners was probably that Hebrew debt-slaves were treated quite harshly in reality. These discussions should be seen as representing the theoretical ideal, with a basis in biblical tradition, rather than lived reality (cf. Hezser 2005:117).

<sup>67</sup> Hezser 2005:117; cf. Glotz 1926:198; De Vaux 1965:85.

<sup>68</sup> Hezser 2005:94, 97; cf. Fiensy 1991:92.

<sup>69</sup> Hezser 2009:131; cf. Fiensy 1991:92; DuBois 2009:52.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Fiensy 1991:92; DuBois 2009:52; cf. Lev 25:39-46.



It is generally agreed and taken for granted that the background for this parable is an ancient farm; most probably a fairly large estate in rural Galilee.<sup>71</sup> It is nonetheless noteworthy that neither the opening verse nor the rest of the parable make explicit reference to agriculture or husbandry. There is not one lexis, term or phrase that unambiguously denotes agricultural activity, animals, personnel or implements. Even the Lukan version is not necessarily about a farm, since the Lukan word ‘manager’ (οικονόμος) can reference the manager of either an urban household or a rural estate.<sup>72</sup> In spite of this silence, however, it remains highly likely that the parable has a rural setting in mind. If the parable derives from the historical Jesus, the Galilean countryside is the prime suspect for its original delivery, as it is for most of the Jesus tradition, especially the parables.<sup>73</sup> The same is true if the parable appeared for the first time in the Sayings Gospel Q, seeing as most scholars agree that it was compiled in or near Galilean villages.<sup>74</sup> What is more, if considering purely the quantity and percentage of material about farming in Q, the document seems somewhat preoccupied with this particular subject matter.<sup>75</sup> Finally, the Jewish tradition associates slavery with wealthy husbandmen and landowners, who often appointed managers to supervise their estates.<sup>76</sup>

The parable begins with a rhetorical question: ‘Who then is the faithful [and] wise slave whom the master put over his household to give [them] food on time?’ The word translated by the International Q Project as ‘faithful’ (πιστός) could also be translated as ‘trustworthy’, ‘loyal’ or ‘obedient’.<sup>77</sup> I would prefer just about any translation over ‘faithful’, because of its religious overtones.<sup>78</sup> It is possible that wordplay is involved on the metaphorical level,<sup>79</sup> but on the purely literal level, the parable wishes to call attention to the slave’s loyalty and reliability. Even on the metaphorical level, πιστός does not refer exclusively to religious

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Kloppenborg 1995:294; Bock 1996:1179; Etchells 1998:110; Harrill 2006:113.

<sup>72</sup> Liddell & Scott 1996 s.v. οικονόμος; cf. Michel 1967:150; Bock 1996:1179; Nolland 2005:997; Harrill 2006:103.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Dodd 1958:21; Funk 2006:44, 61; Oakman 2008:118-119.

<sup>74</sup> Horsley 1999:46; see Reed 1995:21-24; 2000:170-196; Kloppenborg 2000:174-175.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Reed 1995:24-25; 2000:189-199. These include references to the axing of fruit trees (Q 3:8-9), grain farming procedures (Q 3:17), agricultural measuring standards (Q 6:38), fruit trees bearing figs and grapes (Q 6:43-44), the ploughing of fields (Q 9:62), harvest workers (Q 10:2), sheep farming (Q 10:3; 15:4-5, 7), the storing of grain in baskets (Q 11:33), growing spices (Q 11:42), the process of sowing, reaping and gathering in barns (Q 12:24; 19:21, 22), field hay used for cheap fuel (Q 12:28), grain of mustard seeds (Q 13:19; 17:6), small plots or gardens (Q 13:19), cultivated fields (Q 14:18), the salting of dunghills (Q 14:35), millstones (Q 17:2), a sycamine tree (Q 17:6), the milling of grain (Q 17:35), and vultures circling the corpse of an animal (or human being) (Q 17:37).

<sup>76</sup> Hezser 2005:299; cf. Gen 15:2-3; Jdt 8:9-10; 16:23; *T. Ab.* 15:5.

<sup>77</sup> Donahue 1988:99; Liddell & Scott 1996 s.v. πιστός.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Funk 2006:166.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Donahue 1988:99; Etchell 1998:110; Valantasis 2005:168.

belief.<sup>80</sup> Obedient loyalty (*fides* & πιστός) was considered by ancient slaveholders as *the* most important and valued characteristic that a slave could possibly possess.<sup>81</sup>

This is especially true of the servile farm manager, from whom absolute, unwavering loyalty was expected.<sup>82</sup> Significantly, in his comedy *The Merchant*, Plautus chooses to name an estate manager Pistus, based on the Greek lexis πιστός.<sup>83</sup> Columella advises landholders to test the loyalty of their estate managers before appointing them.<sup>84</sup> If judged solely by the length at which Xenophon, Columella and Cato discuss the selection and desired qualities of the ideal farm manager, landowners typically spent a lot of time and energy discovering and selecting the ‘perfect’ individual for the job.<sup>85</sup> Other characteristics that landowners sought when choosing or buying a farm manager included, among others, a rural background, tact, devotion, firmness, dependability, honesty, integrity, diligence, prudence, literacy<sup>86</sup> (or an excellent memory), farming experience and exceptional character.<sup>87</sup> For the most part, masters desired the estate manager to be a (servile) clone of themselves; or rather, their ideal selves.<sup>88</sup> It is important to reiterate that the previous list of traits were additional and complementary to the all-important and central trait of obedient loyalty.<sup>89</sup>

The word ‘wise’ or ‘prudent’ (φρόνιμος) is also significant in this discussion. Beginning the pericope with the word ‘wise’ (φρόνιμος) serves to specify its genre as wisdom.<sup>90</sup> The parable deliberately introduces the traditional sapiential theme of how to identify a wise slave.<sup>91</sup> Texts that discuss this theme were all written from the perspective of slave-owners.<sup>92</sup> In antiquity, ‘wisdom’ did not just refer to cleverness, but also to morality and character, so that the traits of ‘loyalty’ and ‘wisdom’ overlapped.<sup>93</sup> The ability to adequately identify, utilise and manage a wise slave greatly benefitted the slaveholder. Educated,

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<sup>80</sup> Donahue 1988:99; cf. Hays 2012:49; *pace* Etchell 1998:109, 110.

<sup>81</sup> Hezser 2005:155; cf. Harrill 2006:152-153; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:204; see Bradley 1984:33-40, 78; Joshel 2010:115-116.

<sup>82</sup> Michel 1967:150-151; Marshall 1978:541; Burford 1993:218; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:210; Chandezon 2011:117; cf. Xen. *Oec.* 12.5.

<sup>83</sup> *Merc.* 277-278; cf. Aubert 1994:160.

<sup>84</sup> *Rust.* 11.1.7; cf. Aubert 1994:160.

<sup>85</sup> Glotz 1926:201; White 1970:353, 375-376, 403; Chandezon 2011:98; cf. Xen. *Oec.* 12-15; Columella, *Rust.* 1.8; 11.1; Cato, *Agr.* 5.1-5.

<sup>86</sup> Celsus actually preferred illiterate managers, since they would then be less likely to commit fraud (White 1970:354). That some farm managers were indeed literate is indicated by the existence of written correspondence in the form of Egyptian papyri between landowners and managers (e.g. *P.Haun.* 2.23, 32; *P.Ryl.* 2.238; *SB* 16.12579; *P.Tebt.* 2.423; cf. *P.Oslo.* 2.44; *P.Tebt.* 3.1.773; *P.Oxy.* 9.1220; *P.Mich.* 1.14; *P.Duke.inv.* 614; *P.Petr.* 1.29; see Kloppenborg 2006:442-443).

<sup>87</sup> White 1970:350-351, 354, 357, 403; Chandezon 2011:100.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Burford 1993:173; Harrill 2006:87, 105; see Joshel 2010:115-116; cf. Xen. *Oec.* 12.4.

<sup>89</sup> White (1970:354) maintains that diligence was the most important trait to look for in a manager, but diligence was only possible if loyalty was already present (cf. Xen. *Oec.* 12.5). When agronomists discuss the qualities of estate managers, they often take obedient loyalty for granted.

<sup>90</sup> Edwards 1976:66; cf. Harrill 2006:116.

<sup>91</sup> Kirk 1998:234.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Aubert 1994:121; see Joshel 2010:13-14, 172.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Harrill 2006:116.

skilled and intelligent slaves were much more valuable to their owners than other slaves.<sup>94</sup> Due to their Stoic outlooks, both Philo and Jesus ben Sirach had more respect for a wise slave than an ignorant slave-owner.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, Jewish slave-owners feared slaves who were too intelligent and skilled, lest they should threaten or overturn the household's 'ordained' hierarchical structure.<sup>96</sup> To describe the slave as being simultaneously 'wise' and 'loyal' is therefore highly significant, since it introduces him as the ideal servile farm manager.<sup>97</sup> In general, 'prudence' (φρόνιμος) was a quality readily associated with stewards.<sup>98</sup>

The word translated here with 'household' (οικετεία) literally refers to a 'household of slaves.'<sup>99</sup> Scholars mostly agree that Matthew's οικετεία represents Q in this case.<sup>100</sup> It is nonetheless noteworthy that Luke exchanged this lexis for θεραπεία, which denotes a body or retinue of slaves.<sup>101</sup> Even if Luke changed the Q text to better suit his own social context, the alteration indicates that he correctly understood the original word 'household' (οικετεία) as a reference to the farm's *familia*, and not the master's *domus* or, more narrowly, his nuclear family.<sup>102</sup> In Roman literature, the term *familia* could reference only the slaves of a particular household, while the term *domus* referenced the entire household.<sup>103</sup> The *familia* included both urban and rural slaves.<sup>104</sup> The *domus* included the master's nuclear and extended families, with all their slaves, and was equivalent to the Hebrew and Greek words for 'house(hold)' (בַּיִת & οἰκία).<sup>105</sup> It follows that the master did not task the slave with feeding his own (i.e. the master's) family, as the English translation seems to imply,<sup>106</sup> but with feeding the families of slaves who lived on the farm (*familia rustica*). In all likelihood, the master's nuclear family did not even live on the farm, but rather stayed in the city with the master (see below).

The opening verse does not say anything of the master's departure or subsequent absence.<sup>107</sup> According to most commentators, the master's departure is implied by this verse, and it is in their view reasonable to accept that the master's departure is

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<sup>94</sup> Hezser 2005:83; 2009:129.

<sup>95</sup> *Prob.* 19; Sir 10:25; cf. De Vaux 1965:85; see Hezser 2005:95-96.

<sup>96</sup> Hezser 2005:150; cf. Bradley 1984:27; Joshel 2010:119; cf. Prov 17:2; 30:21-23.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Nolland 2005:998.

<sup>98</sup> Marshall 1978:541; see Hays 2012:49; cf. Luke 16:8.

<sup>99</sup> Herzog 1994:157; Liddell & Scott 1996 s.v. οικετεία.

<sup>100</sup> E.g. Fleddermann 2005:627.

<sup>101</sup> Marshall 1978:541; Bock 1996:1179; Liddell & Scott 1996 s.v. θεραπεία; Luz 2005:221; Hays 2012:47 n. 30.

<sup>102</sup> Luz 2005:221. The preference here for the lexis οικετεία instead of οικίασ further strengthens the case that the slave was an estate manager, and not the manager of an urban household, since the phrase ὁ ἐπὶ τῆσ οικίασ was standard for the latter position (cf. Liddell & Scott 1996 s.v. οικίασ).

<sup>103</sup> Hezser 2005:125; see Saller 2003:187-189; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:203-204.

<sup>104</sup> White 1970:357-358; Saller 2003:187-188.

<sup>105</sup> Hezser 2005:126.

<sup>106</sup> *Pace* e.g. Donahue 1988:98; Bock 1996:1179.

<sup>107</sup> Kloppenborg 1995:294; Luz 2005:223.

contemporaneous with the opening of the parable.<sup>108</sup> On the one hand, commentators assume that this parable follows the same structure as other parables, where the master leaves at the beginning of the narrative, only to return later.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, scholars assume that the master permanently resides on his farm, leaving only sporadically, even if lengthily, for a variety of reasons, as is the case with modern farmers.<sup>110</sup> It is much more likely, however, that the landowner of this parable does not reside on the farm at all. When the audience is thrown into the narrative, the master is absent, and the chosen slave had already been appointed manager.<sup>111</sup> One gets the impression that the selected slave's appointment occurred in the somewhat distant past, and is the established state of affairs when the parable begins. The latter is technically indicated by the grammar of the word 'appointed' or 'put over' (κατέστησεν), which features in the aorist tense precisely to indicate that the slave received his specified task in the past.<sup>112</sup>

In the fictional Greek tale *Daphnis and Chloe*, written by Longus in the second century AD, the servile estate manager, Lamon, is on the verge of marriage when he faces the prospect of meeting the owner of the farm, Dionysophanus, for the first time.<sup>113</sup> As in the parable, the landowner is also absent when the story begins. The situation of absentee landownership assumed by both narratives is representative of common farming practice in antiquity.<sup>114</sup> It was customary for landowners to be non-resident and mainly absent from their farms.<sup>115</sup> Wealthy landowners mostly lived in the city, and often had multiple estates.<sup>116</sup> These two factors explain not only their habitual absence, but also their need for estate managers.<sup>117</sup> Generally, Palestinian landowners resided in Tiberias, Sepphoris and Jerusalem, especially those who owned the most fertile land.<sup>118</sup> Galilean landowners were typically non-resident, and mostly absent from their estates.<sup>119</sup> The mere fact that the parable's master appointed a manager is reasonable evidence that the master was mostly

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<sup>108</sup> E.g. Crossan 1974a:38; Taylor 1989:142. According to Kloppenborg (1995:294), the parable is silent about the master's departure and subsequent absence because it is preceded in the Sayings Gospel Q by the Son of Man logion in Q 12:40, which already introduces the departure-return scenario. Yet, this preceding logion is *also* silent about the departure and absence of the Son of Man. In Q 12:40, the apocalyptic Son of Man figure does not necessarily represent Jesus (Howes 2013:10), so that a 'departure' of some kind cannot automatically be assumed (cf. Dan 7:13).

<sup>109</sup> E.g. Crossan 1974a:39; Donahue 1988:99; Scott 1989:208, 211; Taylor 1989:145; Funk & Hoover 1993:342.

<sup>110</sup> E.g. Jeremias 1966:44; Taylor 1989:143; Kloppenborg 1995:294; Bock 1996:1179; Etchells 1998:110.

<sup>111</sup> Fleddermann 2005:635.

<sup>112</sup> Fleddermann 2005:635.

<sup>113</sup> Longus 4.6.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Bradley 1994:105; Harrill 2006:103.

<sup>115</sup> White 1970:350; Massey & Moreland 1992:27; Fiensy 2010:196; cf. Burford 1993:217, 219; Chandezon 2011:98; see Kloppenborg 2006:279-280, 314-316.

<sup>116</sup> White 1970:353; Herzog 1994:156; Saller 2003:187-188; Kloppenborg 2006:300; Fiensy 2010:196; cf. Aubert 1994:126.

<sup>117</sup> White 1970:350; Massey & Moreland 1992:27; Joshel 2010:57.

<sup>118</sup> Freyne 1988:149, 151; 2000:52, 99, 195; Oakman 1986:78; 2008:266; Fiensy 2010:196; see 1991:49-55; cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 17.66; 18.36-38; *Vita* 33.

<sup>119</sup> Scott 1989:207; cf. Oakman 2008:266.

absent from the farm, and therefore needed a manager,<sup>120</sup> although managers were at times also appointed because resident estate owners 'preferred other activities to day-to-day supervision.'<sup>121</sup> In other words, the parable's master did not appoint the manager because he was leaving his place of residence on some errand, only to return home later, but rather appointed the manager during one of his occasional supervisory visits to the farm.<sup>122</sup> The farm *was* his errand, not his home.

The practice of appointing one specific slave as the manager of an estate and its personnel was very common in antiquity, especially when the estate was large and the landowner was non-resident.<sup>123</sup> In fact, with an absent landowner, the estate manager was the key person on any slave-run farm, and the success of the enterprise depended almost entirely on this individual.<sup>124</sup> According to White, 'the slave-run establishment could only be worked profitably if the standard of supervision and work-allocation was high.'<sup>125</sup> Since a slave was generally in antiquity viewed as an extension of his master, excluding of course the latter's legal and social privileges, it was possible to appoint a slave as a supervisor over other slaves.<sup>126</sup> Theoretically, such an overseeing slave represented his master's interests, which meant that the master controlled his slaves indirectly during his absence.<sup>127</sup> That rural and urban managers often acted on their masters' behalf is indicated in a number of Egyptian papyri.<sup>128</sup>

The appointment of a supervising slave was further enabled by the strict hierarchy under which slaves operated on the farm.<sup>129</sup> In both Greco-Roman and Jewish society at large, there was generally tremendous variance in the positions and statuses of individual slaves.<sup>130</sup> The hierarchical structure was fairly intricate on large estates.<sup>131</sup> Increased specialisation in agricultural and other tasks translated into greater differentiation amongst the slaves themselves.<sup>132</sup> Whereas the hierarchical advancement of urban slaves was fairly common in antiquity, opportunities for promotion and socio-economic betterment were few and far between for rural slaves.<sup>133</sup> Since the farm manager was a mediator between the farmhands and the master, and acted on the latter's authority, he occupied a place at

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. Aubert 1994:122, 199.

<sup>121</sup> Kloppenborg 1995:294.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Herzog 1994:157; Kloppenborg 2006:315.

<sup>123</sup> White 1970:350; Hezser 2005:85; 2009:132; Harrill 2006:87; see Varro, *Rust.* 1.16; Columella, *Rust.* 11.1; cf. Xen *Ephes* 2.10.

<sup>124</sup> White 1970:376; Harrill 2006:102, 103; cf. Bradley 1984:26; cf. Egyptian papyrus *P.Tebt.* 2.423.

<sup>125</sup> White 1970:374; cf. Burford 1993:218; cf. Xen. *Oec.* 12.15.

<sup>126</sup> Hezser 2005:11.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Bradley 1984:122-123; Hezser 2005:102; Chandezon 2011:99, 100.

<sup>128</sup> E.g. *P.Mich.* 1.14; 11.620, 625; 12.657; 15.733; *P.Oxy.* 72.4859, 4862, 4871; *P.Ryl.* 2.169; *P.NYU* 2.36.

<sup>129</sup> White 1970:333; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:195; cf. Herzog 1994:157.

<sup>130</sup> Harrill 2006:103-104, 148; see Bradley 1984:15-16; Hezser 2005:83-84, 94; 2009:129.

<sup>131</sup> See White 1970:353, 355, 377-383.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Aubert 1994:175.

<sup>133</sup> See Bradley 1994:68-72; cf. Hezser 2009:129.

the very top of any particular farm's servile hierarchy.<sup>134</sup> In the master's absence, which normally was most of the time, the manager had complete authority over the whole staff, including both day-labourers and slaves.<sup>135</sup> On some estates, farm managers also acted as financial managers (*actores* & e.g. *πραγματευτής*), which gave them complete control over every aspect of the estate's daily operation.<sup>136</sup> Possible direct evidence hereof appears in a papyrus from Egypt, listing a host of transactions and payments that are believed to have been made by an estate manager.<sup>137</sup>

In Q 12:42, the appointed slave's task to feed his fellow slaves is entirely congruent with what we know of agricultural slavery in antiquity.<sup>138</sup> Ancient landowners were advised and encouraged by Roman agronomists and Jewish sages alike to look after the physical wellbeing of their slaves.<sup>139</sup> Such advice was not born out of humanitarianism or compassion. The aim was rather to promote conscientiousness and prudence on the part of the slaveholder when it came to maintaining the condition of his assets, seeing as all slaves were considered property.<sup>140</sup> The same advice applied also to other forms of property, like farming implements and animals.<sup>141</sup> It served the slaveholder's purpose to safeguard the physical condition of his slaves, mainly because it improved productivity and increased the overall value and profitability of his property.<sup>142</sup> Conversely, it was irresponsible and expensive to replace slaves on a regular basis.<sup>143</sup> Acts of apparent generosity and kindness were also the means by which slaves were retained in a general state of relative contentment, which in turn increased productivity.<sup>144</sup> One of the most important tasks of an estate manager was to look after the physical nourishment and wellbeing of the (other) slaves.<sup>145</sup> By being in charge of food rationing, the estate manager had complete control over the physical welfare of the (other) slaves.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> White 1970:333; Burford 1993:173, 185; Bradley 1994:71; Hezser 2005:85; Harrill 2006:148.

<sup>135</sup> White 1970:347, 350; Massey & Moreland 1992:29; Aubert 1994:181; cf. Harrill 2006:87, 103.

<sup>136</sup> See Aubert 1994:170-172, 191-196; see Chandezon 2011:107, 108-117.

<sup>137</sup> *P.Kar.Goodsp.* 96; cf. *P.Corn.* 1; *P.Oxy.* 72.4859, 4862, 4870; 75.5050; *P.Mich.* 12.657; *SB* 14.12203.

<sup>138</sup> Blomberg 1990:192.

<sup>139</sup> E.g. Columella, *Rust.* 1.6.3, 19-20; 1.8.5, 19; 12.3.7; Varro, *Rust.* 1.17.5-7; Ps.-Phoc. 223-227; Sir 7:20-21; Philo, *Spec.* 2.83; cf. Glotz 1926:196; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:189; see Bradley 1984:21-26; Hezser 2005:85, 151-155.

<sup>140</sup> Glotz 1926:195; De Vaux 1965:80, 84, 86; White 1970:359-360, 372, 374; Massey & Moreland 1992:5; Dillon 2002:126; Harding 2003:221; Nolland 2005:999; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:193; cf. Bradley 1984:18, 27; see Joshel 2010:7, 38-41; cf. Cato, *Agr.* 56-57; Arist. *Pol.* 1253b23-1254a17.

<sup>141</sup> Glotz 1926:196, 207; Saller 2003:192; Joshel 2010:57, 113; cf. Burford 1993:210; cf. Egyptian papyrus *P.Tebt.* 2.423.

<sup>142</sup> Bradley 1984:22; 1994:82; Joshel 2010:57; cf. Glotz 1926:196; see Hezser 2005:151-155; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:189-194.

<sup>143</sup> Hezser 2005:85.

<sup>144</sup> Yavetz 1988:157; Massey & Moreland 1992:44; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:207; Joshel 2010:113, 126, 177; cf. Sen. *Ep.* 47.4; Xen. *Oec.* 12.6-7; see Bradley 1984:21-26, 40-45.

<sup>145</sup> White 1970:354, 358; Bradley 1994:82; cf. Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:193.

<sup>146</sup> Luz 2005:225-226 n. 23.

Food and clothing were the primary means by which slaves were kept in a general state of contentment and productivity.<sup>147</sup> Columella advises landowners to provide their slaves with sturdy clothing, because it enabled hard work in all types of weather, and prevented illness in bad weather.<sup>148</sup> Whenever possible, the personnel's food was grown and prepared on the farm itself.<sup>149</sup> Types of food and portion sizes were determined by each slave's assigned tasks and responsibilities.<sup>150</sup> Providing enough food and drink was also considered to be the best means by which an owner or manager could prevent pilfering.<sup>151</sup> Landholders understood that rustic slaves needed adequate amounts of foodstuff if they were to work at their optimal levels of efficiency.<sup>152</sup>

Productivity could further be *increased* by rewarding hard or good work with *additional* food and clothing, thereby turning bare necessities into incentives.<sup>153</sup> In Xenophon's *Economics*, Ischomachos explains that he rewards diligent slaves with higher quality clothes and shoes, while providing sluggish slaves with items of lower quality.<sup>154</sup> During periods when exceptionally gruelling labour was needed, or when punishment was deemed necessary, extra food and clothing served to ease the tension and restore general levels of satisfaction.<sup>155</sup> Likewise, an increase in rations during periods of rest, especially holidays, increased servile satisfaction during periods of hard labour.<sup>156</sup> Columella even advises the estate manager to reward diligent slaves by inviting them to share dinner with him.<sup>157</sup> Apart from the benefits of providing slaves with food and clothing, it was also considered wise and frugal for landowners to allot only the *least* expensive and nutritious foodstuffs to their slaves.<sup>158</sup>

Proper living conditions, humane treatment and adequate downtime could be added to food and clothing as incentives, but only on a secondary level.<sup>159</sup> While rustic day-labourers who had suffered an injury or fallen ill were mostly ignored, sick and injured slaves were at least tended to or sent to the hospital or infirmary.<sup>160</sup> According to Columella, such care not

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<sup>147</sup> White 1970:374; Hezser 2005:152; cf. Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:190, 193; see Bradley 1994:81-84; Joshel 2010:57, 123-124, 177; cf. e.g. Ps.-Phoc. 223-227; Sir 7:20-21; Philo, *Spec.* 2.83; Xen. *Oec.* 13.9; Cato, *Agr.* 5.2; 56-59; Justinian, *Dig.* 34.1.6.

<sup>148</sup> *Rust.* 1.8.9, 15; 11.1.21; cf. Bradley 1984:22; Joshel 2010:124; see Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:190-191.

<sup>149</sup> White 1970:394; Bradley 1994:83; cf. Aubert 1994:176; see Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:191-193.

<sup>150</sup> Harrill 2006:106; cf. Aubert 1994:180; see White 1970:360-361; Joshel 2010:131.

<sup>151</sup> White 1970:358; see Joshel 2010:154-156, 178-179.

<sup>152</sup> Bradley 1994:82; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:189-190, 193; cf. e.g. Arist. [*Oec.*] 1344a35-b11.

<sup>153</sup> White 1970:359; Massey & Moreland 1992:28, 32; Burford 1993:218; Bradley 1994:82; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:198, 206-207; Joshel 2010:124, 177; cf. Harrill 2006:92; cf. Varro, *Rust.* 1.17.7.

<sup>154</sup> *Oec.* 13.10.

<sup>155</sup> Bradley 1984:23; cf. Varro, *Rust.* 1.17.5-7.

<sup>156</sup> Bradley 1984:42, 44; see Cato, *Agr.* 57; cf. Solin. 1.35; Macrob. *Sat.* 1.12.7.

<sup>157</sup> *Rust.* 1.8.5; cf. Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:198.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Burford 1993:209, 215; see Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:192-193.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Bradley 1984:25; see Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:189-194.

<sup>160</sup> White 1970:348, 360; Joshel 2010:174; cf. Glotz 1926:207; cf. Varro, *Rust.* 1.17.3; Columella, *Rust.* 1.1.18; 11.1.18; Cato, *Agr.* 12; 157-158; 160.

only improved the general condition of the master's property, but also rendered these slaves more reliable in the future.<sup>161</sup> Tending to sick slaves was one of the main duties of the estate manager.<sup>162</sup> Day-labourers also tended to get the heavy and unhealthy work, with slaves being more valuable as the landowner's acquired property.<sup>163</sup> By mentioning both food and loyalty in the same breath, the introductory verse of this parable aptly summarises the mutual dependency that characterised all ancient master-slave relationships. Masters depended on the loyalty of their slaves, while slaves depended on masters for physical maintenance and humane treatment.<sup>164</sup>

Much more important on any farm than the nourishment and happiness of the personnel was their productivity; although it is true that a higher degree of contentment translated into greater productivity.<sup>165</sup> On ancient agricultural estates, the manager was evaluated primarily by his ability to maintain or improve productivity and profit.<sup>166</sup> The general contentment of the personnel was only a means to this end, albeit the most important and efficient means by which productivity was ensured.<sup>167</sup> The goal of profitability governed an owner's treatment of his slaves.<sup>168</sup> 'The principle behind every operation on the farm [was] to maximize profit, and prevent waste.'<sup>169</sup> Valantasis is certainly correct that the feeding of fellow slaves would not have been the appointed slave's only task, but it would nonetheless have been his most important task as part of establishing acceptable levels of productivity.<sup>170</sup>

## Verses 43-44

Due to their brevity, verses 43-44 may be considered together: 'Blessed is that slave whose master, on coming, will find so doing. [Amen], I tell you, he will appoint him over all his possessions.' Even though the master's departure precedes the beginning of the parable, and his absence is only presumed by the narrative, his subsequent arrival on the farm is expressed by the participial phrase 'on coming' or 'when arriving' (ἐλθῶν). It made good business sense for a landowner to visit his estate regularly.<sup>171</sup> The latter remains true despite the evidence from Egyptian papyri that landowners and managers sometimes

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<sup>161</sup> *Rust.* 1.8.9; cf. Bradley 1984:22; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:193-194.

<sup>162</sup> Bradley 1984:21; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:193.

<sup>163</sup> Fiensy 1991:77, 91; Kloppenborg 2006:307.

<sup>164</sup> Hezser 2005:149; Harrill 2006:92, 107-108, 111; see Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:199-205, esp. 204-205.

<sup>165</sup> See Bradley 1984:21-26.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Burford 1993:218; cf. Xen. *Oec.* 15.1. By contrast, the farm manager would often have been tempted to maintain agricultural output at a slightly lower level, in order to safeguard his position, and at the same time please his master (White 1970:376).

<sup>167</sup> Bradley 1984:22; cf. Sen. *Ep.* 47.4.

<sup>168</sup> Massey & Moreland 1992:27; Burford 1993:218; Joshel 2010:57, 123.

<sup>169</sup> White 1970:358.

<sup>170</sup> Valantasis 2005:168.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Toutain 1951:278; Burford 1993:173; Aubert 1994:122; Kloppenborg 2006:315; see Harrill 2006:109-110; cf. Xen. *Oec.* 11.15-18.



corresponded via written mail.<sup>172</sup> Upon such visits, all operations on the farm were inspected, including especially the progress of the labour.<sup>173</sup> One of the most important factors that were taken into consideration during inspection was the slaves' general physical condition and level of contentment.<sup>174</sup> Of particular interest was the state of the slaves' food and clothing. The watchful master would allow his slaves to express any and all grievances that they might have against the manager. Ideally, the master would ascertain the reason(s) behind each and every punishment, so that he could evaluate the degree of appropriateness.<sup>175</sup> In addition to inspecting the condition and contentment of the slaves, landholders inspected every aspect of the farm's general condition during their visitations, including the crops, the farm animals and the finances, thereby scrutinising the farm's levels of profitability and waste.<sup>176</sup> Estate managers usually had a host of responsibilities, of which workforce management was only one.<sup>177</sup> A good example of such responsibility is reflected in a papyrus from Egypt, containing over 1200 transactions believed to have been kept by an estate manager.<sup>178</sup>

A number of commentators have objected to an apparent internal contradiction in the parable of the loyal and wise slave.<sup>179</sup> In verse 42, the chosen slave is appointed over the master's entire 'household' (οἰκετεία). As we saw, this refers to the servile manager's position at the top of the estate's hierarchy. In verse 44, however, that slave's reward is to be appointed 'over all his [the master's] possessions' (ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπάρχουσιν αὐτοῦ). How can it be seen as a promotion to place a servile manager in charge of everything, and put him at the top of the hierarchy, when he was already in charge of everything, and at the top of the hierarchy before the master had left? Commentators have attempted to explain this difficulty in a number of ways. Donahue reasons that the slave was initially only in charge of food distribution, but was subsequently set over all his master's possessions.<sup>180</sup> Yet, this proposal does not explain how the slave in question could turn around and beat his fellow slaves (in verse 45) if he had no authority over them.<sup>181</sup> Allison holds that the chosen slave was initially only appointed over the other slaves, but was subsequently promoted to authority over all his master's possessions; not just his slaves.<sup>182</sup> Taylor argues that the slave did not at the beginning of the narrative enjoy the formal title of 'manager', since his supervision was only a temporary arrangement, but was indeed formally appointed as a

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<sup>172</sup> E.g. *P.Haun.* 2.23, 32; *P.Ryl.* 2.238; *SB* 16.12579; *P.Tebt.* 2.423; cf. *P.Oslo.* 2.44; *P.Oxy.* 9:1220; *P.Mich.* 1.14; *Col.inv.* 608; *P.Fay.* 110-124, 248-277; *P.Petr.* 1.29; cf. Kloppenborg 2006:279-280, see 442-443.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Egyptian papyrus *P.Princ.* 2.72.

<sup>174</sup> Bradley 1984:24; 1994:82, 104; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:204; Joshel 2010:175; cf. Columella, *Rust.* 1.8.16-18; *Plin. Ep.* 5.14.8.

<sup>175</sup> Harrill 2006:110; cf. Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:197.

<sup>176</sup> Bradley 1994:104; cf. *Plin. Ep.* 9.20.2; *Longus* 4.13.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Fleddermann 2005:627; Valantasis 2005:168; see Aubert 1994:170-172.

<sup>178</sup> *P.Kar.Goodsp.* 96; cf. *P.Tebt.* 2.423.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. e.g. Marshall 1978:541.

<sup>180</sup> Donahue 1988:98.

<sup>181</sup> Marshall 1978:541.

<sup>182</sup> Allison 2004:440.

permanent 'manager' when his master witnessed his satisfactory performance.<sup>183</sup> Bock similarly maintains that the reward entails a promotion from temporary to permanent management.<sup>184</sup> Marshall reasons that servile estate managers were symbols of service and subordination in the early church, so that the appointed slave's initial authority is only partial and temporary, while his eventual authority would be complete and permanent.<sup>185</sup> Nolland explains the difficulty from a diachronic standpoint: the original text, which Matthew follows, does not feature the appointed slave as an estate manager when the parable commences, since he only becomes one at the end, and Luke was simply wrong in introducing the appointed slave as a 'manager' (οἰκονόμος).<sup>186</sup> Like Donahue, Nolland argues that the slave was initially only put in charge of food distribution, not comprehensive management. Like Taylor, Nolland holds that a temporary arrangement gives way to a more permanent arrangement. These explanations are all inadequate and erroneous, failing to fully consider the social background of agricultural slavery.

The simple solution is that the selected slave was initially indeed at the top of the hierarchy of that individual estate, but not of the master's entire fortune.<sup>187</sup> Q 12:44 portrays the master as an extremely wealthy man, owning more than one estate.<sup>188</sup> In verse 44, the entrusted slave is promoted as manager over the other estates as well. We argued earlier that the 'household' (οἰκετεία) of verse 42 does not reference the owner's entire household (*domus*) or nuclear family, but the families of slaves who lived and worked on that particular farm (*familia rustica*). This interpretation is confirmed by the content of verse 44. It was not uncommon for a landowner who owned multiple estates to appoint an administrator (*procurator* & e.g. πραγματευτής) to supervise all the different estates and estate managers.<sup>189</sup> If Kloppenborg and others are correct that the word βαιτανῶτα in the Egyptian papyrus *P.Lond. 7.1948* refers to Beth Anath in Galilee, we have direct evidence of such a general administrator visiting a large farm in Galilee to inspect its progress before returning to his employer, Apollonios, in Alexandria.<sup>190</sup>

The all-inclusivity of the phrase 'over all his [the master's] possessions' (ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπάρχουσιν αὐτοῦ) implies that the slave was not only put in charge of all the other estates, but also placed in charge of the entire *familia*, including the master's urban slaves.<sup>191</sup> Such a promotion would entail liberation from the confinements of one particular farm.<sup>192</sup> In fact,

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<sup>183</sup> Taylor 1989:139-140, 143.

<sup>184</sup> Bock 1996:1180.

<sup>185</sup> Marshall 1978:541.

<sup>186</sup> Nolland 2005:997-998; cf. Fleddermann 2005:627.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Chandezon 2011:102, 107.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Fiensy 1991:56; 2010:197.

<sup>189</sup> White 1970:353, 355, 379; Harrill 2006:103-104; see Aubert 1994:137, 141-144, 183-186; cf. Columella, *Rust.* 1.6.7, 23; Egyptian Papyrus *SB 16.12607*.

<sup>190</sup> Kloppenborg 2006:368-369.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Aubert 1994:173; Saller 2003:187-188.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Aubert 1994:118.

it would entail a movement from the farm to the master's urban household, where he would henceforth reside with his family; although it would still be expected of him to visit the different estates for inspection.<sup>193</sup> Since urban slaves were normally seen as hierarchically superior to rural slaves, this jump in rank would not at all have been insignificant.<sup>194</sup> What is more, conditions were generally much better for urban than for rural slaves.<sup>195</sup> In fact, urban household slaves were at times threatened with being sent to some or other rural estate as punishment for extreme misdeeds.<sup>196</sup> Whereas rural managers mostly shared the unfortunate socio-economic conditions of their inferiors, urban slaves could improve their socio-economic conditions dramatically.<sup>197</sup> To top it all off, the fact that '[o]nly freeborn or manumitted *procuratores* are recorded in sources' strongly suggests that manumission accompanied the promotion of the slave in the parable.<sup>198</sup>

In the parable, the promoted slave is placed at the very top of the slave hierarchy, second only to the master and his family.<sup>199</sup> One gets the impression that the slave was promoted to being the master's right-hand man and confidant.<sup>200</sup> Both Greco-Roman and Jewish masters could develop highly intimate and/or respectful relationships with one or two of their slaves.<sup>201</sup> Roman and Jewish stories of ideal master-slave relationships give expression to the latter phenomenon.<sup>202</sup> As one would expect, the most important trait of the ideal slave was unmoving loyalty to the master, sometimes unto death.<sup>203</sup> Due to the physical distance between rural managers and urban landowners, as well as the infrequency with which they saw each other, it is extremely unlikely that landowners would have pursued or fostered cherished relationships with farm managers.<sup>204</sup> Urban household slaves were by far the more likely recipients of such favour.<sup>205</sup> In the literature, such slaves are often described by their masters as true confidants, or even friends. Funeral inscriptions indicate that at least some of these 'privileged' slaves had the same high regard and genuine love for their masters.<sup>206</sup> It is doubtful, however, that the same would have been true of all, or even most, of these 'prominent' slaves. At its core, the master-slave relationship was typified by inequality and disproportion. Like an abusive marriage, the slave-master relationship could

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<sup>193</sup> Cf. Herzog 1994:157; Chandezon 2011:102, 107; cf. Egyptian papyri *P.Princ.* 2.72; *SB* 16.12607.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Bradley 1994:70.

<sup>195</sup> Yavetz 1988:159; see White 1970:362-363, 365; Massey & Moreland 1992:27-28. It should nonetheless be noted that urban domestic slaves were more visible, and spent more time in the vicinity of their masters, which made them more vulnerable (Bradley 1984:123; Scheidel 2008:110).

<sup>196</sup> White 1970:358; Massey & Moreland 1992:50; cf. Hezser 2005:153 n. 13; cf. Plaut. *Asin.* 342; *Bacch.* 365; *Mostell.* 19; cf. *Vidularia* 31.

<sup>197</sup> See Bradley 1994:68-72.

<sup>198</sup> Aubert 1994:185; cf. Burford 1993:185, 220; Herzog 1994:157; Mouritsen 2011:137; *pace* Allison 2004:440.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. White 1970:355; Fleddermann 2005:636.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Marshall 1978:541; Herzog 1994:157.

<sup>201</sup> De Vaux 1965:85; Andrews 1967:134; Burford 1993:217; Aubert 1994:159; Hezser 2005:100, 141, 292, 301.

<sup>202</sup> Andrews 1967:138; Yavetz 1988:158; see Matz 2002:17-18; Hezser 2005:155-162; 2009:127-128.

<sup>203</sup> Yavetz 1988:158; Hezser 2005:155; 2009:127; cf. Harrill 2006:146, 152-153; see Joshel 2010:116-117.

<sup>204</sup> Bradley 1994:105; cf. Massey & Moreland 1992:27, 32.

<sup>205</sup> Dillon 2002:125-126.

<sup>206</sup> Aubert 1994:159-160; see Hezser 2005:162-166; cf. Fiensy 1991:92.

be characterised by the simultaneous presence of both intimacy and exploitation, both affiliation and submission.<sup>207</sup> Be that as it may, these individual slaves were usually granted a lot of autonomy and responsibility. It follows that the promotion of which verse 44 speaks entails more than just an advancement of status and an increase in responsibility.<sup>208</sup> In addition to the movement from the farm to the city, it entails a highly honourable movement from the master's blind spot to his right-hand side.<sup>209</sup> This new position would have afforded the (manumitted) slave plenty of opportunities for significant wealth creation.<sup>210</sup>

In general, ancient slave-owners mixed reward and punishment, kindness and cruelty, to get the most out of their slaves.<sup>211</sup> Both the whip at the slave's back and the carrot in front of her nose moved the slave in the direction of the master's objective. The trick for the master was to find the right balance between punishment and reward, thereby ensuring optimum efficiency. Structurally, the parable of the loyal and wise slave is a good example of this balance between reward and punishment.<sup>212</sup> Verse 44 explains the reward, while verse 46 explains the punishment. The servile manager is either rewarded or punished. There is no middle ground, no area of neutrality.

One aspect of verses 43-44 that seems extraordinary is the imbalance and disproportion here between achievement and reward. The magnitude of the manager's reward seems exaggerated given the nature of the actual achievement. This exaggeration is doubly augmented by the exclamation 'amen' (ἀμήν)<sup>213</sup> and the emphatic phrase 'I tell you' (λέγω ὑμῖν).<sup>214</sup> In the Sayings Gospel Q, the latter phrase often precedes an exaggerated, subversive and/or implausible statement by Q's Jesus, as if the audience needs convincing of the claim's validity.<sup>215</sup> For an estate manager to be promoted to administrator was no small achievement, and this reward is totally atypical for the simple and straightforward task of feeding farmhands. Yet, one should not overlook the possibility that the act of feeding slaves was representative of the manager's entire managerial function. The latter is supported if compared to the misconduct of the unfaithful slave, which likewise seems to be representative of mismanagement in general (see below). Nevertheless, it would even in general terms have been exceptional for a farm manager to be promoted to administrator.

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<sup>207</sup> Hezser 2005:149.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. Allison 2004:440; Valantasis 2005:169.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Chandezon 2011:102, 107.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. Herzog 1994:157.

<sup>211</sup> De Vaux 1965:86; see Bradley 1984; Harrill 2006:107, 109-110; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:195-199, 205; see e.g. Sir 33:25-33; Xen. *Oec.* 5.15; 12.16, 19; 13.6-9.

<sup>212</sup> See Crossan 1974a:38-39, 40-41.

<sup>213</sup> Luke has 'truly' (ἀληθῶς) (Marshall 1978:541; Bock 1996:1180; Fleddermann 2005:627-628; Nolland 2005:998).

<sup>214</sup> Cf. Kirk 1998:234. As a side note, this twofold emphasis makes one wonder if this verse was not perhaps the original ending to the parable, to which verses 45-46 were added later (cf. Allison 2004:440).

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Q 7:26, 28; 10:12, 24; 11:9, 51; 12:22, 27, 59; 13:35; 15:7, [10]; 17:34.

The imagined promotion was within the realm of possibility, but was at the same time exceptional, especially if feeding fellow slaves was the manager's only accomplishment.<sup>216</sup>

## Verse 45

Verses 43 and 45 should be read together, since they constitute an antithetic parallelism.<sup>217</sup> In verse 43, the slave is described as performing his assigned task, as was expected of him. In verse 45, the slave is described as doing the exact opposite.<sup>218</sup> Instead of feeding his fellow slaves, he is described as beating them, while eating and drinking with drunkards. The image created here is one of a 'bad' slave who takes food from the mouths of his fellow slaves and squanders it in the company of wayward friends.<sup>219</sup> It is not entirely unlikely that these wayward friends were also slaves owned by the same householder.<sup>220</sup> The friends could also have been slaves and/or servile managers from neighbouring estates.<sup>221</sup> That managers at times did business with one another, either on their masters' behalves or otherwise, is indicated by an Egyptian papyrus that describes a monetary transaction between two such managers.<sup>222</sup> To add insult to injury, the manager would probably have feasted in front of his starving subordinates, at a separate table.<sup>223</sup> Measured against the standards of the landholder, such behaviour would have been totally unacceptable. Servile managers were only permitted to dine in any degree of extravagance on recognised holidays.<sup>224</sup> What is more, they were not allowed to entertain any guests apart from the master's own friends and family.<sup>225</sup> Finally, the servile farm manager was absolutely forbidden to overindulge in alcohol.<sup>226</sup> In Xenophon's *Economics*, Ischomachos opines that hard drinking makes estate managers forget or ignore their duties on the farm.<sup>227</sup> Ancient Jews likewise associated drunkenness with irresponsibility.<sup>228</sup> It is important to note that the parable does not specifically accuse the manager of consuming alcohol or being inebriated himself, but rather of sharing the company of drunkards.<sup>229</sup> Likewise, the parable does not explicitly accuse the manager of neglecting his duties on the farm, although this was in all likelihood implied (see below).

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<sup>216</sup> Nolland 2005:997.

<sup>217</sup> Crossan 1974a:22; cf. Allison 2004:439; Luz 2005:221; see Taylor 1989:141-144.

<sup>218</sup> Bock 1996:1181.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Luz 2005:224 n. 25; Nolland 2005:999; Valantasis 2005:169; Joshel 2010:117.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:198; cf. Columella, *Rust.* 1.8.5.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Joshel 2010:178; cf. Varro, *Rust.* 1.15.1.

<sup>222</sup> *SB* 22.15348.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Joshel 2010:174, 175; cf. Epicrates, fragm. 5.

<sup>224</sup> Joshel 2010:175.

<sup>225</sup> Joshel 2010:175; cf. Valantasis 2005:169; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:209-110; cf. Egyptian papyrus *P.Ryl.* 2.238.

<sup>226</sup> Joshel 2010:177.

<sup>227</sup> *Oec.* 12.11.

<sup>228</sup> Bock 1996:1181 n. 20; cf. Isa 28:1-4; Joel 1:5.

<sup>229</sup> Fleddermann 2005:628. To eliminate any possible doubt in this regard, Luke replaces 'with the drunkards' (μετὰ τῶν μεθούστων) with 'and be drunk' (καὶ μεθύσκεσθαι) (Fleddermann 2005:628; cf. Marshall 1978:542; Bock 1996:1181).

From a post-modern vantage point, it might seem drastic for the manager to beat his fellow slaves, but this practice was totally acceptable as a form of servile punishment in the ancient world.<sup>230</sup> This form of punishment was particularly appropriate for slaves who failed or refused to do their work.<sup>231</sup> In addition to loyalty, firmness was one of the most important and sought after traits that a farm manager could possess.<sup>232</sup> It was expected of the manager to rule over and be harsh with the other slaves, keeping them in line.<sup>233</sup> As the master's representative, the manager was allowed to physically punish the other slaves.<sup>234</sup> Scholarly suggestions that the manager in Q 12:45 described as somehow attempting to usurp his master's role are therefore mistaken.<sup>235</sup>

Denying food to the other slaves could also have been a form of punishment, and would have been acceptable as such if it improved productivity.<sup>236</sup> In fact, it was required of the manager to do whatever it takes to maintain or even increase productivity, since all slaves were considered to be naturally unreliable, gluttonous, criminous, intransigent, greedy, cruel and lazy, and rural slaves were specifically considered to be difficult to manage.<sup>237</sup> A 'good' manager was able to prevent laxity, carelessness and criminality through sternness.<sup>238</sup> It was so common in the Roman world for a manager to physically and emotionally torment his fellow slaves that the term itself (*vilicus*) became synonymous with servile brutality in popular culture. In Roman comedies and elsewhere, the farm manager is often negatively portrayed as a stereotyped regal tyrant, who terrorises and brutalises everyone under his yoke.<sup>239</sup>

Yet, starving and abusing the slaves would have been unacceptable, especially if it had a negative effect on productivity.<sup>240</sup> Brutality against one slave, or one group of slaves, could have a demoralising effect on all the other slaves, which hindered servile productivity.<sup>241</sup> Maltreatment and malnourishment could also render slaves disloyal, and make them rebellious.<sup>242</sup> Agronomists warned estate managers against abusing their authority.<sup>243</sup> We

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<sup>230</sup> Andrews 1967:138; Burford 1993:209, 214; Harrill 2006:106, 107; cf. e.g. Sen. *De Ira* 3.32; Gell. *NA* 5.14.17.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Joshel 2010:40, 122.

<sup>232</sup> White 1970:350-351; Burford 1993:218; cf. Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:197.

<sup>233</sup> Burford 1993:218-219; Aubert 1994:161; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:195; Chadezon 2011:100.

<sup>234</sup> Bradley 1984:122-123; 1994:72; Massey & Moreland 1992:29; Hezser 2005:204; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:196; cf. Harrill 2006:87, 103, 111; Joshel 2010:41; cf. e.g. Cato, *Agr.* 5.

<sup>235</sup> E.g. Marshall 1978:542; Nolland 2005:999; Valantasis 2005:169.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Matz 2002:14.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Burford 1993:211; Bagnall 1993:235; Dillon 2002:126; see Bradley 1984:27-30; 1994:65, 122-125; cf. Egyptian papyrus *P.Stras.* 4.296; Cato, *Agr.* 2.2; 4; 5.1; 66.1; 67.2; Columella, *Rust.* 1.1.20; 1.3.5; 1.6.8; 1.7.6-7; 1.8.1-2, 15, 17, 18; 1.9.1, 4; 7.4.2; 9.5.2; 11.1.12, 14, 16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27.

<sup>238</sup> Joshel 2010:155.

<sup>239</sup> See Harrill 2006:104-105.

<sup>240</sup> White 1970:358; see Bradley 1984:21-26.

<sup>241</sup> Harrill 2006:110.

<sup>242</sup> Descat 2011:213; cf. Diod. Sic. 34.2.25-28; cf. Massey & Moreland 1992:57; see Joshel 2010:57-58.

<sup>243</sup> Kloppenborg 1995:294-295; Harrill 2006:109; cf. Luz 2005:224.

saw earlier that conscientious landowners would inspect the general contentment and physical condition of their slaves whenever they visited their farms. Foremen, who usually operated directly under the manager, were encouraged by agronomists to use words instead of whips to control the farmhands.<sup>244</sup> Ultimately, the combination of carousing with drunkards and mistreating subordinates creates the impression of general mismanagement.<sup>245</sup>

Just like the master had to maintain a balance between punishment and reward to ensure high levels of productivity, the manager was expected to do the same.<sup>246</sup> Regarding punishment, a good manager was able to find an appropriate midway between exceedingly harsh and exceedingly slack discipline.<sup>247</sup> Good managers were further able to prevent unsatisfactory performance, instead of having to punish it after the fact.<sup>248</sup> Farm managers were expected to motivate slaves by commending and rewarding good work.<sup>249</sup>

Some wealthy landowners visited their estates very rarely, thereby increasing the import of each visit.<sup>250</sup> On the one hand, it goes without saying that the less often the master visited his estate, the more freedom and independence the manager had during the interim.<sup>251</sup> For the most part, estate managers were allowed to go about their business as they saw fit, provided that they earned the landowner a steady and sturdy return on investment.<sup>252</sup> 'The handling of the whole operation, including the treatment of the labour force, lay very largely within the discretion of the *villicus*.'<sup>253</sup> On the other hand, infrequent visits allowed time for anticipation to build on the part of both the manager and the (other) slaves. A master's long-anticipated visit was a big event, and could fill both the manager and the slaves with much fear.<sup>254</sup> There is no small number of ancient reports about slaves who were so scared of facing their masters' punishment that they would rather commit suicide.<sup>255</sup> Filling slaves with fear was an efficient and deliberate method to ensure that they did what was expected of them, even in the absence of their masters.<sup>256</sup> At the same time, infrequent visits could endorse and generate different types of laxity and opportunistic behaviour from both the

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<sup>244</sup> White 1970:359; Harrill 2006:107; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:196; Joshel 2010:126; cf. Varro, *Rust.* 1.17.5.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Bock 1996:1181; Luz 2005:224 n. 25; Nolland 2005:999; Oakman 2008:267; cf. *Ahiqar* 3.2; 4.15.

<sup>246</sup> Burford 1993:218; Joshel 2010:174; see Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:195-199.

<sup>247</sup> White 1970:354; Harrill 2006:107.

<sup>248</sup> White 1970:354.

<sup>249</sup> Bradley 1984:23; Harrill 2006:107; cf. Cato, *Agr.* 5.2, 4, 6.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. Burford 1993:216-217, 219; Kloppenborg 2006:315.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Burford 1993:177; Bradley 1994:105, 219.

<sup>252</sup> White 1970:358; cf. Aubert 1994:159.

<sup>253</sup> White 1970:358; cf. Burford 1993:177.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. Bradley 1984:115-116, 123, 135-137, 142; Hezser 2005:149; Harrill 2006:91-92; see Bradley 1994:102-104; see Longus 4; cf. Egyptian papyrus *P.Princ.* 2.72.

<sup>255</sup> E.g. Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 10.5; Sen. *Ep.* 4.4; see Bradley 1994:111-112.

<sup>256</sup> Bradley 1984:136; cf. Joshel 2010:116, 178.

slaves and the manager.<sup>257</sup> For the latter reason, agronomists advised absent landowners to visit their estates regularly and unexpectedly.<sup>258</sup>

Individual slaves on the same farm generally had separate religious, ethnic, social and educational backgrounds.<sup>259</sup> No less distinctive were their agricultural tasks and functions, as well as their living conditions.<sup>260</sup> In general, a slave's background determined her<sup>261</sup> task(s), which in turn determined her rank, which in turn determined her living conditions.<sup>262</sup> For the most part, such internal differentiation thwarted the development of group solidarity amongst slaves, and prevented rebellion against the master.<sup>263</sup> For this reason, slaveholders deliberately established and upheld internal dissention amongst slaves.<sup>264</sup> Much more common than servile solidarity was dissention, jealousy and competition for hierarchical advancement. These cutthroat conditions and attitudes explain why a slave would beat and mistreat fellow slaves. Antagonism was even greater between slaves and their manager.<sup>265</sup> The fact that the manager was also a slave, but had the authority to boss his fellow slaves around, and even discipline them as he saw fit, made him the object of intense envy, resentment and defiance. Rural slaves would often compete with the manager for the master's favour, which would foster a working environment replete with mutual hostility, distrust and anxiety.

## Verse 46

As with verses 43 and 45 in the previous section, verses 44 and 46 also need to be read together, since they also constitute an antithetic parallelism.<sup>266</sup> Verse 44 describes the slave's reward, should his master find him obediently performing his duties, while verse 46 describes the slave's punishment, should his master find him defiantly ignoring his duties. The reward is a promotion: the slave will be appointed over all the master's possessions.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Bradley 1994:105; Kloppenborg 1995:295; 2006:316.

<sup>258</sup> Burford 1993:173; Kloppenborg 1995:295 n. 61; Harrill 2006:109; Joshel 2010:175; Chandezon 2011:101; cf. e.g. Xen. *Oec.* 11.15-18.

<sup>259</sup> Burford 1993:211; Dillon 2002:125; Hezser 2005:116; cf. Glotz 1926:193.

<sup>260</sup> White 1970:333.

<sup>261</sup> The use here of inclusive language in the form of a feminine pronoun is not illegitimate or anachronistic. Due to the desexualisation of slaves in antiquity, some female slaves were expected to work as farm hands, while some male slaves were expected to perform household chores (Hezser 2005:84; cf. Joshel 2010:66, 170). Even some of the estate managers were women, although this was extremely rare (see Aubert 1994:140-141, 193; Chandezon 2011:99). There was nonetheless on most ancient farms a broad division between female domestic labour and male agricultural (and other outside) labour (see Saller 2003:199-201; Mouritsen 2011:133-134).

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Bradley 1984:16; Harrill 2006:148.

<sup>263</sup> Bradley 1984:16; Burford 1993:212; Hezser 2005:11-12.

<sup>264</sup> Burford 1993:212; Joshel 2010:57; cf. Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:211; DuBois 2009:57; cf. Pl. *Leg.* 6.777c-d; Arist. [*Oec.*] 1344b17-20.

<sup>265</sup> Bradley 1994:72.

<sup>266</sup> Crossan 1974a:22; cf. Allison 2004:439; Luz 2005:221; see Taylor 1989:141-144.

<sup>267</sup> Taylor 1989:143; Etchells 1998:110; cf. Chandezon 2011:102, 107.



Following the logic of the parable up to this point, the punishment of verse 46 should in some way or another be the opposite of the reward in verse 44. Verse 46 describes the punishment as cutting the slave in two (διχοτομέω) and giving (τίθημι) him an inheritance (μέρος) with the faithless (ἄπιστοι). At times in antiquity, the word διχοτομέω ('dissect' or 'cut in two') was used figuratively, referring in a general sense to severe punishment.<sup>268</sup> Nolland suggest the following English equivalents: 'cut him down to size' or 'tear him to shreds.'<sup>269</sup> If this word is understood figuratively, it does not describe the content of the punishment, but merely its occurrence.<sup>270</sup> The content of the punishment is then rather described by the final part of the sentence, namely that the slave will be given an inheritance with the faithless. This interpretation corresponds to the content of verse 44, where the slave also receives only *one* reward.

However, it seems unlikely that the author would have used such a descriptive and specific word if he merely wanted to denote the general occurrence of punishment.<sup>271</sup> If taken literally, διχοτομέω might reference either dismemberment or killing. Most scholars have equated the two, reading this verb as a reference to the gruesome ancient practice of 'death by sawing', whereby a person was killed by being sawed into two longitudinal or latitudinal halves.<sup>272</sup> The parable does not necessarily have this practice in mind, though, since the verb 'cut in two' (διχοτομέω) cannot be assumed to imply that the two pieces would be equal in size. Accordingly, the verb could have denoted dismemberment of a limb without the loss of life.<sup>273</sup> In fact, killing should summarily be discarded as an option for the referent of διχοτομέω, since it would encumber the internal logic of the parable. Being 'cut in two' is only the first of two punishments. The second punishment is to 'receive an inheritance with the faithless.'<sup>274</sup> However this second punishment is interpreted, on the literal level of the parable it requires the slave to still be alive after receiving the first punishment.<sup>275</sup> As such, non-fatal dismemberment appears to be the most likely meaning of διχοτομέω in this context, although a figurative understanding of this verb is not impossible.

Dismemberment was not a very popular form of punishment among either Greco-Roman or Jewish slave-owners. In the Roman world, flogging and torture were the preferred methods

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<sup>268</sup> Taylor 1989:144 n. 60; Liddell & Scott 1996 s.v. διχοτομέω; Louw & Nida 1993a:491, sub-domain 38.12; Louw & Nida 1993b s.v. διχοτομέω.

<sup>269</sup> Nolland 2005:1000.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Marshall 1978:543; Scott 1989:210; Allison 2004:441.

<sup>271</sup> Bock 1996:1182; cf. Oakman 2008:267.

<sup>272</sup> E.g. Dodd 1958:159 n. 1; Marshall 1978:543; Donahue 1988:100; Taylor 1989:143-144; Bock 1996:1182; Luz 2005:224-225; Nolland 2005:1000; Hays 2012:47 n. 32; cf. DuBois 2009:55; see Schlier 1964:225-226; cf. e.g. *Ahiqar* 8:38.

<sup>273</sup> Cf. e.g. LXX Exod 29:17.

<sup>274</sup> Donahue 1988:100.

<sup>275</sup> Dodd 1958:159 n. 1; Marshall 1978:543; Taylor 1989:143-144; Bock 1996:1182; Nolland 2005:1000.

of chastisement.<sup>276</sup> The Greeks also preferred flogging over other types of punishment.<sup>277</sup> Dismemberment would have been even less popular for rural slaves, due to the nature of their work, and their depreciation in value should they be rendered less efficient in any way. Be that as it may, dismemberment was not unprecedented in the ancient world as a form of servile punishment. There is adequate evidence of dismemberment in the Greco-Roman world. Caligula is reported by Suetonius, for instance, to have punished a slave who had stolen a piece of silver plate by ordering his hands to be cut off, dangled around his neck, and then having the slave parade around in the dining hall.<sup>278</sup>

Some commentators have argued that the punishment of Q 12:46 seems too severe to be taken literally.<sup>279</sup> Others have used the supposed shock value of the cruel punishment as evidence of the parable's authenticity.<sup>280</sup> These arguments betray a lack of knowledge about slavery in antiquity.<sup>281</sup> In Roman, Egyptian and Jewish societies, the slave's body belonged to the *paterfamilias* (and his nuclear family), who had complete control over it, and could violate or abuse it as he saw fit.<sup>282</sup> In both societies, corporal punishment was not only permissible, but actually also encouraged as a means of promoting obedience and discipline through chastisement. For the most part, not only the punishment, but also the general treatment of slaves tended to be harsh.<sup>283</sup> Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian, blames the first organised slave revolt in the ancient world on the ill treatment and malnourishment of rural slaves by wealthy landholders.<sup>284</sup> It would certainly not have been strange or shocking for a slave to be punished for any and all transgressions, no matter how significant or trivial, as the slaveholder saw fit.<sup>285</sup> Sadistic and cruel acts of chastisement, sometimes for minor offences, were by no means unprecedented in the ancient world.<sup>286</sup> Cruel punishments were often inflicted capriciously, unpredictably, unwarrantedly and erratically. It is certainly possible to imagine the owner being enraged at finding his manager in the middle of a drunken party upon his arrival, coupled with evidence of general mismanagement in the form of servile abuse. Given such a scenario, severe punishment would certainly have been warranted; from an ancient viewpoint, that is.

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<sup>276</sup> Bradley 1984:119; Harrill 2006:106, 158; cf. Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:196; see Joshel 2010:121-122.

<sup>277</sup> See Burford 1993:214-215.

<sup>278</sup> *Calig.* 32.2.

<sup>279</sup> Marshall 1978:543; Nolland 2005:997; e.g. Donahue 1988:100; Blomberg 1990:191.

<sup>280</sup> Allison 2004:441-442; e.g. Scott 1989:210-211.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Harrill 2006:86; see Luz 2005:224-225; cf. Zimmermann 2009:168.

<sup>282</sup> Massey & Moreland 1992:26; Hezser 2005:204; cf. Nolland 2005:999; Joshel 2010:40, 114; see De Vaux 1965:84-85; Bradley 118-123.

<sup>283</sup> Luz 2005:224; cf. e.g. Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 5.1; Sen. *Ep.* 47.11; Egyptian papyrus *P.Oxy.* 14.1643.

<sup>284</sup> Diod. Sic. 34.2.25-28.

<sup>285</sup> *Pace* Scott 1989:210.

<sup>286</sup> Bradley 1984:121, 122, 137, 140-141; Luz 2005:224; Joshel 2010:40, 122-123, 152; cf. Matz 2002:14, 20; Allison 2004:442; see Yavetz 1988:158-159; cf. e.g. Juv. 14.15-24; Mart. *Epigr.* 3.94. As is wellknown, Vedius Pollio was particularly cruel to his slaves (cf. Sen. *De Ira* 3.40; *Clem.* 1.18; Dio 54.23).

Like the Greco-Roman literature, the biblical tradition takes the physical exploitation and punishment of slaves for granted.<sup>287</sup> Proverbs 29:19, for example, states: 'A servant will not be corrected by words: For though he understand he will not answer.'<sup>288</sup> According to Exodus 21:26-27, slaves were to be manumitted if their masters had knocked out one or more of their teeth, or damaged one of their eyes.<sup>289</sup> On the level of actual practice, this regulation reveals that severe physical punishment was common in Israel.<sup>290</sup> On the level of legislation, this regulation probably applied exclusively to Hebrew debt-slaves, and even in their case, it is unlikely that the ruling was administered religiously.<sup>291</sup> Exodus 21:20-21 indicates that violence against slaves, irrespective of its severity, only had legal ramifications if the slave died instantly as a result thereof.<sup>292</sup> If the slave survived, even if only for a few days after the assault, the owner was considered innocent.<sup>293</sup> Apart from the brutality of the regulation's content, its mere existence indicates that the killing of slaves was common enough to require legal prohibition.<sup>294</sup> Josephus adds credibility to the former description by citing a number of independent cases where slaves were either tortured or killed by their masters.<sup>295</sup> The physical punishment of slaves is also promoted by Jewish apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, as well as by rabbinic literature.<sup>296</sup>

A prominent position on the slave hierarchy did not shield any individual slave from outbursts of anger and cruelty on the master's part.<sup>297</sup> In fact, because of their additional responsibility on the farm, and because they were in the master's immediate vicinity more often, such slaves might actually have been reprimanded more often and more severely than other slaves.<sup>298</sup> Estate managers were at times warned by agronomists about a day of accounting.<sup>299</sup> All slaves, even estate managers, lived under constant fear of being punished.<sup>300</sup> In *Daphnis and Chloe*, Lamon fears being hanged by Dionysophanes as punishment for the garden being vandalised under his watch.<sup>301</sup> In *The Golden Ass*, Apuleius tells of a servile manager whose master punished him by smearing him with honey and

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<sup>287</sup> Hezser 2005:57; cf. Bradley 1984:119.

<sup>288</sup> King James Version.

<sup>289</sup> De Vaux 1965:85.

<sup>290</sup> Pace Blomberg 1990:191.

<sup>291</sup> Hezser 2005:208, esp. n. 26.

<sup>292</sup> De Vaux 1965:85.

<sup>293</sup> Hezser 2005:208.

<sup>294</sup> Pace Nolland 2005:1000. In first-century Rome, killing one's slave was allowed by law (Luz 2005:224 n. 28; see Hezser 2005:205-207). By contrast, the killing of slaves was not nearly as prevalent in Jewish society as it was in the Greco-Roman world, especially by the first century AD. One reason for this eventuality was probably the regulation in Exodus 21:20-21 (cf. Hezser 2005:208). Even among Romans, the killing of slaves was viewed as bad business. It was considered an unnecessary expense to replace a slave who had died as a result of severe punishment (Hezser 2005:85).

<sup>295</sup> Hezser 2005:58; e.g. *B.J.* 1.584-586; *A.J.* 5.41; 15.226; 16.230-233; 17.44-45, 55, 66, 79.

<sup>296</sup> E.g. *Sir* 42:5; *Ahiqar* 83; cf. Allison 2000:180; see Hezser 2005:150-151, 208-211; Luz 2005:224 n. 28.

<sup>297</sup> Bradley 1984:18, 123; Hezser 2005:58; Joshel 2010:152; cf. Bock 1996:1183.

<sup>298</sup> Cf. Luz 2005:224 n. 25.

<sup>299</sup> Harrill 2006:109.

<sup>300</sup> Bradley 1984:123, 135-137, 142; Hezser 2005:149; cf. Harrill 2006:91-92; Joshel 2010:116.

<sup>301</sup> Longus 4.7-9.

allowing ants to devour him.<sup>302</sup> In antiquity, a servile manager was ultimately completely subordinate to and at the mercy of the slave-owner.<sup>303</sup> Like the farm animals and the other slaves, he was seen by the master as being little more than a piece of agricultural equipment (*instrumentum*).<sup>304</sup> As we saw, even intimate master-slave relationships were sometimes characterised by violence and cruelty. Fear of intelligent and educated slaves at times led to the physical abuse of high-ranking slaves.<sup>305</sup>

Three additional lexical analyses are necessary to unlock verse 46. When the word ‘inheritance’ (μέρος) appears without a preposition, it can be variously translated as ‘share’, ‘portion’, ‘allotment’, ‘heritage’, ‘lot’ or ‘destiny’.<sup>306</sup> When used in reference to a hired worker or slave, it usually denotes her portion of work, perhaps better described as her allotment of duties. The word commonly translated as ‘faithless’ (ἄπιστος) does not here refer to a degree of religious faith or spiritual commitment, but to a general lack of reliability and trustworthiness.<sup>307</sup> Within the narrative world of the parable, the group described as ‘the untrustworthy’ (οἱ ἄπιστοι) refers to other slaves who are unreliable.<sup>308</sup> This reading is not only confirmed by the slave’s unreliable behaviour in verse 45, but also by the word ‘faithful’ (πιστός) in verse 42, which in that context certainly means ‘trustworthy’.<sup>309</sup> Finally, the Critical Edition of Q has translated the Greek word τίθημι here with ‘give’. Surely, δίδωμι would have been used if this were the intended meaning. Rather, τίθημι should here be translated with one of its many other translation possibilities. Out of these, the most likely options in this context are: ‘appoint’, ‘assign’, ‘establish’ or ‘institute’.<sup>310</sup> Due to these lexical considerations, the second part of verse 46 should rather be translated along these lines: ‘...[the slave’s master] will dismember him and assign his allotment of duties with the untrustworthy slaves.’

The latter translation coheres very well with the rest of the parable, and verse 44 in particular. Whereas verse 44 describes a promotion in rank and duties, verse 46 describes a demotion in rank and duties. In the former, the slave is appointed over all the master’s possessions, but in the latter, the slave is assigned a place at the bottom of the hierarchy, together with all the other undependable slaves. Demotion was not unprecedented as a way of punishing slaves in the ancient world.<sup>311</sup> The proposed translation and reading are further supported by the circumstance that both legs of the punishment seem to fit the

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<sup>302</sup> Apul. *Asinus Aureus* 8.22; cf. Aubert 1994:173.

<sup>303</sup> Nolland 2005:999; Harrill 2006:86, 87, 109; cf. Joshel 2010:40; Bock 1996:1183.

<sup>304</sup> Saller 2003:192; cf. Glotz 1926:195; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:201; DuBois 2009:60; see Aubert 1994:148-149, 191; cf. Justinian, *Dig.* 33.7.8.

<sup>305</sup> Hezser 2005:150.

<sup>306</sup> Liddell & Scott 1996 s.v. μέρος.

<sup>307</sup> Liddell & Scott 1996 s.v. ἄπιστος; Hays 2012:47-48 n. 33; cf. Funk 2006:166; *pace* Bock 1996:1182.

<sup>308</sup> Valantasis 2005:169.

<sup>309</sup> Hays 2012:47-48 n. 33; cf. Catchpole 1993:58; Fleddermann 2005:629, 633.

<sup>310</sup> Liddell & Scott 1996 s.v. τίθημι; cf. Allison 2004:442.

<sup>311</sup> Massey & Moreland 1992:50; Bradley 1994:69.

initial crime. Firstly, seeing as the manager chose to abuse his fellow slaves physically, the master saw it fit to dispense physical punishment upon him as well.<sup>312</sup> Secondly, seeing as the manager chose to keep the company of miscreants and scoundrels when he was still in charge, the master saw it fit to demote him to their level, and to let him share in their duties.<sup>313</sup> This punishment would be even more poetic if the ‘drunkards’ (μεθύοντες) of verse 45 were fellow slaves. It goes without saying that the other slaves would have viewed such punishment as being fair and just.<sup>314</sup> Interestingly, even the dispensation of fairness and justice was considered by Columella and Ischomachos as a means by which the landowner could ‘increase his estate’, probably because it gave rise to a measure of contentment on the part of the servile personnel, which in turn increased productivity.<sup>315</sup>

## Findings

According to Funk, the parables of Jesus are all characterised by an uncomfortable mix of everydayness (or vividness) and strangeness (or incongruity).<sup>316</sup> On the one hand, they portray everyday reality truthfully, causing the audience to agree: ‘That’s the way things are!’ On the other, they distort and overturn everyday reality through one or more narrative elements that are exaggerated, implausible or unusual, causing the audience to ask: ‘What’s wrong with this picture?’ The interplay between everydayness and peculiarity give birth to the meaning of each parable.<sup>317</sup>

On the level of everydayness, we have found that the parable is entirely congruent with the practice of agricultural slavery in antiquity, so that the original audience would have identified the narrative and imagery as highly familiar and true-to-life. On the level of strangeness, one is hard-pressed to find an element of incongruence with agricultural slavery in antiquity. The only real candidates are the extent of the servile manager’s reward, especially if compared to his actual achievement, and the shock value of his gruesome punishment. Yet, these features are not so much incongruent as they are exaggerated. What is more, the extent of their exaggeration can be downplayed in each case.<sup>318</sup> If the act of feeding other slaves is representative of satisfactory farm management in general, then the reward becomes more likely, and therefore less hyperbolic. Similarly, some form of severe punishment would have been expected given the nature of the unfaithful slave’s disregard and licentiousness, rendering also this narrative feature more probable, and therefore less hyperbolic. Given all considerations, it is safe to conclude that

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<sup>312</sup> Bock 1996:1182.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. Bock 1996:1183.

<sup>314</sup> See Harrill 2006:105-109.

<sup>315</sup> *Rust.* 1.8.19; *Xen. Oec.* 13.10-12; cf. Bradley 1984:22; Burford 1993:218, 267 n. 96; Harrill 2006:107; Dal Lago & Katsari 2008:197, 205, 207; Joshel 2010:177.

<sup>316</sup> Funk 2006:43-51.

<sup>317</sup> Cf. Crossan 1974c:98; 1979:28; Kloppenborg 1995:278.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. Zimmermann 2009:168.

the parable displays a very high or complete degree of verisimilitude. Whether either or both of the exaggerated narrative elements qualify as the parable's point(s) of comparison is an open question that lies beyond the scope of the present work.<sup>319</sup> Instead, the article attempted to shed some light on the parable's verisimilitude and literal level of meaning by considering the ancient institution of agricultural slavery. Hopefully, the article was successful in this more limited and modest intentionality, thereby inducing a greater appreciation and understanding of the agricultural background against which the parable was originally told.

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<sup>319</sup> If I had to venture an educated guess, based on the information provided in this article alone, I would say that the slave's punishment is the point of comparison when considering the parable in its final form, but that an earlier version of the parable might have ended at verse 44, with the slave's reward being the point of comparison at this earlier stage.

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