

## GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Felonyuk O.P.<sup>1</sup>, Kazakov V.N.<sup>2</sup>, Kukhtaev A.Yu.<sup>3</sup>, Kavinsky V.V.<sup>4</sup>, Volodchenkov M.I.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Felonyuk Oleg Petrovich – Independent Researcher;

<sup>2</sup>Kazakov Vladimir Nikolaevich – Independent Researcher;

<sup>3</sup>Kukhtaev Alexander Yurievich – Independent Researcher;

<sup>4</sup>Kavinsky Veniamin Vitalievich – Independent Researcher;

<sup>5</sup>Volodchenkov Mikhail Ivanovich – Independent Researcher.

VORONEZH

**Abstract:** *The article explores the theological theme—of “God’s Forgiveness”, and also provides an analysis of the verses of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments—the Gospel of Matthew 18th chapter (Matthew 18:21-22). The study is based on the analysis of individual chapters of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments of the NKJV Study Bible. The result of the consideration is the main conclusion: every person who believes in Jesus Christ must accept God’s forgiveness and forgive his neighbor, as Christ forgave us. This study was conducted by the biblical method—“proof by the Scriptures”.*

**Keywords:** *Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments of the New King James Version (The NKJV Study Bible); sin; forgiveness; traditions of the East.*

UDC 226.2

### Special Abbreviations

f., ff. — following verse, following verses.

### Quotes

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version (The NKJV Study Bible)*.

### Introduction

The purpose of the work is to study the theological theme—“**God’s Forgiveness**”. In addition, the article presents an analysis of the verses of the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament—the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 18 (**Matt. 18:21-22**). The study is based on the commentary of individual chapters of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments of the *NKJV Study Bible*. The result of the analysis is the conclusion: God’s forgiveness belongs to all people, therefore it must be accepted by faith and practiced in one’s life in relation to other people. This study was conducted using the biblical method and is based on convincing argumentation from Bible verses—“**proof by the Scriptures...**” (**Acts 18:28f**) [9].

*The presented work is thematically related to the authors' previous research [1-7].*

*God knows His children—those who believe in Jesus Christ and always do His will. He knows them perfectly and constantly takes care of them, which is convincingly proven in works [1-2].*

*God always has a reward for serving the Lord—salvation and eternal life, which is proved by the content of the works [3-4].*

*For obedience to the will of God (humility), the Lord also has a reward—healing and blessing, which is proved in the works [5-6].*

*The children of God are obedient to the voice of the Lord—the Holy Spirit (the word of God)—which is proven by the content of the work [7].*

### NKJV STUDY BIBLE

From the Holy Scriptures (the Bible) we know that the Lord loves to have mercy and forgive the sinner.

Let us define the terms “**sin**” and “**forgiveness of sins**”:

“**Sin**—Various Hebrew and Greek words are translated ‘**sin**’ with many shades of meaning. Theologically, **sin** is the human condition of separation from God that arises from opposition to God’s purposes. It may be breaking God’s law, failing to do what God wills, or rebellion. It needs forgiveness by God.” [8, 260].

“**Forgiveness of sins**—God’s action in pardoning or remitting sinful offenses, which includes canceling the penalties that such acts would have merited. Forgiveness of sins comes through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:14) and is to be a mark of the Christian’s life as well (Matt. 6:12-15; 18:21-35).” [8, 107].

In the light of this definition, we see that this also includes the teaching of Jesus Christ on forgiveness, given by Him in the Sermon on the Mount:

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (**Matt. 6:14-15**).

Indeed, this puts believers and sinners (unbelievers) on the same level in their relationship with God, which proves the Lord’s impartiality:

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ...” (**Acts 17:26ff**).

Considering the relationship of people among themselves, the forgiveness of our sins to each other, we do all this only on the basis of the teachings of Jesus Christ—according to the word of God.

The prophet Micah writes about the forgiveness of sins:

*“Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy.” (Mic. 7:18).*

The verses from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 18 (**Matt. 18:21-22**), regarding how many times we should forgive those who sin against us, are presented for consideration.

In order to fully understand this issue, it is necessary to consider some of the religious traditions of the East regarding forgiveness that existed at that time.

## **1 RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE EAST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Let's define the concept of **“tradition”**:

*“Tradition — (Gr. paradosis, Lat. traditio, from tradere, ‘to deliver,’ ‘to hand over’) the transmission of received teaching or practice. In Christianity, the church's tradition centers in God's revelation in Jesus Christ...” [8, 285].*

In the days of the Old Testament, *some religious traditions of the East* were very strong among the people of Israel. This included everyday household issues and customs.

For example, mentioning something *more than three times* was not allowed. Even this was considered *“very much”* and was quite sufficient.

### **1) The Lord uses the customs of these peoples**

The Lord speaks to Israel in their own language so that they can understand.

#### **Three Cities of Refuge:**

*“When the Lord your God has cut off the nations whose land the Lord your God is giving you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses, you shall separate **three cities** for yourself in the midst of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess. You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into **three parts** the territory of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there. And this is the case of the manslayer who flees there, that he may live: Whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in time past.” (Deut. 19: 1-4).*

### **2) Jonah Thrown into the Sea**

The book of the prophet Jonah presents a case when Jonah did not listen to the voice of the Lord to go to Nineveh, but fled from His presence to Tarshish. The Lord commanded the big fish to swallow him:

*“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish **three days and three nights.**” (Jon. 1:17).*

**Conclusion.** We see that during the time of the Old Testament the religious traditions of the East were carefully observed by the peoples living there.

## **2 RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE EAST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

We know from the Holy Scriptures that some religious traditions of the East were also observed during the New Testament.

### **1) Pharisees Demand a Sign**

The **Lord Jesus Christ**, speaking about Himself and about His impending death on the cross of Calvary, as well as the resurrection that followed, used the customs of the people, saying to the disciples:

*“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the **prophet Jonah**. For as Jonah was **three days and three nights** in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be **three days and three nights** in the heart of the earth.’ ” (Matt. 12:38-40).*

Here we will comment on the words of Jesus Christ about this event. The Lord cites Jonah as an example: just as Jonah, being in the belly of a fish, was considered dead, so Jesus will be dead in the belly of the earth for three days and three nights, but He will rise again, like the surviving Jonah, and having a body confirmation that He, being dead, came to life. His wounds on his arms and in his side were a certificate to confirm Thomas' faith. And moreover, it will remain a sign in eternity:

*“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.” (Rev. 1:7).*

They will see His wounds, which will cause a feeling of guilt and remorse, manifested by crying.

### **2) The Damascus Road: Saul Converted**

The Apostle Paul (then his name was Saul), on his way to Damascus, was stopped by the Lord:

*“As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened*

he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was **three days** without sight, and neither ate nor drank.” (Acts 9:3-9).

The Apostle Paul, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthian Church, writes:

“This will be the **third** time I am coming to you. ‘By the mouth of **two** or **three** witnesses every word shall be established.’ ” (2 Cor. 13:1).

### 3) Peter’s Vision

The Apostle Peter in Joppa saw a vision (a heavenly vessel) referring to the Gentiles whom the Lord is calling:

“And saw heaven opened ... And a voice spoke to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ This was done **three times**. And the object was taken up into heaven again.” (Acts 10:11-16).

Also, the prediction of Jesus Christ that Peter would deny Him **three times** was exactly fulfilled (Luke 22:34; 22:61). The Lord forgave and blessed Peter **three times** (John 21:15-17) and destroyed his renunciation of Him.

**Conclusion.** During the time of the New Testament, some religious traditions of the East were also carefully observed by the peoples living there.

### 3 TRADITIONAL VALUES OF THE NUMBERS “THREE” AND “SEVEN”

Let us give some traditional meanings of the number “**three**”.

1) “**THREE, THIRD**—Occurring in the Bible as often as it does, the figure of three is an evocative image, rich with connotations... Jonah is stuck in the belly of a fish for **three days and three nights** (Jon. 1:17)... **Three** is the minimum number necessary to establish a pattern of occurrences. A single event can be pure chance; a pair can be mere coincidence; but **three** consecutive occurrences of an event serve as a rhetorical signal indicating special significance... Similarly, Elijah has a sacrifice and altar on Mt. Carmel doused with water a full **three times** before the fire of the Lord comes down to consume it (1 Kings 18:34). In the New Testament, Jesus prays in Gethsemane **three times** over and each time discovers his disciples sleeping; only then does the mob arrive to arrest him (Mt. 26:36–47; Mk. 14:32–43)... Thus an episode occurring in **threes** is a motif that points to further developments yet to unfold. But **three** also conveys a sense of completeness or thoroughness to the episode itself; when an event happens **three times** over, the reality of that event gains emphasis.” [10, 2910-2911].

Now we understand why in the East they talked about numbers of no more than three in everyday life. All the above examples confirm this.

It was in **other countries** that people could say to each other when they met: how many years, how many winters (they haven’t seen each other), or: I haven’t seen you for ages. **But the East carefully preserves its traditions.**

2) Let us give some traditional meanings of the number “**seven**”.

“**Seven.** Of the numbers that carry symbolic meaning in biblical usage, **seven** is the most important. It is used to signify **completeness or totality**. Underlying all such use of the number **seven** lies the **seven-day** week, which, according to Genesis 1:1–2:3 and Exodus 20:11, belongs to the God-given structure of creation. God completed his own work of creation in **seven** days (Gen. 2:2), and **seven** days constitute a complete cycle of time... For example, sprinkling the blood of a sacrifice **seven times** (Lev. 16:14, 19) indicates complete purification. The **seven** ‘eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth’ (Zech. 4:10, NRSV—New Revised Standard Version), indicate the completeness of God’s sight of everything in his creation.” [10, 2603].

3) **The prophet Isaiah** writes about the fullness of God in the person of Jesus Christ:

“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” (Is. 11:2).

**The Apostle John** also writes about the fullness of God of Jesus Christ:

“Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw **seven golden lampstands**, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.” (Rev. 1:12-13).

**The Lord Jesus Christ** explains the mystery of God to John:

“He had in His right hand **seven stars**, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength... The mystery of the **seven stars** which you saw in My right hand, and the **seven** golden lampstands: The **seven stars** are the angels of the **seven churches**, and the **seven lampstands** which you saw are the **seven churches**.” (Rev. 1:16, 20).

The Apostle John describes **the throne of God** in detail:

“And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. **Seven lamps** of fire were burning before the throne, which are the **seven Spirits of God**.” (Rev. 4:5).

**Conclusion:** The number “**seven**” was for the Jews as a holy number and so large that it was hardly used.

### 4 THE TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST ON FORGIVENESS

#### 1) Instruction About Forgiveness

One day, Peter asked the Lord Jesus Christ an astonishing question:

*“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘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.’ ”* (Matt. 18:21-22).

The other disciples might have thought: what great love Peter has, we probably wouldn't have been able to do that. It wasn't about forgiving up to *three times*, but (unimaginable) up to *seven times*.

But the Lord's answer destroys all their piety and commitment to human traditions and rituals—up to *seventy times seven times*.

2) If you count it, you will get:

$7 \times 70 = 490$  times (where  $\times$  is the multiplication sign).

It is known that a person sleeps for 8 hours a day, works for 8 hours (usually alone), and spends the remaining 8 hours interacting with other people, where the possibility of sinning arises.

A simple calculation shows: 8 hours  $\times$  60 minutes = 480 minutes.

If you want to find out how often to forgive in terms of time, by dividing 480 minutes by 490 times, you get approximately 0.98 minutes, or about 58.8 seconds.

**Conclusion.** *Even if a person sins against us almost every minute and repents, he must be forgiven—according to the word of God.*

The question arises: why should we do this? The answer is very simple: so that the Lord forgives us in the same way.

In the eyes of the Lord, everything related to people has great value. On the Cross of Calvary, He forgave His tormentors and the people of Israel:

*“And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’ ...”* (Luke 23:33-34f).

But how can we do this, because, by human standards, it is impossible to forgive like that, and in the eyes of people all this *seems crazy*.

3) **Fools for Christ's Sake**

The Apostle Paul writes about this in simple words:

*“We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ!”* (1 Cor. 4:10).

The Lord's teaching about the sacraments of Communion (John 6:47ff) also seemed like madness to some disciples:

*“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”* (John 6:54).

To many of Jesus' disciples this statement seemed strange:

*“Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’ ”* (John 6:60).

After these words, many of His disciples departed from the Lord:

*“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.”* (John 6:66).

But these were words of truth and common sense.

The Holy Scripture (Bible) gives the answer why this happens:

*“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.”* (1 Cor. 2:14-15).

*The conclusion follows from this. The natural man is an unbeliever who does not receive the Holy Spirit.*

Therefore, the word of God calls us to rely on the Lord, and not on our own mind, feelings, emotions, any experiences:

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding.”* (Prov. 3:5).

In order to do this, to forgive almost every minute, we must completely trust in the Lord and His grace:

*“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;”* (1 Pet. 1:13).

**Conclusion.** *From this work, it follows that we should not pay attention to what people of this world, who are generally mostly non-believers, might say or think regarding the forgiveness of one's neighbor for their sins.*

*The priority is what the Lord says about this in His Holy Scripture (the Bible). Believers should strive to follow this precisely.*

Therefore, *God wants every person to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with a sincere heart, to know His forgiveness, love, and mercy, and to practice God's forgiveness, love, and mercy towards others people in their own lives. Furthermore, by believing in the Lord, a person will have close communion with Him—eternal life in Christ Jesus.*

**CONCLUSION**

Summarizing the results of this study, the following important conclusions can be drawn.

By studying certain chapters of the Holy Scripture in the New King James Version (*The NKJV Study Bible*), we have reviewed and explained the following topics:

- 1) Religious traditions of the East in the Old Testament.
- 2) Religious traditions of the East in the New Testament.
- 3) Traditional values of the numbers “three” and “seven”.
- 4) The teaching of Jesus Christ *on forgiveness*.

An answer has been received to the question: *how and how many times should one forgive each person?* The answer: *as the Lord teaches in His teachings and as He forgave all people on the cross of Calvary—He died for the sins of the people of the entire world.*

#### *References*

1. Felonyuk O., Kazakov V., Rybolovlev M., Malchenko A., Kavinsky V. and Volodchenkov M. (2023). Gospod' znaet veruyushchikh v Nego [The Lord knows those who believe in Him]. Problemy nauki [Problems of Science]. 5 (79), 4-9. DOI: 10.24411/2413-2101-2023-10501.
2. Felonyuk O., Kazakov V., Sinibabnov A., Rybolovlev M., Kavinsky V. and Volodchenkov M. (2024). The Lord knows those who believe in Him. Academy. 1 (77), 15-20. DOI: 10.24411/2412-8236-2024-10101.
3. Gruzdev D., Kolosov S., Volodchenkov M. and Kavinsky V. (2022). Nagrada za sluzhenie Gospodu [Reward for serving the Lord]. Problemy nauki [Problems of Science]. 5 (73), 50–55. DOI: 10.24411/2413-2101-2022-10503.
4. Gruzdev D., Severov P., Kolosov S., Sinibabnov A., Kavinsky V. and Volodchenkov M. (2023). Reward for Serving the Lord. Academy. 1 (74), 61–68. DOI: 10.24411/2412-8236-2023-10103.
5. Kolosov S., Sinibabnov P., Sinibabnov A., Khripushin P., Kavinsky V. and Volodchenkov M. (2023). Istselenie docheri Khananeyanki [The Healing of a Canaanite Woman's Daughter]. Problemy nauki [Problems of Science]. 3 (77), 58-63. DOI: 10.24411/2413-2101-2023-10301.
6. Kolosov S., Sinibabnov A., Sinibabnov P., Khripushin P., Kavinsky V. and Volodchenkov M. (2023). The Healing of a Canaanite Woman's Daughter. Academy. 3 (76), 6-11. Rev. DOI: 10.24411/2412-8236-2023-10301.
7. Logunov Jr.A., Logunov M., Logunov K., Sinibabnov A., Kavinsky V. and Volodchenkov M. (2023). Obedience to the Voice of the Lord. Academy. 2 (75), 37-45. DOI: 10.24411/2412-8236-2023-10204.
8. McKim, Donald K. (Ed). (1996). Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms. Louisville, Kentucky, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. 316 p.
9. Nelson's NKJV Study Bible, Second Edition. (2007). Earl D. Radmacher, general editor. 2nd ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 2341 p.
10. Ryken L. et al. (Eds). (1998). Dictionary of biblical imagery. Downers Grove, Illinois, USA; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press. 3291 p.