

Matthew 18:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Analysis

Peter's question 'Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?' appears generous—rabbinical tradition required forgiving three times. Peter's seven seems magnanimous. But Jesus' response 'I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven' (or 'seventy-seven times,' v. 22) demands unlimited forgiveness. The point isn't literal counting (490 times) but forgiving without limit, as God forgives us. This introduces the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Historical Context

Jewish teaching required forgiving three offenses; Peter's seven doubled this plus one, seemingly generous. Jesus' 'seventy times seven' deliberately echoes Genesis 4:24 where Lamech vowed unlimited vengeance—Jesus transforms unlimited vengeance into unlimited forgiveness. Kingdom citizens forgive as God forgives—without limit or scorekeeping.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. Whose repeated offenses are you struggling to forgive unlimited times?
2. How does God's unlimited forgiveness of you motivate forgiving others?

Interlinear Text

Τότε προσελθὼν αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος εἶπεν Κύριε ποσάκις
Then came him G3588 Peter and said Lord how oft
G5119 G4334 G846 G4074 G2036 G2962 G4212

ἀμαρτήσει εἰς ἐμὲ ὁ ἀδελφός μου καὶ ἀφήσω
sin against me G3588 brother shall my and I forgive
G264 G1519 G1691 G80 G3450 G2532 G863

αὐτῷ ἔως ἐπτάκις
him till seven times
G846 G2193 G2034

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 18:15 (Parallel theme): Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

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