

MATTHEW 18:21-35
MESSIAH ON A MISSION
(PART 37)

“Forgiveness is Debt Cancellation”



In this parable, the king shows great mercy and cancels his servant's unpayable debt.



At various times in Roman history, the government extended tax-debt relief by destroying the debt records.

This frieze found in the Roman Forum shows tax records being placed on a pile to be burned (early second century AD).

According to some Jewish tradition, a brother was forgiven three times for the same offense. The fourth offense, however, need not be forgiven because it would be evidence that the brother had not repented. Peter thought he was being generous in forgiving up to seven times. Lenski adds that the Jewish teaching of forgiving three times was based on Amos 1:3 and 2:6.

When the evil man's wickedness was brought to the attention of his master, the king had him arrested at once. "O thou wicked servant," he said, "I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?" (18:32-33)

Approximately Two Hundred Thousand Years' Wages!

Jesus' parables often contain unrealistic, striking elements that contribute to the parable's effect on the hearers and readers. Paying off this kind of debt is an impossible feat and thus magnifies the graciousness of the forgiveness.

(Stern, David, H., *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 1992)



The museum in Heraklion, Crete, displays 3,500-year-old Minoan talents- metal ingots used to settle debts.

The Consequences Of An Unforgiving Spirit (Matthew 18:31-35)

Although the other servants offer no money to release the imprisoned man, they are distressed or “grieved” (the same Greek term as in Matthew 17:23; Matthew 19:22; Matthew 26:22) and do not hesitate to report the forgiven servant’s act, which has now cost the king (and thus ultimately them) still more money (Manson 1979:214).

Ancient documents indicate that this practice of imprisoning debtors was legal—and that officials could severely punish those who abused it (Deissmann 1978:269-70).

The first servant’s debt is reinstated, and he is handed over to the torturers.

Footnote 1:

Attention moves to the other servants of the king, here described as the *fellow servants* of the man just thrown into jail. When they saw what *had happened*, they were *very sorry*, an expression that evokes a variety of translations (e.g., "very upset," GNB; "greatly distressed," NIV; "deeply grieved," NASB). However we translate it, it clearly points to a deep feeling of grief. The imprisoned man may or may not have been popular, but there was no doubting that he had been treated very shabbily. So these servants went to the king (still spoken of as *lord*; that was his relation to all the other people concerned in this story). They explained to him *all that had happened*; they left him in no doubt but made a clear and full explanation of the whole situation.

(Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According To Matthew*, 476)

Footnote 2:

This is a dialogue on the forgiveness of wrongs done by one member of the Church to another. It is the Jewish teaching that the offender must repent, apologize, and make reparation for the wrong done. It is then the duty of the injured party to forgive him. In his teaching Jesus is reversing the old law of vengeance which finds expression in Gen. 4: 24, where the song of Lamech runs, 'If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold', i.e., the old blood feud was carried on without mercy and without limit. Jesus says: Just as in those old days there was no limit to hatred and vengeance, so among Christians there is to be no limit to mercy and forgiveness. The vengeance of Lamech in Gen. 4: 24 was $70 + 7 =$ seventy seven fold. Later, owing to the LXX rendering 70×7 , it became four hundred and ninety fold. That is the version we have here. The R.V. margin suggests seventy times and seven, but the Greek cannot bear that meaning. D (Codex Bezae, the Western Text) has 'seventy times seven times', an alteration designed to make the meaning quite clear.

(Argyle, A.W., *The Gospel According To Matthew*, 142)

Footnote 3:

A talent was the equivalent of seventy-five pounds, or 1,093 troy ounces. While the price of silver and gold have varied over the centuries, seventy-five talents was an amount that far exceeded anything someone could normally amass in a lifetime. Turner says the amount is so huge that “a laborer would have to work sixty millions days, or roughly 193,000 years (60,000,000 days divided by 310 workdays per year) to earn this much money!” A gold talent would have been worth much more. In any case, a vast, virtually unimaginable, sum is what Jesus intended to picture.

(Stern, David, H., *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 1992)

Footnote 3 (cont.):

Many millions, literally, "ten thousand talents." In Roman times one talent equalled 6,000 denarii, a denarius being roughly a day's wages for a common laborer. If a day's wages today is in the neighborhood of \$50, 10,000 talents would be \$3 billion! In the Tanakh a talent weighs 75.6 pounds. This amount of gold, (\$1,350/troy ounce), is worth nearly \$4 billion; the same amount of silver, at \$4/troy ounce, comes to over \$40 million. Haman offered King Achashverosh of Persia 10,000 talents of silver to destroy the Jews (Esther 3:9). The museum in Heraklion, Crete, displays 3,500-year-old Minoan talents-metal ingots used to settle debts

(Stern, David, H., *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 1992)