

# I Was a Slave in Russia - Part 1

by John Noble

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*John Noble shares his harrowing experiences as a prisoner in the Soviet Union, urging Americans to recognize the dangers of communism and the importance of faith in times of suffering.*

**Duration:** 27:05

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:7

**Topics:** "Russia"

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## Description

In this sermon, Johnny Noble shares his personal experience of being imprisoned in the Soviet Union for nine and a half years. He explains that he accepted the invitation to speak in Houston because he felt a responsibility to share the truth about what was happening in the Soviet Union. Noble also expresses his belief that similar oppression could happen in America if people do not wake up. He recounts a specific incident in the prison where he was held in a narrow cell and witnessed the execution of fellow prisoners. Despite his despair, Noble prayed to God for strength and surrendered his life to Him.

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## Transcript

Since returning to America as a free man in 1955, John Noble has traveled the length and breadth of this land to keep his promise to those who are still in slavery behind the Iron Curtain. In his campaign to inform the American public of the reality of communism, Mr. Noble has appeared on national radio and television programs and before various congressional committees. Mr. Noble's story has appeared as a featured story in Reader's Digest, U.S. News and World Report, True Magazine, The Defender, The Exchange, Youth for Christ, Action, and others.

His story was dramatized as a full hour presentation on the Armstrong Circle Theater. He is also the author of two books, I Was a Slave in Russia and I Found God in the Soviet Union. It is with great pleasure that we present this tape-recorded address by Mr. John Noble.

Mr. Noble. I felt throughout those nine and a half years that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ had his hand upon me and he brought me back for a mission. And the third reason is that I seriously believe that what I went through over there in the Soviet Union in those nine and a half years can happen right here in America if we don't wake up very soon.

I know it's not going to happen to me over here because I won't live to see that day. As you've heard, I was born in Detroit, Michigan. At that time, when I went to school, when I went about my everyday life, I wasn't

concerned about Communism, just as there are millions today, too, here in the United States that are very little concerned.

Oh, yes, people are more and more getting aware of the dangers of Communism, that is true. They are more being interested in the situation behind the Iron Curtain, and yet the information that they are being fed as a whole is information that is brought back from behind the Iron Curtain by tourists that have traveled over to the Soviet Union on two or three weeks trips, and these people, having seen only what the Soviets want them to see and having heard only what the Soviets want them to hear, and these people come back as experts and try to tell America, don't be concerned. I saw a different Soviet Union than these red carpet tourists see.

I lived through a life that today hundreds of millions of people behind the Iron Curtain are trying to survive through. I lived a prison life, a slave camp life, that today, tonight, this very evening, still in the Soviet Union alone, 28 million prisoners are going through. And please keep in mind, this very day while we invite Soviet Premier Khrushchev to come over here, that henchman of that nation, at the same day while he enters the White House, approximately 3,000 American boys are still over there and rushing those concentration and slave labor camps, hoping and praying that someone in the Soviet Union will come over and help them.

I'm going to do something about it. Can you understand why I did not approve of Khrushchev's visits? Or maybe I haven't even made it clear that I do not approve. But let me make this statement.

There too are several reasons why I believe that Khrushchev's visits is a disgrace in the sight of God. For one, I believe it is against the Bill of Rights because we American citizens have the right to seek our government to protect us from criminals. The second reason is that it is against the Word of God.

The Bible clearly states that if we let men like Khrushchev come over here to the United States, that we will be judged on equal basis. And then too, let me just skip ahead somewhat in my experiences. In the last camp in which I was held in the Soviet Union, I had, if you might call it a privilege, to meet Mrs. Khrushchev, number one.

She was a prisoner. She had just completed her eight-year sentence. And out of her own mouth, she told me, when she met and married Nikita in 1918, he at that time already had set his plans to become dictator of the Soviet Union and the conqueror of the world.

In 1918, if you please. I know it does not agree with these reports that the Soviet government is pouring out upon the United States. We're made to believe that Mrs. Khrushchev, number one, married Nikita in 1920 and died in 1938.

That is not true. That was Mrs. Khrushchev, number two. But she did not die in 1938.

She today is still imprisoned in the camp region of Taishet, serving a 12-year sentence. This wife that he is bringing along today, I don't know if it is third or fourth or fifth. Maybe he forgot himself.

But because of this plan of becoming conqueror of the world, I too believe that we should have nothing to do in common with this creature. And as I mentioned before, I believe what I went through, America might go through. So let me illustrate these things the best way, and that is by exactly what had happened to me.

Of course, I cannot give you all of these experiences that took place throughout those nine and a half years, but I will try to pick out a few highlights so that you will be able to understand what actually communism is. Having been born in Detroit, went to school there, and been raised there, I went over to Europe with my parents shortly before the war broke out. My dad to take care of his health while my brother and I received an education in one of my dad's factories.

My dad had invested in various different factories in various different countries in Europe. And while we were over there, the war broke out. And we were locally interned throughout the entire war until 1945 when the Soviets moved in and occupied that area.

Now as this war was going to an end in February 1945, as possibly some of you recall, the greatest air raid of World War II was flown, the air raid against the city of Dresden, the city in which we were held at that time. And those 4,200 American bombers were dropping their bombs within approximately 50 minutes, taking the lives of close to a quarter million people. And we were down there in that city at that time, the walls were shaking, the plaster was crumpling from the ceiling, but physically nothing happened to us.

But from that very day on, until the end of the war, those people in Dresden were literally on their knees praying, Lord protect us from the brutal West and let the Reds come in. And just a few weeks later, as the Soviet troops did move in and did occupy that area, those same people that had been on their knees before, they again were down there on their knees. But their prayers were different, because they prayed, Lord, why didn't you take our possessions? Why didn't you take our wives and daughters with the bombs instead of having the Russians take them? Because those things that took place as that Soviet army moved in were so horrible, you can hardly find words to describe them.

Immorality, brutality, rape and murder, open on the streets, and yet nobody seemed to care. America was celebrating a victory. The Soviets were an ally.

No one was concerned what was going on. And it was that time, while no one was concerned, that the Soviets arrested just about every foreigner that they could put their hands on, including approximately 3,000 American boys that had been in the PW camps in Eastern Germany from World War II. But there in Dresden, in the house in which we were held, we pulled up the American flag.

And it seemed to protect us, because for quite some time, not a single Soviet officer or guard set foot on the property. We had contact with the American authorities in the West, and they assured us that nothing could happen to us. We're American citizens.

The Soviets are allies. On the other side too, they told us that shipping space was not available to return to the United States before early 1946, since everything was required by the armed forces. But only two days after they told us not to be concerned, the Soviet officers and guards moved in, tore the American flag down, tore it into pieces, burnt it, and arrested my father and myself.

My mother and my brother were kept under house arrest for approximately a half a year before they managed to escape to Berlin and from Berlin back to the West. But Dad and I were in prison, put into solitary confinement. My dad on one side and I on the other side.

It was a tremendous five-story building, a hollow center in the middle, the cells all around. A naked stone cell, a bunk, a bench, a table, a tin pan, and a spoon. No one to talk to, nothing to occupy the mind with.

A small window to look out into the sky, and on the other side, a solid metal-plated door separating us from the hallway. Just a little spy hole in the door for the guards to look in to see what the prisoner was doing. And I remained in that cell for seven months without a single question, without a single answer, without a single reason or explanation.

But as soon as the door fell into the lock behind me, I began to protest. I was an American citizen, they had no right to do this to me. But they didn't care.

And it just seemed as if nobody else cared either. Food was poor and I was rapidly losing my weight. July 28, 1945 came along, when for the first time, this entire prison, 700 prisoners in there, 700 people like you and myself, people I believed never to have committed a crime and always to have lived a decent life, these people having been snatched away from the streets or out of their homes or out of the office, being torn away from their families without a reason, without an explanation, having been deprived of freedom, and also from this July 28 on, having been deprived of food, well those people were nervous and afraid.

They were knocking against their doors and calling and cursing and screaming and begging, but still nobody cared. And I couldn't stand listening to those calls and the screams out there in the hall when I stepped over towards the wall where the window was. I could listen down into the yards and hear those bullets flying of those who were being executed.

And when it was time to lay down that night, I had a problem. The problem was that I had the right to turn to God and ask God for food and for freedom. But all those years in the past, I just took all these things for granted.

Just as millions today here in America take freedom for granted, take their material blessings for granted, take their Bibles for granted, take their churches for granted. Well, I was deprived of these things now and now I want it. I'm going a little into detail about this because I think it's important.

I couldn't answer my own question, but I did pray. And I asked for food and for freedom. And I was confident that I was going to receive it.

But the next morning came and there was nothing. At noon only warm water, in the evening only warm water, and I was disappointed. Disappointed because my prayers weren't answered.

But the second night I prayed again, more seriously than the day before. And still the third day came and there was nothing, not a crumb of bread or a spoonful of soup for the entire prison. And I just felt, well, it's useless for me to pray anymore.

God must have slammed the door into my face. He didn't care to hear or see me anymore. And so I didn't pray that third night.

But the next morning, to my surprise, we had a slice or two of bread and some watery soup at noon and some watery soup at night. And I was confused. Confused because when I did pray, I did not receive.

And then again when I did not pray, I had something to eat. I just didn't understand the Bible at that time. I didn't understand how God works, how God answers prayer.

And that's good that I didn't understand it at that time. Because if God would have answered my prayers during those days, I would have been right back on the old track. But I thanked him for this little bit of food.

We had food two days, and then a new starvation period began. A new starvation period that lasted 12 days. 12 days in a row.

Not a crumb of bread to eat. And those people, not only were they calling and cursing and screaming, but some of them going out of their minds. Others committing suicide.

Many being executed. And yet the only strength that I had at that time was when my dad's door was opened, I could look through that spy hole and see my father across the hall. I could see him stand there.

And that gave me strength. And when it was my turn to receive the water, I too stood as straight as possible, just to give my dad some encouragement. But it was on the fifth or sixth evening of the second starvation period when I too was physically completely finished.

I was so weak that I couldn't lift my feet from the floor anymore. I couldn't talk anymore. I was just completely finished.

And that night as the water bucket was coming closer and closer from one cell to the other, I could barely slide to the door to receive the water that they were passing out. And while that door was open, if I would have had the voice to call, I would have called across the hall to my father and would have said, Dad, this is the last time you're going to see me because I'm finished. But I couldn't call.

And so the door closed, and I stood there holding that tin pan of water in my hands, looking for that spyhole, just wanting to see my dad once more. And after his cell was closed, I slid back to my bunk, drank my water, and began to pray. I prayed, Lord, close my eyes and keep them closed.

I can't stand it any longer. I was physically finished. The pains of hunger were eating me up.

But then I added, Lord, if you don't want to close my eyes, then you take my life and make whatever you want it to be because I'm finished. If there's a life for me, it's not mine anymore, Lord, it's yours. And that's where things began to change.

And I'm mentioning that for this purpose, because if our nation would also go on its knees before God, then we would not go on our knees before communism. The most wonderful part about that experience there in that prison was that still five or six days followed, only water, nothing to eat, but I got stronger every day. We have a wonderful God, and if you only let him, let him guide us.

But after this starvation period was over, we were still in more or less solitary confinement for approximately seven months. And during these seven months, not once a piece of soap or a toothbrush or a haircut or a shave or a bath or a piece of clothing could change, nothing of that kind. The only time when I slipped out of my clothing was to turn it inside out and to crack the lice and the fleas and the bed bugs.

And that took quite some time. I cracked over 300 a day. But that too passed on, and both Dad and I survived.

And from early 1946 on, I was in charge, from early 1946 on, I began to work scrubbing floors, passing out food. And later on, even from March 46, I was in charge of the office work in that prison. And while I was taking care of the records, I saw what had taken place in that prison throughout that last year.

Approximately 21,000 people had passed through that prison in less than a year. 21,000 people like you and I. And yet worse than that, I also saw what had taken place during that starvation period. Out of those

700 people that went into the starvation, only 22 or 23 survived, that is all.

All the rest died, committed suicide, or were executed. And if we only keep in mind for a moment that the Soviets have predicted that they are going to have control over the United States by 1972-73, and they also have gone further than that. They said that they are going to do away with 60 million American people, because 60 million American people will not be able to be converted to communism.

What kind of a mess are we going to have over here? Over there in Germany, in Eastern Germany, this starvation was going on in prison after prison, concentration camp after concentration camp, because the Soviets had arrested 560,000 people and had no place to put them. So they liquidated a whole layer. But also while I was working in that prison office, I saw all the procedures that were going on.

I saw how they were bringing new prisoners in. People again that they had snatched away from the street or out of the home, put into those cells, and there, from there taken into the so-called investigation with the various different torture methods, forced to sign confessions. Forced to sign things that they never dreamed of doing.

I'm not going to go into much detail about these tortures, but just let me mention one thing. Frequently I was called to the so-called prison doctor. He was just a prisoner, and he had nothing but just his medical knowledge to help those prisoners.

When I was called, it was always a case when someone did not want to sign what the Soviets wanted them to sign. That man or woman was brought back from the investigation from their neck down to their hips. Their back was just slashed with just a mixture of blood and skin and shirt.

They didn't use a whip. They used copper tubing. Also, after these people had signed their confessions, they were taken to the courtroom.

They're in this courtroom a minute or two court session, and those people were sentenced 10, 15, 25 lifetime or death sentence. Those sentenced to the various years were soon sent on to the concentration camps. But those that were sentenced to death, they remained in their cells for approximately six weeks.

And after these six weeks were over, one after the other was taken out into the hallway, no matter man, woman, boy or girl. And there in the hallway, they were stripped of their clothing, and I had to take the clothing away. Then two guards stepped to the side, a junior officer behind them.

They marched them out the back door. A minute or two later, they came in, took the next one, and after five and 10 and 15 and 20, sometimes even up to 30, were marched out that back door, where workers had their own barrels of gasoline through the building, which was poured over the bodies and burned. And that was going on week after week and month after month and year after year, and it's still going on today, and we're made to believe that the Soviet system has changed.

You know what's worse than that? That we, as a so-called Christian nation, hold hands with a nation that denies the least bit of human dignity, and then we go on our knees and ask our God Almighty to bless us still more. Well, in that prison, I saw these things go on for 14 months. And then, too, I was taken away to the concentration camps without being sentenced.

First Mühlberg, and then Buchenwald, and then on. But just let me give you one illustration from the camp of Mühlberg before we go on to Buchenwald. I had an appendix operation in that camp.

Now, that is not important, I know. Under camp conditions, it certainly was, because we had excellent doctors there, but they officially were not permitted to have any drugs or instruments. So the scaffold that was used in my operation was made out of a saw blade, clips were made out of tin cans, but with the grace of God, everything went fine.

But the day when I left the so-called hospital barrack, I was taken back to barrack number one, where my dad was waiting for me. And I only spoke for, I was together with my dad for approximately two hours, when the messenger from the political officer came in and told me to report at the political office. Now, I knew this political officer, Kapitano Rajanov was his name.

I'd frequently discussed my American citizenship with him, explained the unrighteousness that was going on. But this political officer gave instructions that I be taken to the dungeon. Now, the dungeon there in Mühlberg was just a narrow cell, about three feet wide and six foot long.

I had a bunk in there to lay on. It was painted white inside. The right wall, my right wall or my neighbor's left wall, was a furnace which was heated from the hallway.

And in the morning, the guards would start heating that furnace, and the wall was getting hot and hotter. Around noontime, I'd taken most of my clothes off, and still the perspiration was running down. If I'd spit against the wall, it would sizzle.

In the early afternoon, they took the fire out and opened up all the doors and windows. And from evening on till the next morning, I was sitting in that cell and shivering. And worst of all, about four to five feet in front of my face, they had a 400-watt light bulb burning day and night for 23 days, trying to drive me out of my mind.

Now, that too might not seem important because it happened to me and to a few hundred others. But important is that this political officer was later on political officer in the camp of Buchenwald, and that man's right here in the United States today preparing exactly those same things for you and for me over here. Now, I know the FBI is on his trail, and they found much evidence of it, and yet who knows how much of this is going on throughout our nation.

So often people think, well, communism is so far away, and yet it's right here. Later on in Buchenwald, when we arrived there, there were 14,000 prisoners in Buchenwald, and I was there for almost two years. And before we left, we'd buried close to 10,000.

That's what life was like, and yet the Western world didn't seem to care about it, even at that time. But from there, I was taken to a prison, to the Weimar prison, and there in a tremendous courtroom I was sent. The courtroom, red drapery all around, red carpet on the floor, one table in the middle with a red tablecloth over it, a girl sitting on one side, an officer sitting at the end.

When I stepped in, the girl asked my name. I told her. She took a piece of paper and pushed it towards me and told me to sign it.

I said, what is it? I don't understand Russian. The girl said, this paper states that you've been tried by a court in Moscow and have been sentenced to 15 years of slavery. I said, for what? Why? I've never been accused of anything.

She said, if you have any question in regard to your sentence, ask there in the camp to which you will be taken. Now, let me skip ahead. That camp was way up in the Arctic Circle in the Soviet Union.

When I asked the political officer, he wore the same bright smile that Soviet ambassador Menshikov wears when he's in front of cameras over here. And he said, if you have any question in regard to your sentence, you should have asked back there where you got it. And that's, to this very day, the only explanation that I've ever received.

The State Department has frequently sent a note demanding an explanation, but the Soviets don't answer. At least they tell me that they've sent notes. Well, after this sentence there in Weimar, we were shipped up to Berlin.

In Berlin, 644 men were put together, put on one train, and shipped through Poland into the Soviet Union. Now, that was not a prisoner transport. That was a mail transport, because we were transported in mail cars, at least on the outside with big letters they had written on there.

It was mail, postage. But there, as soon as we hit the Soviet borders, we were transferred into the well-known Stolopinsky prison cars. Prison cars are specially designed for prisoner transport in the Soviet Union.

You can find them attached to just about every passenger and freight train that's moving over there right now. They look something like baggage cars, small windows along one side, the side where the guards are patrolling up and down. Right next to their hallway, they have a line of bars, and behind these bars, cages.

In these cages, three shallow shelves, so shallow that we could barely turn around in them. And yet we were packed on these shelves like sardines in a can for about six weeks. And during this trip, only dried bread, dried fish, and plenty of water.

But our trip was interrupted three times in three different prisons, Orsha, Moscow, and Vologda. Let me just stay with Moscow for a moment, because we hear so much about this wonderful city. We arrived at the Grand Central Station.

Prison cars were lined up, oh, maybe 30 prison cars, something like that. And they hauled us off to the Krasnyi Press, the Red Press prison, the largest prison, as they say, in the Soviet Union, holding tens of thousands of prisoners, right on the outskirts of downtown Moscow, a tremendous building. And we stayed in that prison for three days, but we had an advantage there.

We had an advantage to go up on the roof for about 10 minutes each day to walk around and take a deep breath of air. There's large cages up there. And in these cages, some 250 to 300 men walking around.

And as we got over towards the wall, we stood on our tiptoes to look down into the city. We wanted to see what Moscow looked like. But we only looked once or twice, because there was something much more shocking, much more of interest to look at.

And that was the cage right next to us. Almost the same size cage and approximately the same number of prisoners, but those were youngsters over there, and I mean youngsters. Boys in the age of 6 to 12, sentenced 10, 15, 25, and lifetime.

A disgrace in the sight of God, and we Americans are holding hands with that nation. Can you imagine your sons and daughters or your brothers and sisters, six years old, possibly sentenced to a lifetime in prison? And yet the visitors that go over to Moscow, they don't see these things.

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