

Forgiving 70 times 7 Ends In Torture!

Overview

The Greek word translated as "forgave" in Matthew 18 means "to send away." The word translated as "tormentors" comes from βάσανος (basanos), a stone used to test the purity of gold. This walks through Matthew 18:21–35 word by word in the original Greek. I will focus on three words to rebuild the parable. Αφίημι (Aphiāmi), translated as "to forgive," names a physical act of release, not an emotional shift. (Splagchnizomai, translated "moved with compassion"), names an involuntary upheaval in the gut. And (Basanistās, translated "tormentors"), appears only once in the entire text and comes from βάσανος (basanos), which fundamentally means a test or a trial of genuineness. Its literal translation is a "touchstone"—a dark, hard stone from Lydia that ancient metalworkers used to determine the purity of gold or silver by the color of the streak it left behind. Considering all of this, the parable stops sounding like a morality tale and starts sounding like a map of an inner sequence.

Summary

Peter doubles the rabbinic three and adds one in Matthew 18:21. Jesus answers seventy times seven, inverting Lamech's seventy-sevenfold vengeance in Genesis 4:24. The debt in verse 24 is μυρίων ταλάντων (myrioōn talantōn), the largest Greek number paired with the largest currency unit, equaling sixty million denarii or two hundred thousand years of daily labor. Αφίημι (Aphiāmi) appears over 140 times. Thayer defines its use in Matthew 18:27 as "to let go," "to give up a debt by not demanding it." The grammatical object is δάνειον (daneion), a noun that translates to "a loan" or "a debt." This word appears only once, in this verse. Splagchnizomai comes from σπλάγχνον (splagchnon), referring to the inner organs or viscera (heart, liver, lungs, and intestines). Figuratively, it was used to describe the seat of deep human emotion—translating to "bowels" in older texts and representing our modern concepts of compassion, tender mercy, or heartfelt affection. It appears twelve times: eight used directly of Jesus, three in parables of figures representing God, and one of a father pleading for his son. The sequence in verse 27 is fixed: the gut seizes, then the man's release, then the aphiāmi of the debt. In verse 28, the same servant grabs a fellow servant by the throat over one hundred denarii, six hundred thousand times less than what was released. Verse 34 uses ὀργισθεῖς (orgistheis), derived from ὀργή (orgē), which primarily translates as anger, wrath, or violent passion, and παραδίδωμι (paradidōmi), meaning to personally hand over. The (Basanistās – the tormentors) appear only here. Thayer defines it as "one who elicits the truth by using the rack." The root basanos was originally an Egyptian loanword for a dark stone used to test the purity of gold. Verse 35 closes with ἀπὸ τῶν καρδιῶν ὑμῶν (apo tōn kardiōn humōn), from your hearts, plural, individual decision centers. In

this reading, the passage maps a single sequence: the gut seizes, the hands release, or the touchstone tests what was withheld.

An Examination of the Text

The word your Bible translates as “forgave” in Matthew 18 has never primarily meant “forgive.” The Greek word is *aphiāmi*. It appears over 140 times in the New Testament, most often translated as “leave or forgive” in the King James Version. Its primary meaning is “to send away,” “to release,” and “to let go.” In Matthew 18:27, a king releases a servant from a debt so large it would take two hundred thousand years to repay. Modern translations use “forgave,” but the Greek says he “sent it away.” The traditional reading is not wrong; it’s just incomplete. The Greek beneath it contains three words that shift the weight of the entire story. Before the release, the text says something happened inside the king's body. A word that English completely flattened into a feeling. And the word for what comes after, the tormentors, appears exactly once in the entire New Testament. Its root means a stone used to test the purity of gold. Three Greek words:

1. One for what the king felt in his gut.
2. One for what he physically did with the debt, and
3. One for what happens when you receive both but extend neither.

By the end of this article, you will know and understand the full meaning of all three.

The passage begins with Peter in Matthew 18:21. He asks Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother. Seven times? The rabbis taught three. Peter doubled that and added one more, hoping the number would be satisfactory. He thought he was being generous beyond measure. But the problem was that he was still counting. Notice that Jesus does not raise the number; He eliminates counting entirely!

Jesus replies, “Seventy times seven.” That phrase echoes Genesis 4:24, where Lamech boasts of a seventy-sevenfold vengeance. Jesus inverts this. While Lamech multiplies revenge without limit, Jesus multiplies release without limit. Then, in verse 23, he tells a parable. The word Peter used for forgive in his question is the same word the king will use in verse 27—*Aphiāmi*. Peter assumed he knew what forgiveness meant. The parable is about to show him that he did not.

But before we get to the *aphiāmi* receipt, we need to consider the scale of the release. The numbers in the text are not accidental. Verse 24 tells us that a servant owing ten thousand talents is brought before the king. The Greek word for ten thousand is *myrioi*, the highest named number in the Greek language. There was no single word for anything larger. Also, a talent (*talanton*) was the largest unit of currency. Jesus combined the largest possible number with the largest possible denomination. To give you an idea of the amount owed to the king, one talent equaled roughly six thousand denarii, and one denarius was a day's wage for a laborer. Therefore, ten thousand talents equals sixty million denarii, which is approximately two hundred thousand years of daily labor!

For context, Herod the Great's annual revenue from all his territories was about 1,000 talents. This servant owed ten times the national budget. The number was never meant to be realistic. It was meant to be *felt*. Imagine owing the IRS that much. Yikes! A debt so large that the mind cannot hold it. A number designed to make the listener stop calculating and start listening. That is the point. Remember that number because in verse 28, the second servant will owe one hundred denarii—about one hundred days' wages. That is serious money that would cause genuine hardship. Jesus does not trivialize what the second man owed. But it is six hundred thousand times less than what was just released.

Verse 26 says, "So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything'" (NASB). He cannot. The text knows he cannot. Two hundred thousand years of labor is not a number anyone negotiates with. It is a number that exposes the absurdity of the promise. But notice what the king does next. He does not grant patience: the servant asked for time, but the king gave him something the servant did not ask for and could never earn. In verse 27, three things happen in one sentence: (1) The king was moved with compassion, (2) he loosed the servant, and (3) he forgave the debt.

Your English says "he forgave." You hear that word and think of an emotional shift: the anger fades, and the resentment softens. But that is not what the Greek says. The word is *aphiāmi*. It appears over 140 times in the New Testament, most often translated as "leave" or "forgive" in the King James Version. However, the primary meaning across all its uses is "to send away, to release, to let go." Thayer's lexicon defines it in this verse as "to let go, give up a debt by not demanding it." The object of *aphiāmi* in verse 27 is explicitly the *daneion*, the loan. The king did not feel forgiving. He performed a physical act of release; he sent the debt away.

You have carried debts that others owe you. Maybe not money, but apologies or acknowledgments. The feeling that someone should have done better. *Aphiāmi* says forgiveness is not waiting for the anger to fade. Rather, it is the act of sending the claim away, whether the feeling follows or not. So the next time you feel that grip tighten around something someone owes you, you will have the word for what release actually looks like. It is not an emotion but an action. But here is a detail your translation buried. The word for debt in verse 27, *daneion*, appears exactly once in the entire New Testament. Only here, only in this verse. Still, the passage does something with that word that no other New Testament verse does. It pairs *daneion* with *aphiāmi*. The loan was met, and the debt disappeared. The king had released the debt.

But the text says something happened inside his body first. The English word translated as "moved with compassion" obscures what actually took place. And that word appears only twelve times in the entire New Testament. Nearly every use points to God or to Jesus himself. Go back to verse 27. Before the king released the man and before he sent the debt away, the text says he was moved with compassion. In English, that sounds gentle, as if the king felt sorry for the servant. But the Greek tells a different story. The word is *splagchnizomai*, which comes from *splagchnon*, meaning the bowels, the inward parts. Thayer defines it as to be moved as to one's bowels, hence to be moved with compassion, for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity. This is not gentle sympathy but rather an involuntary physical upheaval in the gut.

Something seized the king before his hands moved. You have felt this, not the decision to be kind, but the moment something in your gut contracts before your mind catches up. It is the involuntary response to someone else's suffering that you did not choose. Splagchnizomai says that response is not weakness; it is the same quality the text assigns to God. So, the next time that feeling seizes you and you try to talk yourself out of it, you will know what the Greek word says is actually happening.

Splagchnizomai appears twelve times in the New Testament. Eight are used directly to describe Jesus. Nearly all lead to healing, feeding, or raising the dead. The pattern is physical action following a gut response. Three appear in parables, where the figure represents God or models divine compassion. One describes a father begging Jesus on behalf of his demon-possessed son. This word marks a quality the text treats as extraordinary. It is not a general word for pity. It is specific, visceral, and reserved. The sequence in verse 27 matters: there are three verbs in a fixed order: first, the king was moved with compassion; second, he loosed the man; and third, he sent the debt away. Thus, the sequence is: splagchnizomai, then release, then *aphiāmi*. The gut seized before the hands opened. The involuntary response came first. The decision to release came after. The text maps a sequence, not a single feeling. The body led.

And this is the detail most readings skip: compassion is not the conclusion; it is the beginning. What follows the gut seizure is what the passage is actually about. The next time you feel that involuntary contraction and wonder whether to trust it or dismiss it, you will know that the text says it leads not to sentiment but to action. Splagchnizomai is the start of the sequence, and *aphiāmi* is where it ends. The church's reading of this verse has served millions of people. Compassion is not the wrong word, but the Greek is doing something the English cannot preserve. It describes an event in the body, not a sentiment in the mind.

Now look at what the released servant does in verse 28. The man for whom the king's gut seized, whose debt was sent away, whose chains were broken. Watch what he does to the very next person who owes him something, and notice the word the text uses for what happens at the end, because it appears nowhere else in the entire New Testament. Verse 28 says that the same servant who just had two hundred thousand years of wages sent away goes out and finds a fellow servant who owes him a hundred denarii, about a hundred days' wages. That represents real money. But it is still six hundred thousand times less than what was just released. He grabs the man by the throat. The Greek is *ἐπνίγεν* (*epnigen*), the third-person singular imperfect, which indicates continuous or ongoing action in the past, in the active form of the verb *πνίγω* (*pnigo*). Its literal translation is "to choke," "to throttle," or "to strangle." His first act after receiving release is violence!

Verse 29 says that the fellow servant falls down and says almost the exact same words. Have patience with me, and I will pay you all. The same plea, the same posture. But whereas the king responds with splagchnizomai, this servant responds with refusal. The text forces you to hear the first plea inside the second. That echo is the engine of the entire parable. Verse 34. The king is angry. The Greek is *ὀργίζομαι* (*orgistheis*), from *ὀργή* (*orgā*), which is generally translated as "anger," "wrath," or "indignation." It denotes a more controlled, abiding, and objective state of

hostility, in contrast to θυμός (thumos), meaning a sudden, explosive, and boiling rage. This is not irritation but settled wrath, the kind of anger that arrives after deliberation, not in the heat of the moment. And the king delivered the first servant to the tormentors. Your English says “tormentors,” which sounds like a severe punishment (e.g., a scourging). The Greek word is βασανιστής (basanistās), meaning “torturer,” “tormentor,” or “jailer.” Thayer defines it as one who elicits the truth by the use of the rack, an inquisitor, torturer, or jailer, doubtless because the business of torturing was also assigned to him. These are not amateurs; they are professional inquisitors who extracted truth under the rack.

But the root goes deeper. Basanistās comes from basanos, which originally meant a touchstone. An Egyptian loanword for a dark stone used to test the purity of gold by rubbing it against the stone’s surface. The testing stone became testing by examination, which evolved into examination under duress. The torturers test what is real. You know this feeling. Something inside you that will not stop pressing; a resentment you cannot put down, or a debt you refuse to release. The Greek word for that pressing is basanistās, the touchstone testing whether what you received ever became real inside you. Now that you have the word, you will recognize it the next time that pressure comes. Not as random suffering, but as a test of what is genuine.

Notice the verb. Delivered. The Greek is παραδίδωμι (paradidōmi). Thayer defines it as to give into the hands of another. This is not merely a bureaucratic transfer. Paradidōmi carries a sense of personal, deliberate handing over. The king did not merely sentence the man. He personally placed him in the hands of the inquisitors. Till he should pay all that was due. Since the debt is ten thousand talents, that means never. The sentence has no end because the debt has no ceiling. The torment is not a punishment with a release date. It is permanent because the debt is permanent. The torturers test what is real. That is what the root word means. A stone that tests purity.

Now look at the very last verse. Jesus names the exact location from which forgiveness must come for it to count—it is not the mouth. In verse 33, the king asks one question, “Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?” The king’s question uses a different word: ἐλέεω (Eleeo, “to have mercy,” “to show compassion,” or “to pity”). But it points back to the splagchnizomai of verse 27. The question is not whether the servant felt a gut seizure. It is whether the mercy he received should have moved through him. The three words tell the full arc:

1. The gut seizes. That is *splagchnizomai*. Something involuntary. Something that happens in the body before the mind decides.
2. The hands release. That is *aphiāmi*. A physical act, not an emotional conclusion.
3. And if those hands do not open, the touchstone tests, that is *Basanistās*. The inquisitor who tests whether what was poured in ever became real.

The debt was sent away. The servant received *splagchnizomai* and *aphiāmi*. He extended neither. He choked a man who owed him four months’ wages. The passage maps a single inner sequence. Receive, extend, or be tested by what you withheld. The king poured out two hundred thousand

years of release upon this man. The man could not pass along one hundred days. That ratio is the verdict. The text does not need to explain why it is wrong. The numbers do the work.

Jesus closes the parable in verse 35, "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (NASB). From your hearts—the Greek is ἀπὸ τῶν καρδιῶν ὑμῶν (apo tōn kardiōn humōn—from the heart your). The word kardia encompasses more than sentiment. It means the center of your inner life; the seat of thought, desire, and decision; the place where you actually choose, not merely where you feel warm. Notice the plural: not from the heart, as a collective, but from your heart, as an individual. Each person's decision center is addressed separately. A forgiveness that does not originate in one's heart is only a performance. The words come out, but the grip stays locked. And the touchstone will find it.

The passage does not demand that you feel compassion on command. It maps a sequence. Something seizes your gut, and you either release the grip or the grip becomes the test. You have felt both sides of this. The moment the gut seized, you followed it. And the moment you felt it and held on anyway. Now you have the Greek for what was happening each time: Splagchnizomai, meaning "what seized you." Aphiāmi for what your hands were supposed to do. Basanistās for what tested you when they did not. The gut seizes. The hands release, or the touchstone tests what you are holding. That is the entire passage in three Greek words.

The king did not wait to feel compassionate before he released. The gut seized. The hands opened. The feeling was the catalyst. The release was the action. Peter came to Jesus with a calculator. How many times? Give me the number. Let me track it. Let me know when I have done enough. Jesus did not give him a number. He gave him a story about a man who received the largest release the Greek language could name, then choked a man over four months' wages. The passage that opens with counting ends with a touchstone. **The question was never how many times. It was whether the release is real.**