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# Can a Slave Serve Two Masters? Jointly Owned Slaves in Documentary Papyri and the Synoptic Gospels

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## Abstract

This article examines the synoptic saying on serving two masters (Matt 6.24; Luke 16.13) in light of the evidence for jointly owned slaves in documentary papyri. The saying implies that the slave of two masters will inevitably be more loyal or exclusively loyal to one master. Scholars usually accept this as an accurate depiction of jointly owned slaves. However, the papyrological evidence shows that the relationship between jointly owned slaves and their owners varied in everyday life and that slaves had little control over their loyalty to each master. The saying is, therefore, not a fully realistic portrait of how jointly owned slaves served their masters in antiquity but is possibly a slave stereotype that contributes to the (un)faithful slave imageries in the Gospels.

**Keywords:** jointly owned slaves; documentary papyri; Matt 6.24; Luke 16.13; faithful and unfaithful slaves

## 1. Introduction

One of the most famous sayings on slavery in the Gospels is the proverbial ‘No one/no slave can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one or love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other’ (Matt 6.24; Luke 16.13).<sup>1</sup> In its Matthean and Lukan contexts, the saying serves as an analogue for the impossibility of serving both God and mammon. Given that the analogue appears to draw on the phenomenon of joint ownership of slaves, this study assesses whether the saying aligns with the evidence for how jointly owned slaves served their owners in everyday life. This is done by paying attention to documentary papyri which bear witness to the lives of jointly owned slaves. As texts which come from daily life and administration, documentary papyri offer key insights into how slaves served multiple owners in antiquity. By examining these ancient sources on everyday life, one can determine whether the saying accurately reflects the way jointly owned slaves served their masters.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NRSV, here and elsewhere in this study. Most manuscripts of Matthew have οὐδεὶς with a few manuscripts containing the additional οἰκέτης. Luke has οὐδεὶς οἰκέτης with NA<sup>28</sup> recording no textual variants for the Lukan verse. Partial forms of the saying with Greek and Coptic words for ‘slave’ occur in 2 Clem 6.1 and Gos. Thom. 47 respectively. On the question of the saying’s oldest form, see the summary of different views in D. T. Roth, *The Parables in Q* (LNTS 582; London: T&T Clark, 2018) 247 n. 95.

<sup>2</sup> On the legitimacy of using documentary papyri, which come predominantly from Egypt, as evidence for daily life in other Roman provinces and the study of the NT, see P. Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon* (PKNT 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003) 45–56, who also discusses criteria for comparing papyri with

The discussion consists of three parts: 1) the interpretation of the saying in the Gospels, 2) the papyrological evidence for jointly owned slaves with a focus on documents which make explicit or implicit references to the services performed by such slaves, 3) the implications of the papyrological evidence for the saying's representation of jointly owned slaves and scholarship on the saying. The argument of this study is that the relationship between jointly owned slaves and their masters varied in everyday life, with slaves for the most part having little to no control over how devoted they were to each master. The Matthean and Lukan saying is, therefore, not a completely factual representation of how jointly owned slaves served their owners, but is possibly a slave stereotype that supports the image of faithful and unfaithful slaves in both Gospels.

## 2. Slaves of Two Masters in Matthew 6.24//Luke 16.13

Most scholars agree that the saying on serving two masters describes enslavement to two human masters, which is used as an analogue for service to God and mammon.<sup>3</sup> Although some interpreters have the impression that the saying reflects the legal impossibility of being enslaved to two masters,<sup>4</sup> most recognise that it was legally possible to be enslaved to multiple owners as there is an abundance of evidence for this in ancient sources, including the NT (Acts 16.16).<sup>5</sup> Consequently, most scholars take the analogue to mean

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the NT; S. R. Huebner, *Papyri and the Social World of the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) 1–7 and the literature she cites on p. 139 n. 13. Worth noting is that the Gospels presuppose a number of slave-related situations similar to those in Roman Egypt: e.g. slaves act as go-betweens (e.g. Matt 21.34–6; *BGU* 1.37, 50 CE), work in agricultural settings (e.g. Luke 17.7; *P.Fay.* 110–12, 94–9 CE), prepare their masters' meals (Luke 17.7–10, *P.Wisc.* 1.5.31–3 (with *BL* 13.131), 185 CE), conduct business for their masters (Matt 25.14–30; *BGU* 4.1079.15–20 (with *BL* 2.23), 41 CE), manage their masters' households/estates including other slaves (Matt 24.45; *P.Lond.* 3.1213–15, 65–6 CE), etc.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of this two-part structure, see Roth, *Parables*, 248–50. Exceptions to the consensus include S. Safrai and D. Flusser, 'The Slave of Two Masters', *Immanuel* 6 (1976) 30–3, who see here the rabbinic concept of the human struggle to serve the creator and one's own inclination (Ruth Rab. 3.1); see also F. Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) 462. For a critique of this interpretation, see C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009) 233 n. 203. A few others seek to either downplay or cast doubt on a reference to slavery in the Matthean version, which lacks a noun for 'slave' in the running text: H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 455–9; R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002) 71; M. Munari, "'No One Can Worship Two Lords'" (Matt 6:24a): Freeing the Logion from the Imagery of Slavery', *Liber Annuus* 65 (2015) 125–33. Without going into a detailed evaluation of these interpretations, it should be said that none of these authors takes into account Matthew's comparison of God to human slave owners in other passages (13.24–30; 18.23–35; 21.33–46; 22.1–14; 24.45–51; 25.14–30). This makes it more likely than not that the combination of κύριος and δουλεύω in Matt 6.24 refers to human slavery as an analogy for enslavement to God.

<sup>4</sup> A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel according to St Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (London: Macmillan, 1928) 85; D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCBC; Grand Rapids/London: Eerdmans/Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972) 143; C. L. Blomberg, *Matthew* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 124; cf. Betz, *Sermon*, 456, who thinks that cases of joint ownership are exceptions to a 'legal provision' against its practice.

<sup>5</sup> Other examples, apart from documentary papyri discussed below, include Jewish sources (e.g. T. Jos. 14.2; m. Pesah 8.1; m. Ed. 1.13; m. Gitt. 4.5; b. Hag. 2a–2b; b. 'Arak. 2b; b. Gitt. 42a; b. B. Qam. 90a), Greek and Roman literary and legal sources (e.g. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 66.13; *Dig.* 14.3.13.2; 15.1.15–16; 41.1.37.1; 45.3), and inscriptions (e.g. *IG* 8.3325, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE; *IG* 9(2).1282, 50 BCE). For discussion on some Jewish sources, see C. Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 106–8, 290, 374; for co-ownership in the context of κοινονία, i.e. partnerships in which multiple persons pooled resources together for a common purpose, particularly within Greek cultural and legal frameworks, see U. Roth, 'Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus: A Christian Design for Slave Mastery', *ZNW* 105 (2014) 102–30, at 117–120; for jointly owned slaves in the imperial household, see P. R. C. Weaver, *Familia Caesaris: A Social Study of the Emperor's Freedmen and Slaves* (Cambridge:

not that it was impossible to be enslaved to two masters, but that a slave of two masters cannot serve them equally.<sup>6</sup> The slave will either be more devoted to or prefer one master<sup>7</sup> or be unable to meet the incompatible demands of both masters, especially when they have conflicting interests like God and mammon.<sup>8</sup> In these interpretations, the emphasis shifts to the second and third clauses of the analogue: ‘for a slave will either hate the one or love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other’. These antitheses are interpreted either in a comparative sense where the slave prefers or is more devoted to one master than the other;<sup>9</sup> a radical sense where the slave is absolutely loyal to one master and disloyal to the other,<sup>10</sup> the slave’s ‘faithful labour’ rather than their emotions;<sup>11</sup> or simply the inability of the slave to work for both masters at the same time.<sup>12</sup> A few scholars make the additional observation that the analogue reflects the perspective of slave owners: joint slave owners would have found co-ownership inconvenient since the slave would be unable to give all owners the full service that each required.<sup>13</sup> Still other scholars note how difficult it would have been for the slave, who was caught between the demands and tensions of two masters.<sup>14</sup> Overall, the basic idea communicated by the saying seems clear: a person who is enslaved to two masters will inevitably favour one master, whether in the sense of showing preference to, being exclusively loyal to, or labouring more for that master.

While this interpretation seems exegetically secure, a question that arises is whether the saying aligns with the evidence for jointly owned slaves in everyday life. Documentary papyri, which mention jointly owned slaves in different capacities, are of great value in answering this question. Whereas literary texts often offer theoretical reflections or

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Cambridge University Press, 1972) 53, 62–8. The evidence from rabbinic sources, the Digest and the imperial household challenge Betz’ aforementioned claim about a ‘legal provision’ against co-ownership of slaves.

<sup>6</sup> This assumes that the saying describes a slave who is actually owned by two masters. W. Munro, *Jesus, Born of a Slave: The Social and Economic Origins of Jesus’ Message* (SBEC 37; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1998) 340–1, suggests that the saying refers to a slave who has one owner but whose services are hired out to another individual. However, the analogy with service to God and mammon supports the view that the saying describes enslavement to two (competing) owners.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. J. Dupont, ‘Dieu ou Mammon (Mt 6,24; Lc 16,13)’, *Études sur les Évangiles synoptiques* (2 vols.; BETL 70B; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985) II.551–567, at 551; J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (WBC 35B; Dallas: Word Books, 1993) 807.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. A. Sand, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (RNT 1; Regensburg: Pustet, 1986) 138; W. Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (THKNT 1; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998) 141–2; J. J. Hatter, ‘Slavery, the Enslaved, and the Gospel of Matthew: A Narrative, Social-Scientific Study’ (PhD diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 2021) 237–40.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. B. Witherington III, *Matthew* (SHBC; Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2006) 150–1: ‘The Aramaic comparative mechanism seems to be at work in v. 24b with the love/hate contrast really referring to being more devoted to the one than to the other’. Scholars frequently note this ‘Aramaic comparative mechanism’ as Witherington calls it. U. Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 335, thinks that this interpretation is unnecessary in Matthew since readers would have immediately associated ἀγαπάω with the commandment to love God. However, this is questionable since, with the exception of Matt 22.37, Matthew always uses ἀγαπάω for human-to-human ‘love’ (5.43–6; 19.19; 22.39).

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Hatter, ‘Slavery’, 243–5; M. J. Smith, ‘Slave Parables in Luke and the Antebellum South’, *Luke 10–24* (B. E. Reid, and S. Matthews; Wisdom Commentary 43B; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2021) 458–9, at 459.

<sup>11</sup> W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (3 Vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) I.642; R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994<sup>2</sup>) 115.

<sup>12</sup> E. P. Groenewald, ‘God and Mammon’, *Neot* 1 (1967) 59–66, at 62.

<sup>13</sup> S. van Tilborg, *The Sermon on the Mount as an Ideological Intervention: A Reconstruction of Meaning* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986) 148–52; J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 303; Hatter, ‘Slavery’, 239, 245.

<sup>14</sup> J. A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 107–8; R. B. Vinson, *Luke* (SHBC; Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2008) 525.

describe the world as it should be from the perspective of the elite few, documentary papyri present real-life situations and the everyday experiences of a broad variety of persons. Like literary texts, documentary papyri can reflect the biases of their authors<sup>15</sup> and may offer glimpses rather than a full picture of the situations that they describe. But as texts from everyday life and administration, which concern real-life circumstances, these glimpses provide arguably the best insights into what jointly owned slaves were actually doing in their daily lives. However, few attempts have been made to bring these documents into conversation with the saying on serving two masters.<sup>16</sup> In what follows, I examine how jointly owned slaves served their masters as evidenced in Greek papyri from the first three centuries CE.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Jointly Owned Slaves in Documentary Papyri

Extant papyri show that co-ownership of slaves was attained through a variety of means, mainly inheritance, particularly in the case of siblings,<sup>18</sup> (e.g. *P.Oxy.* 1.97.12–13, 116 CE; *P.Freib.* 2.8.10–16, 144 CE; *P.Oxy.* 14.1638.1–12, 282 CE); the joint purchase of a slave by several persons (e.g. *SB* 3.6016, 154 CE; *P.Col.* 8.222, 160–1 CE); and the sale of a share of one's slave to someone else (e.g. *P.Oxy.* 2.327 (with *BL* 1.321), 75–99 CE; *P.Col.* 10.254, 129 CE).<sup>19</sup> In at least one instance, a dowry serves as the source of a bride's joint ownership of a slave (*PSI* 10.1115.12–16, 152 CE). Presumably, loan contracts that involve pledging a part of one's slave to a creditor could serve as another avenue for attaining joint ownership: failure to repay the loan in time could mean that the creditor retains ownership of the pledged part of the slave.<sup>20</sup>

In some cases, ownership of the slave remains undivided, or co-owners receive equal shares of the slave. Thus, some slaves are identified as the 'common' (κοινός) and/or 'undivided' (ἰσδιόρετος) property of their owners (*P.Oxy.* 44.3197.17–18, 111 CE; *P.Oxy.* 34.2713.12–13, 297 CE),<sup>21</sup> and in several wills, parents appoint their children as 'equal'

<sup>15</sup> Like the Gospel saying, most papyri provide the slave owner's perspective.

<sup>16</sup> To my knowledge Glancy, *Slavery*, 107–8, has gone the furthest in bringing documentary papyri to bear on the saying, but her assessment is brief. C. Spicq, 'Le vocabulaire de l'esclavage dans le Nouveau Testament', *RB* 85 (1978) 201–226, at 205 n. 2; and Keener, *Matthew*, 233, go no further than citing papyri as evidence for the joint inheritance of slaves.

<sup>17</sup> I focus on slaves with multiple legal owners, not on slaves with one legal owner but who nevertheless serve or have a relationship with other free persons (e.g. *P.Brem.* 63.9–11, Teeus in 19–23, 116 CE?; *SB* 24.16257.1–20, 123 CE; *P.Oxy.* 3.496.5–6, 127 CE; *P.Tebt.* 2.407, after 199 CE?) nor on under-slaves (e.g. the *vicarii* in *O.Berenike* 2.184–188, 50–75 CE). Abbreviations of papyrus editions are taken from the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca, and Tablets* (ed. J. F. Oates, R. S. Bagnall, S. J. Clackson, A. A. O'Brien, J. D. Sosin, T. G. Wilfong, and K. A. Worp) <https://papyri.info/docs/checklist#Papyri>. I rely on the texts of the Papyrological Navigator (<https://papyri.info/>), which incorporate the corrections in the *Berichtigungsliste der Griechischen Papyrusurkunden aus Ägypten (BL)*. Dates of cited papyri are derived from Trismegistos (<https://www.trismegistos.org/>). I cite commentaries in editions following the conventions employed in the *Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament (PKNT)* series: editor name 'in' name of edition (abbreviated), volume number (where applicable), page number. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

<sup>18</sup> To be sure, not all cases of joint ownership by siblings are the result of inheritance: see e.g. *P.Mich.* 5.264–5.8–9, 37 CE, in which a mother sells one-fifth of a slave to her two children.

<sup>19</sup> I. Biezuńska-Małowitcz, *L'esclavage dans l'Égypte gréco-romaine: Période romaine* (2 Vols.; Archiwum Filologiczne 35; Wrocław/Warzawa/Kraków/Gdańsk: Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1977) II.124–8.

<sup>20</sup> M. Hombert and C. Préaux, 'Les papyrus de la Fondation égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, V: Fragment de κατ' οἰκίαν ἀπογραφῆ', *CdE* 14 (1939) 161–70, at 164–5; cf. W. L. Westermann, *Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 40; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1955) 122 n. 49. Cf. *P.Lond.* 2.360 (with *BL* 8.177–8), 151 CE, in which a certain Stotoetis releases one-fifth of a pledged slave to his sisters after they repay one-fifth of their mother's debt.

<sup>21</sup> In such cases, the slave owners could decide to divide the slaves among themselves, which may result in individual ownership of slaves (e.g., *P.Mich.* 5.323–325, 47 CE; *SB* 20.14258, 59 CE; *P.Oxy.* 44.3197.1–17, 111 CE).

(ἐξ ἴσου) heirs of their property including slaves (e.g. *P.Oxy.* 3.491.4–5, 126 CE; *P.Oxy.* 3.492.5–7, 130 CE; *BGU* 7.1654.7–10, after 133 CE). Other documents indicate that slaveholders own or previously owned equal fractions of a slave, such as half a share in the case of two owners (e.g. *BGU* 7.1589, 166–7 CE; *PSI* 12.1228, 188 CE; *P.Fam.Tebt.* 48.20–3, 202–3 CE) or a third share in the case of three owners (e.g. *P.Mich.* 5.322a.14–16, 46 CE).

In other instances, co-owners own unequal shares of a slave. For instance, a text mentions four siblings, one of whom owns one-sixth of a slave, two of whom own a combined half, and another who used to own a third share, which he has already set free (*P.Oxy.* 4.716, 186 CE);<sup>22</sup> two siblings own two-thirds of a slave while their nephews and niece own one-third (*P.Oxy.* 67.4584, 100–1 CE); the minor, Harthonis, puts up for auction his two-thirds of the slave, Claudia, whose remaining third is owned by the freedman, Plemis (*P.Oxy.* 86.5558, 200–10 CE), etc.

For slave owners, these divisions indicate 1) the rights of each owner over the slave, including their rights to sell, auction, or mortgage their share of the slave, and 2) their responsibilities towards the slave (e.g. declaring their share of the slave in census returns; tax payments for their share of the slave).<sup>23</sup> For slaves, the divisions most likely indicate the amount of service they are required to perform for each owner.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, where slaves are owned in unequal shares, the expectation would probably be that they give more attention to the master who owns them in the larger share. For slaves owned in equal shares, several scenarios are possible: 1) they work for each master for a specified amount of time, e.g. a third of the month or year in the case of three co-owners; 2) the slave is leased to an employer who then paid each owner a fee (or the owners might share the profits among themselves); 3) the slave is used by one co-owner who then pays the other co-owners a fee; 4) the slave is in a position to work collectively for all co-owners (perhaps while residing with one owner).<sup>25</sup> The case of the slave, Martilla, in *P.Fam.Tebt.* 37, 38, 40 (167–74 CE) has been suggested to fit either the first or fourth scenarios;<sup>26</sup> the second scenario, at least in the form of co-owners sharing the profits among themselves, might be attested in the case of the jointly owned wet nurse in *PSI* 9.1065 (157 CE); the jointly owned slaves of Laberia (*P.Bru.* 1.19, 117–18 CE) and Arabion (*P.Harr.* 1.62, 150 CE) seem to fit the third scenario.<sup>27</sup>

The following six examples, discussed in chronological order, illustrate the diverse ways in which jointly owned slaves served or refused to serve their owners:

#### a) *P.Bru.* 1.19, 117–18 CE: *The Jointly Owned Slaves of Laberia and Horaiane*

*P.Bru.* 1.19 is a census return declaring members of the household of Laberia, daughter of Pasion. Among the declared are four slaves who belong to Laberia and her sister Horaiane

R. Zelnick-Abramovitz, 'Half-Slave, Half-Free: Partial Manumission in the Ancient Near East and Beyond', *HSCP* 110 (2019) 1–58, at 9–10, thinks that such divisions were for the purpose of avoiding legal disputes.

<sup>22</sup> Apparently, this practice of partial manumission, which is also attested in rabbinic sources, was not permissible in Rome, where the share of a slave relinquished by one owner was passed on to the other owner(s). Its practice in the Greek *polis* is also a matter of dispute. See J. A. Straus, 'Slaves and Slavery in the Roman Period', *Law and Legal Practice in Egypt from Alexander to the Arab Conquest: A Selection of Papyrological Sources in Translation, with Introduction and Commentary* (ed. J. G. Keenan, J. S. Manning, and U. Yiftach-Firanko; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 452–61, at 460–1; Zelnick-Abramovitz, 'Half-Slave', 7, 12–13.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. A. Straus, 'L'esclavage dans l'Égypte romaine', *ANRW* 2.10.1 (1988) 841–911, at 885. These are, of course, legal issues, which may not always translate into actual practice.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Benaissa's comment on the aforementioned *P.Oxy.* 86.5558: 'The testamentary disposition presumably means that Claudia was to serve Plemis for a third of her time, e.g. ten days each month or four months each year' (*A. Benaissa* in *P.Oxy.* 86 p. 92).

<sup>25</sup> B. A. van Groningen in *P.Fam.Tebt.* p. 134; Biežuńska-Małowitz, *L'esclavage*, II.130; Straus, 'L'esclavage', 885–6.

<sup>26</sup> *P.Oxy.* 34.2713, 297 CE, would also seem to fit the fourth scenario since all co-owners appear to live in the same house (ll. 11–12).

<sup>27</sup> B. A. van Groningen in *P.Fam.Tebt.* p. 134; Biežuńska-Małowitz, *L'esclavage*, II.130–1.

in equal shares: Dioskoros, who is said to be a weaver (ll. 5–8), the one-year-old Dioskoros (ll. 9–13), Isidora (ll. 19–20), and Dioskorous (ll. 21–2).<sup>28</sup> It is possible to imagine scenarios in which some of these slaves were used in the service of both sisters: the breeding costs of the one-year-old Dioskoros could have been shared between the two sisters;<sup>29</sup> Isidora and Dioskorous may have divided their time between working for both mistresses as domestic workers, or they both lived with one owner, who then paid the other owner a fee.<sup>30</sup> However, the document suggests that the weaver, Dioskoros, may have served Laberia more than he did Horaiane. The declarant of the census return (either Laberia or her husband, Theon)<sup>31</sup> appears to take full fiscal responsibility for Dioskoros as the expression *ὁ καὶ ἐνθάδε λογιζόμενος ἰδίος μου* ('considered here as if belonging to me',<sup>32</sup> l. 8) implies.<sup>33</sup> It is, therefore, likely that Dioskoros lived exclusively with Laberia,<sup>34</sup> a likelihood further strengthened by the fact that Dioskoros' free partner and children also live with Laberia (ll. 14–15, 23–26). Thus, this is a case where at least one slave, Dioskoros, may have served one mistress more than he did the other.<sup>35</sup>

#### b) BGU 7.1581, 147 CE: *Didymos, the Jointly Owned Slave*

BGU 7.1581 is a census return in which 'Didymos, slave of both Nemesilla and Petronilla' ([Διδύμου δούλου] τῶν | Νεμ[ε]σίλ[λη]ς καὶ Πετρῶ[ν]ίλλης, ll. 2–4) declares the uninhabited share of a house and courtyard for 'my two Longinia mistresses' (μου δ[ε]σποίναις Λονγινίαις] (l. Λογγινίαις) δυοί, ll. 5–6). This appears to be the only published instance of a slave acting in this capacity.<sup>36</sup> In all likelihood, Didymos is the manager of his mistresses' declared property,<sup>37</sup> especially since the property in question is uninhabited (l. 15) and the mistresses are said to be absent (l. 7). This represents a situation where a jointly owned slave's service is beneficial to both co-owners: by managing their jointly owned property and submitting a census return on their behalf, Didymos, at least in this instance, serves his two mistresses equally, not having to choose one over the other.

<sup>28</sup> Since Horaiane is not among those declared in the census return, it is likely that both sisters lived apart from each other. To be sure, the text of *P.Brux.* 1.19 is incomplete, but only the top, where male members of the household would have been listed, is missing: see R. S. Bagnall and B. W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge Studies in Population, Economy and Society in Past Time 23; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 200.

<sup>29</sup> Straus, 'Slaves and Slavery', 459.

<sup>30</sup> Hombert and Préaux, 'Papyrus', 163, 165. That both slaves are domestic workers is suggested by their lack of occupations: cf. Bagnall and Frier, *Demography*, 71.

<sup>31</sup> The opening portion of the text which would normally mention the declarant's name is missing. G. Nachtergaeel in *P. Brux.* 1 p. 46, assumes that Laberia is the declarant. However, R. S. Bagnall, 'Notes on Egyptian Census Declarations, V,' *BASP* 30 (1993) 35–56, at 38, argues that her husband is the declarant.

<sup>32</sup> Trans. Straus, 'Slaves and Slavery', 460.

<sup>33</sup> Hombert and Préaux, 'Papyrus', 165; I. Biezuńska-Małowitcz, 'Les esclaves en copropriété dans l'Égypte gréco-romaine', *Aegyptus* 48 (1968) 116–29, at 121; Straus, 'L'esclavage', 885. On the relationship between census returns and tax payments, see Bagnall and Frier, *Demography*, 27–8.

<sup>34</sup> However, see Biezuńska-Małowitcz, 'Esclaves en copropriété', 121, who thinks that all the slaves reside exclusively with Laberia.

<sup>35</sup> Dioskoros is also attested in his son's tax receipts, where he is consistently referred to as 'Dioskoros, slave of Laberia' (Διοσκόρου δούλου Λαβερίας, *P.Harr.* 2.180–9, 134–46 CE). This could be another indication of Dioskoros' greater service to Laberia, or it could be that Horaiane had died or relinquished her share of Dioskoros to Laberia.

<sup>36</sup> See the list of declarants in Bagnall and Frier, *Demography*, 179–325.

<sup>37</sup> M. Hombert and C. Préaux, *Recherches sur le recensement dans l'Égypte romaine* (*P. Bruxelles inv. E. 7616*) (Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 5; Leiden: Brill, 1952) 58–9.

c) *P.Harr. 1.62 (with BL 3.76 and BL 11.88), 150 CE: Arabion's Jointly Owned Slaves*

*P.Harr. 1.62* calls for the search of the slaves, Artemidoros, Isidoros, and Martilla (ll. 19–20),<sup>38</sup> who ‘belong partly’ (ὡς ἐγ (l. ἐκ) μέ[ρο]υς ὑπαρχόντων, l. 9) to a certain Arabion, also known as Ischyriion. Judging by the contents of the document, it seems that Arabion reported the flight of his slaves to the strategos of his nome. The strategos then issued a notice to other strategoi asking that relevant officials conduct a search for the slaves and have them brought to him when found.<sup>39</sup>

Given that no other co-owners are mentioned in the document,<sup>40</sup> it may be that the slaves, though belonging to multiple persons, resided only with Arabion.<sup>41</sup> Since no further details are provided about Arabion and the slaves, the only other thing that can be said is that by fleeing the slaves appear to have rejected all of their owners. From all indications, the slaves do not leave Arabion for any other owner(s) but flee from their servitude entirely, hence the call for the ‘search’ (ἀναζήτησις, ll. 8, 16). *P.Harr. 1.62* is a case of jointly owned slaves who are neither equally loyal to their owners nor more loyal to one owner than to another, but who are equally disloyal to all co-owners by fleeing from all of them.<sup>42</sup>

d) *PSI 9.1065 (with BL 8.406), 157 CE: Taapis, the Jointly Owned Wet Nurse*

*PSI 9.1065* is a receipt issued by two women: the sister of Ischyriion and Sarapous, both of whom are accompanied by their respective guardians, Ischyriion and Kapiton. It acknowledges the receipt of wet-nursing fees and other expenses from a certain Domitius, whose two-year-old son was nursed by ‘our slave, Taapis’ (ἡ δοῦλη ἡμῶν Ταᾶπις, l. 10). Since many slaveholders used their female slaves as wet nurses,<sup>43</sup> it is not surprising that slave owners could become partners in a wet-nursing business, which some considered lucrative.<sup>44</sup> If it is assumed that Ischyriion’s sister and Sarapous are non-relatives, who did not attain ownership of Taapis via inheritance, then they have probably entered into this arrangement for the purpose of making money (cf. Acts 16.16).<sup>45</sup>

Given that Taapis is made to carry out the same task commissioned by both mistresses, who have the same interest, it is difficult to see how she would have been more loyal to one than the other, let alone absolutely loyal to one while rejecting the other. Inasmuch as her owners use her to render the same services, Taapis, in this instance, serves them equally.

e) *PFam.Tebt. 37, 38, and 40, 167–74 CE: The Case of Martilla*

These three documents from the archive of Philosarapis (TM Arch 192) revolve around the fraternal dispute over a jointly owned slave named Martilla. Three brothers, Lysimachos,

<sup>38</sup> It is thought that a fourth slave, who was named first in the list of slaves, is no longer preserved in the papyrus: see J. E. Powell in *P.Harr. 1* p. 42 and Biežuńska-Małowitz, *L’esclavage*, II.127, who speak of four slaves. However, see S. Llewelyn, ‘P. Harris I 62 and the Pursuit of Fugitive Slaves’, *ZPE* 118 (1997) 245–50, at 248, who disputes this.

<sup>39</sup> See Llewelyn, ‘Pursuit’, 246–50 for discussion.

<sup>40</sup> There is some missing text following the reference to Arabion (ll. 9–10), but this would have contained the name of Arabion’s village (ἀπὸ κώ[μης] . . . . . ), with not enough space for references to other co-owners.

<sup>41</sup> Biežuńska-Małowitz, *L’esclavage*, II.127.

<sup>42</sup> The same would be true if it were assumed that the slaves resided with all co-owners.

<sup>43</sup> See the list of wet-nursing contracts and receipts in M. Parca, ‘The Wet Nurses of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt’, *Illinois Classical Studies* 42 (2017) 203–26, at 218–23.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *P.Mich. 3.202.12–15*, 105 CE.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Zelnick-Abramovitz, ‘Half-Slave’, 6. Both partners may have found it advantageous to invest in only a part of a slave – slaves were a risky investment as they could escape, get sick, or die, and a commonly owned slave might mean that the co-owners share the burden of tax payments: Biežuńska-Małowitz, *L’esclavage*, II.131.

Philosarapis, and Philantinoos, inherited Martilla as a commonly owned slave from their mother (*P.Fam.Tebt.* 37.6; *P.Fam.Tebt.* 38.7–8). The texts highlight two ways in which Martilla was used in the service of her owners. First, Lysimachos and Philosarapis state that Martilla resided on their property in Arsinoites and sent provisions to them in Antinoopolis (τὰ ἐπι[ή]δε[ι]α ἡμεῖν (l. ἡμῖν) διαπέμπεται εἰς τὴν Ἀντινόου, *P.Fam.Tebt.* 37.8). Second, Philantinoos uses Martilla as security for a loan. The earliest document, *P.Fam.Tebt.* 37 (167 CE), is a petition filed by Lysimachos and Philosarapis, alleging that a certain Sarapammon and his brother Dios have kidnapped Martilla over a claim against Philantinoos (ll. 9–15). In *P.Fam.Tebt.* 38, written a year later, Lysimachos and Philosarapis tell a different version of the story.<sup>46</sup> They allege that Philantinoos had actually pledged Martilla to a creditor without their permission and used the loan for himself (ll. 5–12). As such, they seek to retrieve their own individual shares of Martilla (ll. 12–18). Finally, in *P.Fam.Tebt.* 40, written six to seven years after the first petition, Philantinoos tells his side of the story in a letter to Lysimachos. He claims to have pledged only his third share of Martilla (ll. 5–10) and agrees to provide written proof (ll. 11–15).

These texts show that difficulties did arise from joint slave ownership.<sup>47</sup> They also show that when their masters were in conflict, jointly owned slaves did not always have the power to take sides or choose one master over the other. Although the documents do not reveal Martilla's perspective, they imply that she has no control over the situation. Moreover, the reference to Martilla's sending of provisions to their location and her tending to what is apparently their jointly owned property suggests that, prior to the dispute, she served them all in an equal capacity. Joint slave ownership may have proven difficult for all parties involved in this case, but such difficulties appear to have been between the slave owners, with Martilla playing no active role in this as far as can be determined.<sup>48</sup>

#### f) *P.Oxy.Hels.* 26, 296 CE: *The Case of Sarmates*

*P.Oxy.Hels.* 26 is a petition filed by Aurelia Tapammon against her jointly inherited slave, Sarmates (ll. 9–10), complaining about his refusal to pay her and her sister ἀποφορά – the financial contribution of slaves which was due to their owners (ll. 11–14).<sup>49</sup> She petitions that Sarmates be forced to pay what he owes and be ordered to remain in their service (ll. 14–18).<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> However, B. A. van Groningen in *P.Fam.Tebt.* p. 140, prefers to think of these as separate events, which would mean that Martilla was taken not once but twice.

<sup>47</sup> Biežuńska-Małowitz, 'Esclaves en copropriété', 123 and Zelnick-Abramovitz, 'Half-Slave', 10, share the suspicion that cases of co-owners manumitting, selling off, or auctioning off their shares in a slave (*P.Freib.* 2.8.10–16, 144 CE; *P.Oxy.* 4.716, 186 CE etc.) are the result of difficulties arising from joint ownership or attempts to avoid legal complications arising from co-ownership.

<sup>48</sup> Other cases of family disputes that involve jointly owned slaves in the first three centuries CE include: *P.Oxy.* 34.2713, 297 CE, a petition in which Aurelia Didyme complains that her uncles took her share of their joint and undivided inheritance, including slaves (ll. 12, 24); *P.Cair.Isid.* 62.16–19, 297 CE, in which two sisters dispute their step-mother's claim on half a share of their late father's slave. Neither case suggests that the slaves play active roles in the disputes.

<sup>49</sup> It has been suggested that Sarmates was actually a freedman or at least thought himself to have been freed from all obligations by Aurelia's parents: J. Frösen in *P.Oxy.Hels.* p. 104; J. Rowlandson, ed., *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 194. Conversely, A. L. Connolly in *New Docs.* 4 p. 102, thinks that since Aurelia appears to have been widowed, Sarmates may have considered her too weak to pursue her ownership claims.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *P.Bingen* 74.11–14 (after 130–99 CE), which mentions that a certain Eros (possibly a slave) has been detained over his non-payment of ἀποφορά to 'the orphans' (possibly his owners).



It is unclear why Sarmates stopped offering his services to both sisters: Aurelia, in the typical fashion of many a petitioner, claims not to know the reason for Sarmates' behaviour (ll. 12, 14), and Sarmates' side of the story is unavailable. The matter is made more complicated by the absence of Aurelia's sister as a co-petitioner. This makes it hard to tell whether she authorised Aurelia to petition on her behalf or supported Aurelia's account of events.

However, taking Aurelia's account at face value, this is a case not of a slave who prefers one mistress to the other or chooses to be absolutely loyal to one mistress, but that of a slave who is disloyal to both mistresses. He has stopped supplying both mistresses with ἀποφορά and does not want to remain in the service of either of them (οὐ βούλεται παραμένειν τῇ ἡμῶν ὑπηρεσίᾳ, l. 13). Incidentally, Aurelia states that Sarmates initially served them well, supplying her and her sister with ἀποφορά after their parents' death (ἀπὸ τοῦ χρόνου τῆς τελευτῆς τῶν γονέων μου οὗτος ἀποφοράς | ἡμῖν χορηγῆ (l. χορηγεῖ), ll. 11–12). This could, of course, be a mere rhetorical strategy, typical of petitions. But taken at face value, it might indicate that Sarmates initially served both sisters on an equal basis before choosing to abandon them.

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is safe to conclude that a slave's ability to serve multiple owners and the co-owners' perception of this service varied from one situation to the next. There are slaves who serve their owners equally (*BGU* 7.1581; *PSI* 9.1065), those who reject all co-owners (*P.Harr.* 1.62; *P.Oxy.Hels.* 26), and cases where one co-owner benefits more than the other co-owner(s) from the services or use of a jointly owned slave (*P.Fam.Tebt.* 37, 38, 40; possibly *P.BruX.* 1.19). In the few instances where co-owners refer to the slave's services to all owners, they give the impression that they were equally served by the slave; they never accuse the slave of deliberately favouring one master over the other (*P.Fam.Tebt.* 37.7–8; *P.Oxy.Hels.* 26.11–12). Thus, in many circumstances, it was possible for a slave to render equal service to two or more masters.

Moreover, the evidence suggests that slaves did not have control over their ability to serve their masters equally: this was, by and large, subject to external forces beyond their control. To start with, slaves owned in unequal shares would likely have offered more services to one master than the other. In such cases, the attention that they are expected to give each master is already predetermined by factors beyond their control, such as a testator's decision on how to divide slaves among heirs or agreements between partners who purchase a jointly owned slave.

Even when owned in equal shares, slaves did not necessarily have control over their level of devotion to each master. This is seen most clearly in the case of Martilla, whose service to Philantinos as security for a loan, much to the disadvantage of her other masters, is not within her control (*P.Fam.Tebt.* 37, 38, 40). Dioskoros, the weaver, who appears to work exclusively for one mistress, seems to have less access to one of his mistresses, Horaiane, since he lives with his other mistress, Laberia (*P.BruX.* 1.19). This decision may not have been his to make but is probably linked to the fact that either Laberia or her husband takes full responsibility for his taxes. It is these external factors rather than the slaves' own initiative that result in an imbalance of service to their masters.

Yet, even in cases where slaves show equal devotion to their owners, factors other than the slaves' own agency seem to be at play. In particular, when slave owners use their slaves for the same function, the slave automatically serves all co-owners equally as seen in the cases of Didymos (*BGU* 7.1581), Taapis (*PSI* 9.1065), and even Martilla prior to being pledged as security (*P.Fam.Tebt.* 37.7–8).

In the cases where slaves do exhibit some kind of control, it is not a matter of serving one master better than the other or choosing one master and rejecting the other, but a rejection of all masters: Arabion's slaves flee from all their owners (*P.Harr.* 1.62), and Sarmates, if Aurelia's petition is taken at face value, abandons both his mistresses (*P.Oxy.Hels.* 26). In these cases, there is no indication that belonging to multiple owners is the problem as such – the slaves may not have made different choices even if they were enslaved to one person.

In what follows, I discuss the implications of the papyrological evidence for the Gospel saying as well as scholarly assumptions about the saying.

#### 4. Implications for the Saying and Scholarship

The saying in both Gospels lacks sufficient context to determine whether the evangelists have a specific scenario of joint slave ownership in view.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, in other occurrences of οὐδείς ('no one') in Matthew and Luke, exceptions to the rule are signalled by εἰ μὴ ('except') (Matt 11.27; 24.36; Luke 10.22; 18.19). Other occurrences of οὐδείς, especially in the sayings of Jesus, seem to be generalisations without exception (e.g. Matt 9.16; Luke 4.24). Thus, the use of οὐδείς/οὐδείς οἰκέτης ('no one/no slave') without εἰ μὴ suggests that the evangelists are not referring to specific situations but to jointly owned slaves in general. Yet, as the evidence from everyday life shows, the saying's portrayal of jointly owned slaves as unable to serve two masters without favouring one of these masters over the other was not a general situation – some slaves did, in fact, serve their owners in an equal capacity.

The evidence also shows that, in many cases, it was not up to jointly owned slaves to decide the degree of loyalty to show to each master. This observation on the slave's lack of control is significant since the saying places the choice of devotion to each master in the hands of the slave: it is the slave who will 'hate the one or love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other'.<sup>52</sup> That this is presented as a choice on the part of the slave is further seen in its application to a person's choice to serve either God or mammon. Additionally, in every other occurrence of the verbs μισέω, ἀγαπάω, and καταφρονέω in Matthew and Luke,<sup>53</sup> the action is implied to be a deliberate choice on the part of the subject or agent.<sup>54</sup> However, the extant evidence from the everyday lives of jointly owned slaves shows that, in most cases, it was not the slave's choice to decide how devoted they were to each master or to choose one and reject the

<sup>51</sup> It is possible that Luke's οἰκέτης refers specifically to domestic slaves: H. Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium* (KEK 1/3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006) 543; E. Baasland, *Parables and Rhetoric in the Sermon on the Mount: New Approaches to a Classical Text* (WUNT 351; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015) 366; cf. Acts 10.7, where οἰκέτης could also have this meaning. However, the context does not make this clear, and οἰκέτης could be a general reference to slaves. In literary and documentary sources, οἰκέτης is often used interchangeably with other slave terms (cf. the earlier discussed *P.Oxy.Hels.* 26.10, 15, 16) and is used for both domestic and non-domestic slaves even by the same authors: see Biezuńska-Malowitz, *L'esclavage*, n.11; J. G. Gibbs and L. H. Feldman, 'Josephus' Vocabulary for Slavery', *JQR* 76 (1986) 281–310, at 288–9, 294–5; R. Zelnick-Abramovitz, 'Greek and Roman Terminologies of Slavery', *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Slavery* (ed. S. Hodkinson, M. Kleijwegt, and K. Vlassopoulos; Oxford University Press, 2018) <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199575251.013.41>.

<sup>52</sup> See also Dupont, 'Dieu ou Mammon', 562; Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 807; M. Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 551. Cf. John Chrysostom *Hom. Matt.* 21.1, who says that the love-hate, devoted-despise contrasts are meant to show that it is possible and easy for those who are enslaved by wealth (ἐδουλώθησαν ὑπὸ πλούτου, ἐτυραννήθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν χρημάτων) to transfer themselves to God and vice versa.

<sup>53</sup> The verb ἀντέχω does not occur anywhere else in either Gospel.

<sup>54</sup> Matt 5.43–6; 10.22; 18.10; 19.19; 22.37, 39; 24.9; 24.10; Luke 1.71; 6.22, 27, 32, 35; 7.5, 42, 47; 10.27; 11.43; 14.26; 19.14; 21.17. The verbs do not occur in Acts.

other. The saying, therefore, does not seem to capture the experiences of many jointly owned slaves.

The papyrological evidence also calls into question the scholarly acceptance of the saying as an accurate depiction of how slaves would normally serve two masters.<sup>55</sup> More often than not, this acceptance is not accompanied by the citation of any ancient evidence for jointly owned slaves:<sup>56</sup> e.g. ‘Nobody can give his full devotion to two masters at once. He may try, but only one will be central for him’;<sup>57</sup> ‘A slave cannot wholeheartedly serve two masters, since slavery demands the undivided attention of the slave to the master. If there are two masters, their demands will be incompatible’;<sup>58</sup> ‘if one tries to serve masters whose morals and values conflict sharply, one will “be devoted to one and despise the other.” It is unavoidable’;<sup>59</sup> ‘One can, of course, serve two masters at different times or on different matters. But at the same time, and especially on the same matter, one cannot serve two masters simultaneously or equally. Priority must be given to one over the other.’<sup>60</sup> Each of these scholars makes generalised comments about a slave’s service to two masters.<sup>61</sup> But these generalisations are invalidated by the evidence from everyday life which shows that 1) some slaves did serve multiple owners without giving priority to one owner, 2) service in the same matter was precisely when it was possible to serve multiple owners equally, 3) the demands of slave owners were not always incompatible, 4) the slave’s (un)equal service to each master was not necessarily the result of the slave’s own initiative but of other factors, and 5) when slave owners had conflicting interests or values, slaves were powerless to decide which master to serve.<sup>62</sup> Glancy’s remarks, which are based on papyrological data, deserve attention. Drawing on the case of Martilla and a case of partial manumission in *P.Oxy.* 4.716 (186 CE), she concludes that the saying ‘resonates with the actual tensions implicit in the not uncommon occasion of a slave caught between the demands of two or more masters’.<sup>63</sup> While this may be true in some cases, a broader consideration of the papyrological evidence shows that the saying does not ‘resonate’ with the situation of all jointly owned slaves, including those who appear to serve multiple masters equally, those who lack control over how loyal they are to each master, and those who reject all masters.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Munro, *Jesus*, 340–1, who considers it plausible that the saying reflects Jesus’ own experience as a former slave, who was hired out to other individuals.

<sup>56</sup> Groenewald, ‘God and Mammon’, 60 and Baasland, *Parables*, 367, do rely on rabbinic texts, Dio Chrysostom and Acts 16.16 for their respective claims that serving two masters was ‘considered undesirable’ and considered by most readers to be ‘impossible’. However, neither Chrysostom, the rabbis, nor Acts says anything about the slave’s greater loyalty to one master, and, therefore, cannot be used to support the gospels’ particular claim. Nolland, *Matthew*, 304, relies on Varro’s prescription on the proper treatment of slaves (*Rust.* 1.17.6–7) for his claim that ‘the slave owner who engendered affection was likely to get more than his fair share of the efforts of the shared slave’. Varro, however, does not discuss jointly owned slaves and is describing an ideal situation from his perspective, not necessarily reality.

<sup>57</sup> L. Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC 3; Leicester/Grand Rapids: InterVarsity/Eerdmans, 1988) 273.

<sup>58</sup> D. L. Turner, *Matthew* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 197.

<sup>59</sup> C. A. Evans, *Matthew* (NCBiC; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 156.

<sup>60</sup> J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke* (PiNNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 458.

<sup>61</sup> See also M. J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Devotion to Christ* (NSBT 8; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999) 113; M. Davies, *Matthew* (Readings; Sheffield: Phoenix, 2009<sup>2</sup>) 64; Keener, *Matthew*, 233. But see the more nuanced comments in F. W. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981) 183.

<sup>62</sup> Note also van Tilborg’s critique: ‘Everyone seems to act as if the saying expresses a reality, i.e. one lets oneself be deceived by the rhetoric of the words, or rather one allows the point of view of the narrator to coincide with one’s own. This is a fallacy.’ (*Sermon*, 148).

<sup>63</sup> Glancy, *Slavery*, 108.

Overall, the saying is one which should not be taken at face value as a fully accurate reflection of actual slave-master relationships.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has argued that the saying on a slave's inability to serve two masters does not adequately capture the experiences of jointly owned slaves in everyday life. Some slaves may have served one master better than others; others served all masters equally in certain circumstances; still others were unfaithful to all co-owners. In most cases, slaves had little to no control over how loyal they were to each master. In a nutshell, the relationship between jointly owned slaves and their owners seems to have varied from one situation to the next, and it is pertinent to be cautious about taking the saying at face value, at least without further context, as scholars have tended to do.

The question that this raises for further consideration is why a gap exists between the saying's generalised portrait of jointly owned slaves and the evidence from the everyday lives of slaves. Some might argue that the saying was never intended to express a general reality but refers specifically to the impossibility of being enslaved to both God and mammon.<sup>64</sup> Yet, the comparison between God and human masters in other Matthean and Lukan passages makes an intended analogue between God, mammon and human masters probable in the saying. Since the saying focuses on the slave's loyalty, a more adequate explanation is that the saying contributes to the faithful and unfaithful slave imageries which occur in Matthean and Lukan parables (Matt 24.45–51; 25.14–30; Luke 12.42–8; 19.12–27).<sup>65</sup> Like the saying on serving two masters, these parables are ultimately concerned with the master's interests and assume that faithfulness to the master is within the slave's control. A connection to the image of the (un)faithful slave is even suggested by the immediate Lukan context, where the saying comes right after a saying on faithfulness with 'mammon' (Luke 16.10–12).<sup>66</sup> However, studies have shown that the (un)faithful slave motif in the parables bears a striking resemblance to the (un)faithful slave trope found in Roman literary texts, especially with their emphasis on the slave's (un)faithfulness in the master's absence (*absente ero*) (e.g. Plautus, *Men.* 966–85).<sup>67</sup> In light of this, as well as the 'bland moralistic division' of slaves into good and bad, Harrill argues that the slaves in these parables should be viewed not as realistic but as stock figures similar to those in ancient comedies.<sup>68</sup> If Harrill is correct, then it is worth considering whether the characterisation of jointly owned slaves in the Gospels is also a literary construct based on ancient slave stereotypes.<sup>69</sup> This could explain the discrepancy between the evi-

<sup>64</sup> J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 597. Cf. Gundry, *Matthew*, 114; Hatter, 'Slavery', 238, who consider this possibility.

<sup>65</sup> Hatter, 'Slavery', 244–5, makes this connection in Matthew.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. F. E. Udoh, 'The Tale of an Unrighteous Slave (Luke 16:1–8 [13])', *JBL* 128 (2009) 311–35, at 331.

<sup>67</sup> J. A. Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) 25–6; Id., 'The Psychology of Slaves in the Gospel Parables: A Case Study in Social History', *BZ* 55 (2011) 63–74; M. J. Stoutjesdijk, "'Not Like the Rest of the Slaves'?: Slavery Parables in Early Rabbinic and Early Christian Literature' (PhD diss., Tilburg University, 2021) 135–66.

<sup>68</sup> Harrill, *Slaves*, 25–6; Id., 'Psychology', 66–8.

<sup>69</sup> Already in Classical Greece, the figure of a slave whose loyalties are divided between two owners is attested in one of Lysias' speeches (Lysias 4: *On a Wound by Premeditation* 8, 17). On the unreliability of Lysias' characterisation of this slave, see S. C. Todd, *A Commentary on Lysias, Speeches 1–11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 374, who notes a contradiction in Lysias' statements about the slave; A. Glazebrook, *Sexual Labor in the Athenian Courts* (New York: University of Texas Press, 2021) 30–42. It might be that this idea was current as a slave stereotype when and where the gospels were written.

dence for jointly owned slaves in everyday life and the depiction of such slaves in the Gospels.<sup>70</sup>

By bringing the saying into conversation with documentary papyri, this study shows the usefulness of such documents for understanding the Gospels in their socio-cultural and literary contexts. On the socio-cultural level, documentary papyri reveal the gap between the saying and the real-life experiences of jointly owned slaves. This allows for the correction of scholars' acceptance of the saying at face value and invites further reflection on the saying as one which is preserved primarily in literary texts. The famous saying may conform to the ancient stereotyping of slaves, or it may be something else entirely, but it is hardly a fully accurate summation of how jointly owned slaves served their masters.

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<sup>70</sup> Admittedly, papyri also contain slave stereotypes, but the everyday nature of these documents sets them apart from the more intricate literary shaping of slave conduct that frequently occurs in literary texts.

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