

— A SEASON OF *Teshuvah* —

40 DAYS

— RETURN TO ME —

REPENT. RETURN. ROOT.



JOEL 2:12-13



Why 40 Days?

The number “forty” + (time period) is mentioned at least 146 times in Scripture. The phrase “40 days and 40 nights” appears 24 times.

It symbolizes trials or the fulfillment of promises.

It’s a number associated with testing and the hardships one must endure to become more spiritually aware.

<http://www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible/40.html> <https://guideposts.org/angels-and-miracles/miracles/gods-grace/the-number-40-in-the-bible/>



40 DAYS
RETURN TO ME

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “**Return**
[שׁוּב *shuv*] to Me with all your heart, and with
fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend
your heart and not your garments. Now
return [שׁוּב *shuv*] to the Lord your God, for
He is gracious and compassionate, slow to
anger, abounding in lovingkindness and
relenting of evil.” ” Joel 2:12-13



What kind of God is calling us to Return [שוב *shuv*]?

- Gracious
- Compassionate (merciful)
- Slow to anger
- Abounding in lovingkindness
- Relenting of evil



- Zechariah 1:3 Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: **Return to me**, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.
- Malachi 3:7 From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. **Return to me**, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?'
- Jeremiah 15:19 Therefore thus says the LORD: "If you **return**, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them.
- Isaiah 44:22 I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; **return** to me, for I have redeemed you.
- Jeremiah 4:1 "If you return, O Israel, declares the LORD, to me you should **return**. If you remove your detestable things from my presence, and do not waver,
- Jeremiah 3:12 Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, "'**Return**, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever.
- Zechariah 1:1-4:14 In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, "The LORD was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: **Return** to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? ...
- James 4:8 **Draw near to God**, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.



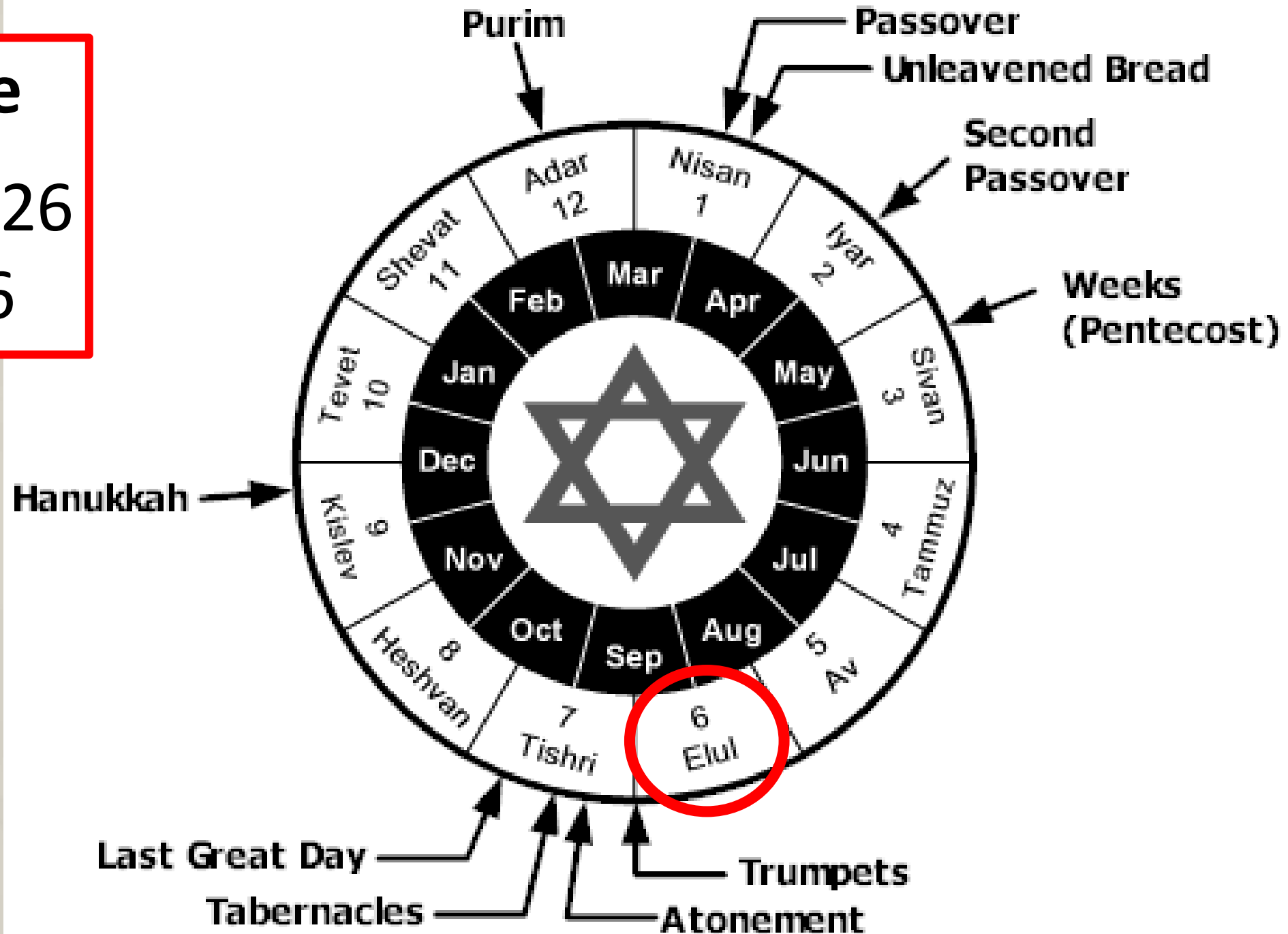
- Hosea 6:1 “Come, let us **return** to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.
- Acts 3:19 **Repent** therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,
- Hosea 14:1 **Return**, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.
- Lamentations 3:40 Let us test and examine our ways, and **return** to the LORD!
- Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him **return** to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
- Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; **turn back**, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?
- Jeremiah 8:4-6 “You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD: When men fall, do they not rise again? If one turns away, does he not **return**? Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit; they refuse to **return**. I have paid attention and listened, but they have not spoken rightly; no man relents of his evil, saying, ‘What have I done?’ Everyone turns to his own course, like a horse plunging headlong into battle.
- Zechariah 1:4 Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, **Return** from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.
- Jeremiah 3:22 “**Return**, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness.” “Behold, we come to you, for you are the LORD our God.



Today's date

August 30, 2026

17 Elul 5786



40 DAYS
RETURN TO ME

Elul, the 6th month of the Hebrew calendar, is an intense month of spiritual preparation and self accounting in preparation for standing before the Lord on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The journey of *teshuvah* - of return - to our true selves and to the Lord our Creator, is a journey built on honesty and integrity and a burning desire to become the person God intended us to be.

Every new day of the month of Elul is announced by the sounding of the *shofar* - the ancient wake up call that touches our soul and rekindles our belief in ourselves and our ability to repair who we are. The month of Elul is a gift to all who are ready to bear down and get to work.

- Temple Institute



Sound the shofar

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JSnXmFq8lM>



**Because God willingly forgives us, we
are called to forgive each other**

Be kind to one another, tender-
hearted, forgiving each other, just as
God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:32



Matthew 18:21-35



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There is a similar Parable of Jesus

- The parable of the unmerciful slave in Matthew 18 is unique to Matthew's Gospel. It does not appear in Mark, Luke, or John.
- Jesus tells a shorter parable in Luke 7 of two debtors (one owing 500 denarii, the other 50) to explain how much love flows from being forgiven a large debt, though it targets a different lesson regarding a woman's sin and gratitude for forgiveness.



Then [Simon] Peter came and said to Him [Yeshua],
“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me
and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said
to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but
up to seventy times seven.” Matthew 18:21-22

- Peter was being generous here, for the traditional Rabbinic teaching was that an offended person needed to forgive a brother only three times. Jesus’ reply was that forgiveness needs to be exercised to a much greater extent. Not just 7 times, but “70 times 7”, that is, 490 times. Jesus meant that **no limits** should be set. Then to complete the idea, He told a parable. – Bible Knowledge Commentary



Jesus said, “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them [examine their work], one who owed him ten thousand [μύριοι *murioi*] talents [τάλαντον *talanton*] was brought to him.” Matthew 18:23-24

- A talent was a measure of weight, between 58 and 80 pounds
- The value would differ according to the metal (silver or gold), but the buying power was enormous. Five talents would make one a multi-millionaire.
- 10,000 talents would be equivalent to hundreds of millions of dollars today



The Economic Units Explained

- **The Denarius:** This was the standard silver coin of the Roman Empire and the typical daily wage for an ordinary day laborer or a Roman soldier.
- **The Talent:** This was not a coin, but a massive unit of weight used to measure precious metals (usually silver). One talent was worth roughly 6,000 denarii.
- In the first-century Roman Empire, **10,000 talents represented an astronomical, completely unpayable sum of roughly 60 million denarii** (daily wage for 60 million days/164,000+ years).



The Hyperbole of Jesus's Story

- To fully appreciate the scale of 10,000 talents, it helps to understand how it fit into the economy of the ancient world:
- **The Maximum Number:** "Ten thousand" (μύριοι *murioi*, the root word of myriad) was the highest numerical unit used in the Greek language, and the "talent" was the largest denomination of currency. Jesus combined the largest number with the largest unit to describe an **"infinite" debt**.
- **Imperial Comparison:** Historical records show that the entire annual tax revenue collected by Rome from Judea, Samaria, and Galilee combined was only about 600 to 900 talents. **The slave's debt was greater than the revenue of the entire region over a decade.**



Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king’s laws, so it is not in the king’s interest to let them remain. If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay **ten thousand talents of silver** into the hands of those who carry on the king’s business, to put into the king’s treasuries.” Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. Esther 3:8-10



Jesus said, “But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be **sold**, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.”
Matthew 18:25



The Financial Futility of the Legal Action

- The core irony of the king's legal decree is the massive disparity between the size of the debt and the market value of human beings.
- **Market Value of a Slave:** In the first century, an ordinary laborer or domestic slave typically sold for anywhere between **500 to 2,000 denarii** (roughly 1/12 to 1/3 of a single talent), depending on age, health, and skills.
- **The Total Recovery:** If the king sold the slave, his wife, and his children, the total court-ordered liquidation would net perhaps **1 to 3 talents** at best.
- **The Math:** 3 talents recovered out of a 10,000-talent debt means the legal action would recoup less than **0.03%** of what was owed.
- In the ancient Greco-Roman and Near Eastern world, a king had absolute authority to order a debtor and his family to be sold into slavery, though for a debt of 10,000 talents, **the legal action was a purely punitive measure rather than a realistic way to recover the financial loss.**
- The sale of a single family would yield only a tiny fraction of a single talent, making the king's initial command an exercise of absolute sovereign right and a demonstration of the slave's total ruin.



The Legal Framework of Debt Slavery

- In first-century Judea and the broader Roman Empire, specific legal structures governed debt and slavery.
- **Sovereign Right (*Manus* / Absolute Power):** Hellenistic kings and Roman governors held supreme judicial power over their subjects, particularly over royal officials or "slaves" (who were often high-ranking state administrators handling tax revenues). The king could bypass ordinary civil courts to issue immediate summary judgments.
- **Asset Liquidation:** Under Roman law (*bonorum venditio*) and ancient Near Eastern custom, a creditor had the legal right to seize everything a debtor owned. Because a person's family was legally considered their property, the wife, children, and personal belongings were liquidated alongside any land or houses.
- **The Mosaic Law Limit:** Jewish law explicitly permitted a person to be sold into temporary servitude to pay off a theft or debt (Exodus 22:3). However, the Torah required Hebrew slaves to be released after six years (Exodus 21:2) and strictly forbade selling a wife to pay her husband's debts. By describing a permanent, multi-person family sale, Jesus's parable reflects harsher Gentile or Hellenistic legal practices, which standard Roman audiences would instantly recognize.



“So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’” Matthew 18:26

- When the slave falls to his knees and begs, "Be patient with me, and I **will pay back everything**" (Matthew 18:26), **the original audience would have laughed at the absurdity**. It was physically impossible for a slave to ever repay thousands of lifetimes worth of labor.
- This servant-debtor thought he only needed *patience*; but indeed he needed *forgiveness!*" - Charles Spurgeon



What was the slave requesting?

Justice
or
Mercy
or
Grace



What would the king do next?



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“And the lord of that slave felt compassion and **released** [ἀπολύω *apoluo*] him and forgave him the debt.” Matthew 18:27

- The master showed **mercy** prompted by **compassion**, forgiving a debt that obviously could never be repaid – despite whatever promises the servant made. - David Guzik



Why the King Did It

Because the sale could never actually pay off the enormous debt (as stated in Matthew 18:25), the legal decree served two distinct purposes in the ancient mind:

- **Total Foreclosure:** It was a formal legal declaration that the slave was completely bankrupt, stripped of his administrative office, and erased from free society.
- **The Setup for Mercy:** By enforcing the absolute limit of the law first, the king establishes just how severe the debt is. This makes his sudden pivot—moving from strict legal execution to tearing up the contract out of pure compassion—all the more shocking to the listeners.



What would the forgiven man do next?



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“But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him [by the throat] and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’” Matthew 18:28

- 100 denarii has a modern value of \$5,000-15,000. A denarius was a Roman silver coin, worth a few cents; it represented a laborer’s daily wages. – Bible Knowledge Commentary
- In the first-century Roman Empire, 10,000 talents represented an astronomical, completely unpayable sum of roughly 60 million denarii, while 100 denarii was a small, manageable debt equivalent to about 100 days of manual labor.



- The ratio between the two debts is a staggering **600,000 to 1**, illustrating the contrast between God's infinite forgiveness and the small grievances humans refuse to forgive each other.
- “The debt was very, very small, but the claim was urged with intense ferocity. Our little claims against our fellow men are too apt to be pressed upon them with unsparing severity.” - Charles Spurgeon

Metric	The Fellow Servant's Debt (100 Denarii)	The First Slave's Debt (10,000 Talents)
Total Value in Denarii	100 denarii	60,000,000 denarii
Labor Equivalent	~100 days of work (~3–4 months)	~60,000,000 days of work (~164,000 years)
Modern Purchasing Power (Assumed \$100–\$150/day wage)	\$10,000 to \$15,000	\$6 Billion to \$9 Billion
Historical Context	A common, completely workable personal loan.	More than the annual tax revenue of entire Roman provinces combined.



“So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’”

Matthew 18:29

- Does that request sound familiar?



“But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.”

Matthew 18:30

- The man who owed the smaller debt used the exact same plea and promise that brought mercy to the man who had the greater debt. But it gained nothing, and the forgiven servant put the man into a debtor's prison. – David Guzik



“So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.” Matthew 18:31

- The other servants, aware of all that had happened ... were greatly distressed (*elypēthēsan*, “grieved or sad to the point of distress”; see Matthew 14:9; 19:22) by this turn of events and told their master what had transpired. – Bible Knowledge Commentary
- **There is no mention in the parable of the first servant’s conscience bothering him about his conduct.** It was his fellow servants that recognized the wrong that was done. Sometimes we are painfully – and to our embarrassment – blind to our own sinful, fleshly conduct.



“Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.” Matthew 18:32-34

- The master called back the first servant and jailed him for failing to show mercy to a fellow servant when he had been forgiven a much greater debt.
– Bible Knowledge Commentary
- It was wrong for a man who has been forgiven so much to then be so unforgiving. He then gave the first servant what he deserved – justice instead of mercy. – David Guzik



What happened next?



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“My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.” Matthew 18:35

- Forgiven people should be forgiving people.
- If I refuse to forgive, have I really been forgiven?
- God has forgiven such a great debt, that any debt owed to us is absolutely insignificant in comparison. No man can possibly offend me to the extent that my sins have offended God. This principle must be applied in the little things done to us, but also to the great things done unto us. – David Guzik



“My heavenly Father will also do the same to you”

- It would be wrong to make this into the idea that unforgiveness itself is the unforgivable sin. It is better to say that forgiveness is evidence of truly being forgiven, and that habitual unforgiveness may show that a person's heart has never really been touched by the love of Jesus.
- For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:13
- We remember the punishment of the unforgiving man in the parable of Jesus: the master delivered him to the torturers. There are many poor souls who are tortured by their own unforgiveness toward others. – David Guzik



- This parable was given to make us *more forgiving*, not *less forgiving*.
- Jesus taught, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” Luke 6:36
- **It is important to understand that a distinction can and should be made between *forgiveness* and *reconciliation*.** True reconciliation of relationship can only happen when both parties are agreeable to it, and this may require repentance on one or both of the parties in the conflict. Yet forgiveness can be one-sided.
- **Forgiveness does not necessarily shield someone from the civil or practical consequences of their sin.** For example, a homeowner may personally forgive the man who robbed his house, yet it is still appropriate for the robber to be arrested and put in jail. On a personal level, forgiveness is required. On a civil and societal level, the man should be punished by the magistrates (Romans 13).



In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, the first servant's debt was forgiven, and he was not required to repay until his unforgiving nature was discovered.

In contrast, our sin debt was paid in full by Jesus on the cross and is the only basis for God's forgiveness. We cannot repay our debt to God or earn our salvation. It is a gift of grace.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8



Have we received forgiveness?

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9



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