



# “Be of Good Cheer; It is I; Be Not Afraid”

Matthew 14-18

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## Introduction

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These chapters include one of Matthew’s five ‘books’ or sections of his writing that remind us of Moses’ five books in the Old Testament. In this, the fourth book, Jesus begins to shift his attention away from a more public ministry to a private one, giving more responsibility to his closest disciples and preparing them for future duties. See the detailed introductions with each of the two parts of this book below.

## Outline of Matthew

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Matthew seems to break his work into seven sections (seven representing perfection): a prologue and climax, with five middle sections, each concluding with a major discourse by Jesus. This makes it similar to the five books of Moses. An overall outline for the book of Matthew is as follows (with the focus of this lesson in bold):

1. Prologue—Birth and Infancy (1-2)
2. Proclamation (3-4); Sermon on the Mount (5-7)
3. Galilean ministry (8-9); Missionary discourse (10)
4. Opposition (11-12); Parables (13)
5. **Christ and the Church (14-17); Church life and order (18)**
6. Jerusalem (19-23); Eschatological discourse (24-25)
7. Climax—Passion, Death, and Resurrection (26-28)

Note: In each lesson on the gospels, where there are overlapping or parallel texts, those will be noted in the heading. References in bold are the preferred reading(s) and will be the principal section of analysis, though some unique points in the current gospel will be noted, as well as helpful JST changes.<sup>1</sup>

## Christ and the Church (14-17)

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This section closely parallels Mark 6-8 but includes unique references to Peter’s position and the Church. Thus, Matthew leads us toward the formation of the Church unit itself, and towards a greater understanding of Jesus’ coming passion. Jesus was rejected at Nazareth (13:53-58), and we learn of the death of John the Baptist (14:1-12), foreshadowing Jesus’ own death. Jesus fed the church while at the same time heightening the role of the disciples with the people (14:13-21; 15:29-39), and he symbolically saved the church from the storm in the walking on the water incident, including saving Peter, the model disciple—a story only found in Matthew (14:22-33). The story shows that through faith in Christ, we can achieve all things.

The break with the Jews is heightened by his teaching to reject their rituals and food laws (15:11, 17-18). Matthew includes the condemnation of a common practice during that day of taking funds that should be used to care for parents and claiming to have given it to the temple (15:3-6). Unlike Mark, the disciples in Matthew are not ‘blind’ but the leaders (15:14); the followers are simply “of little faith” (14:31, meaning they have faith but panic in a crisis) or “without understanding” (15:16).

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<sup>1</sup> Not all JST changes are noted, only those of textual or doctrinal interest. Interested readers are encouraged to see Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament* or the manuscripts themselves on the Joseph Smith Papers website ([josephsmithpapers.org](http://josephsmithpapers.org)).

Matthew uniquely calls out Peter's revelation-based testimony and reception of keys (16:17-19). The first passion prediction is given (16:21) though Peter rebuked him and was in turn rebuked by Jesus, who called them all to take up their own crosses and follow him (16:22-28).

Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James, and John (17:1-13), meeting with Moses and Elijah to prepare him for what lies ahead, heals a demonic boy that his disciples could not (17:14-21), and again foretells his death and resurrection (17:22-23). In a story unique to Matthew, Jesus teaches about paying the temple tax and about faith (17:24-27).

### [The Death of John the Baptist \(Matt 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9; 3:19-20\)](#)

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See Mark. Matthew's version is much abbreviated from Mark's (Luke's even more so), but with a couple of interesting changes.

14:1 **Herod the tetrarch.** Matthew corrected Mark's reference to "king Herod." The last king was Herod the Great, who was this Herod's father. This one is Herod Antipas, who ruled one-fourth of his father's kingdom (*tetrarch* means 'ruler of a fourth').

14:3 **his brother Philip's wife.** Herod Antipas had two half-brothers named Philip, from different mothers, so this can be confusing. The one mentioned here, also called Herod II or Herod Philip I, was the son of Mariamne II, Herod the Great's third wife, the daughter of Simon Beothus the high priest. It was his wife, Herodias, that Herod Antipas had taken for his own. The other Philip (called the Tetrarch or Herod Philip II) was the daughter of Cleopatra (not the one associated with Julius Caesar and Marc Anthony, but the daughter of a noble from Jerusalem). This Philip received one-fourth of his father's kingdom (Iturea and Trachonitis), so was also a tetrarch like Antipas.

14:12 **and went and told Jesus.** Mark's account ends with the disciples collecting and caring for John's body. In Matthew's, those same disciples of John then went to Jesus and told him about John's death, which transitions to the next section and shows the reason Jesus wanted to go off to a quiet place for a time (v. 13).

### [Feeding the Five Thousand \(Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15\)](#)

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See Mark and John. Matthew's version is slightly abbreviated with some notes below. This is one of the few non-Passion events mentioned in all four gospels.

14:13 **When Jesus heard of it.** Referring back to v. 12 and the news of John the Baptist's death brought to Jesus by John's disciples. As a result of hearing of John's death, Jesus desired to "into a desert place apart," meaning a secluded or solitary place. The sense from Matthew is that the news saddened Jesus, perhaps reflecting that as John's preaching has anticipated Jesus' ministry, John's death also heralded Jesus' coming demise.

14:21 **five thousand men, beside women and children.** Mark only mentioned the men, where Matthew added that there were also women and children present, thereby increasing the number of those fed by an unknown amount.

### [Jesus Walks on Water \(Matt 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21\)](#)

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Mark's account of this incident is briefer than Matthew's, and John's is the shortest of the three. Matthew uniquely tells the story of Peter walking on the water and the reaction of amazement from those in the boat. There are many lessons in this brief story—so glad that Matthew preserved it for us!

14:23 **went up into a mountain to pray.** As Matthew has expressed before (5:1; 8:1), Jesus sometimes went up into a mountain to escape the pressures of dealing with the multitudes. In this case, he also sought time for personal prayer away from the crowds and even the disciples, whom he sent ahead of him in the ships (did they not wonder how he would later join them?). Given the proximity of the story of Jesus seeking solitude after the news of John the Baptist's death,

14:24 **tossed with waves.** Mark added that Jesus saw them "toiling in rowing," which had to be in vision since they were too far away for him to see them physically. John says they were 25-30 "furlongs," but the word in Greek is *stadia* which is about 600 feet (which Matthew uses in older manuscripts as well; but it's "the midst of the sea" in

KJV based on later manuscripts which use that wording). The lake is about sixty *stadion* from the location of the loaves and fishes incident to Capernaum, so they were about halfway to their destination—two and a half to three miles from shore.

14:25 **fourth watch of the night**. Somewhere between about 3:00 and 6:00 am, but before sunrise, so perhaps just starting to get light. That explains how they could just see him but not discern who he was.

14:26 **saw him walking on the sea**. Mark adds that his direction was such that he “would have passed them by,” but they cried out and he spoke to them.

14:27 **It is I**. Greek *ego eimi*, or ‘I am’. In other words, Jesus said, ‘Take courage; I AM; don’t fear.’ Matthew is identifying Jesus with Yahweh (Jehovah), the God of Israel in the Old Testament.

14:28 **Peter answered him**. The incident with Peter walking out to Jesus is only recorded in Matthew. At first, it might be surprising if the ancient tradition that Mark wrote Peter’s words is true: you’d expect it there. But if Matthew was an eyewitness, he may have decided to include it while Peter did not retell the story in his own reminiscences.

14:28 **Lord, if it be thou**. This continues the identifying Jesus with Yahweh. Lord is *kyrios* in Greek, which in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) is what is used for YHWH, the name of God. The interchange could be understood like this:

- *Jesus*: ‘Take courage, I AM; don’t fear.’
- *Peter* (looking through the darkness at a barely discernable figure on the water): ‘Yahweh, if it is you, then command me to come to you on the water.’

14:29 **he walked on the water**. We may be inclined to be critical of Peter, since Jesus said his faith was lacking (v. 31). But nowhere in scripture is it recorded that anyone else ever walked on water. Perhaps Peter didn’t walk as far as he wanted, but he still showed tremendous faith in doing it at all. As one author says (in the title of his book), “If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat.” Only Peter got out of the boat that night.

14:30 **he was afraid; and beginning to sink**. Peter was a fisherman and surely a strong swimmer; he was no stranger to the water. He couldn’t have been far from the boat and could have probably just swum a few strokes and returned to the safety of the boat. Instead, in the fear of the moment, he cried out “Lord, save me.” Peter’s story thus becomes representative of all of us who exhibit faith and take bold steps but then are overcome with fear and doubt and find ourselves powerless to save ourselves. The only one we can turn to is the Lord, as we cry out, “Hosanna,” meaning ‘save, we pray.’

14:32 **they were come into the ship**. After gently reprimanding Peter for lacking faith in the midst of the boisterous sea, Jesus taught a more important lesson: he grabbed Peter’s hand, lifted him out of the water, then stayed with him as together they walked (on the water!) to the ship, and climbed in. Peter learned that by himself he can do some things, but with faith and Jesus’ help, he can do all things.

14:32 **the wind ceased**. Though no words by Jesus are recorded, both Mark and Matthew note that as soon as Jesus entered the boat, the storm ended. This added to the amazement of the disciples (v. 33).

14:33 **Of a truth thou art the Son of God**. The reaction to the incident, uniquely recorded in Matthew, is that those in the boat declared Jesus to be the Son of God. He walked on water, he helped Peter do the same, and he calmed the storm by his mere presence. Jewish tradition held that God alone could rescue someone from the sea.<sup>2</sup> By calling Jesus the Son of God, they were acknowledging that he had the same power to save them.

## [Healing in Gennesaret \(Matt 14:34-36; Mark 6:53-56\)](#)

See Mark.

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, *Search, Ponder, and Pray*, 161.

## Eating with Unwashed Hands (Matt 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23)

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See Mark also. Matthew includes the condemnation of the traditions around caring for parents before the Isaiah quotation, while Mark has it in the reverse order.

15:1 **scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem.** Jesus was attracting the attention of leaders from Jerusalem, who came north to Galilee to investigate. Note that Matthew deletes Mark's lengthy explanation of Jesus practices of washing of hands, cups, plates, etc., an indication of the Jewish nature of his audience who would have already understood that.

15:3 **transgress the commandment of God by your tradition.** "Tradition" is Greek *paradosis*, meaning the action of handing down. "Precepts" might be an alternate translation. In this case, it was the handed-down tradition of excusing care of parents even though such care is a fundamental commandment.

15:4 **Honor thy father and mother.** The quote in this verse is a combination of three scriptures: Exodus 20:12; 21:17; Deuteronomy 5:16.

15:5 **It is a gift.** Mark used the Aramaic word for gift, *corban*, while Matthew used the Greek term only. The custom was that someone could vow that a portion of their goods or money were dedicated to the temple as a gift to God, and thus make that portion off-limits in terms of supporting his parents. However, he didn't have to give it to the temple for many years and could still use it for his own benefit.<sup>3</sup> In some cases, a man might claim it as a gift to the temple, but after the parents were gone, go back on the vow and take it back as his own property.

15:7 **well did Esaias prophesy of you.** The quotation in vv. 8-9 is from LXX Isaiah 29:13.

15:11 **that which cometh out of the mouth.** Jesus contrasted food taken in to words that come out. Though under the law of Moses certain foods were forbidden and eating them could ritually defile a person, Jesus' point is that words that come from a person's mouth could not just render them ritually impure but could put their status before God in jeopardy.

15:12 **the Pharisees were offended.** Matthew added that the disciples said to him (paraphrasing), 'Don't you realize how you just offended the Pharisees?' To which Jesus replied, "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14).

15:12 **this saying.** The Greek word here is *logon*, a singular noun. The Pharisees were offended not because of *everything* Jesus taught but because of a single word. Though challenging to identify such a single word in the previous conversation, it could be that they are speaking of the singular "word of God."

15:15 **answered Peter and said.** Acting in his role as leader and example, Peter humbly expressed his own ignorance and asked for an explanation. It's interesting that he viewed Jesus' words in v. 11 as a parable requiring interpretation. Jesus' response seems to indicate that he didn't see it as a parable but as a literal statement, though requiring expansion.

15:17 **into the draught.** Same word Mark used, *aphedrōn*, meaning 'the place where human waste is dumped.'

15:18 **come forth from the heart.** Thoughts came from the heart, in their culture, and evil thoughts (v. 19) could make a person unclean on their own, and more likely to act on those thoughts, truly making them unclean before God (also v. 19-20).

## The Syro-Phoenecian Woman's Daughter (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30)

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See Mark.

15:22 **a woman of Canaan.** Mark called her "a Greek, a Syrophenician," but Matthew used the term "woman of Canaan," a stereotypical name for a Gentile from a pagan land. Matthew wanted to be clear that she was a Gentile.

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<sup>3</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 1:96.

15:23 **he answered her not a word.** Matthew enlarged Mark's account, giving context to Mark's reason for Jesus' potentially rude comment in v. 26.

15:24 **I am not sent but unto . . . the house of Israel.** Unique to Matthew, Jesus explained that at this time, at least, he was only teaching those who were descendants of Israel or Jacob, the son of Isaac.

15:25 **worshipped him.** She stepped up her request, going from asking him now to begging him as she prostrated herself in front of him. She could not have put herself in a humbler position before him.

15:26 **cast it to dogs.** It was a great insult to call a Gentile a "dog," as Jesus did here (see 1 Samuel 17:43; Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 56:10-11; Philippians 3:2). As I noted with Mark, however, the word he used is gentler than it might sound—it means little and domesticated dogs, not the wild dogs that roamed around stealing scraps of food and garbage.

15:28 **great is thy faith.** And her humility. She took his insult and turned it around to represent the lowliness of her request for help. Jesus recognized this as a manifestation of her great faith, spoke the word, and her daughter was healed.

### Healing Many (Matt 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37)

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15:29 **went up into a mountain.** Again, Jesus ascended a mountain. No specific reason is given but the symbolism of going up to a mountain to commune with the God is implied (and intentionally makes us think of Moses' many experiences doing the same).

15:30 **great multitudes came unto him.** People continued to come themselves or bring their sick—those injured or otherwise unable to walk; the blind; those who cannot speak; those somehow maimed or disfigured; and "many others." While Mark inserts here the healing of a specific deaf and dumb man, Matthew's record simply records, "he healed them."

### Feeding of the Four Thousand (Matt 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10)

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Unlike the feeding of the five thousand (see Matt 14:14-21), only Matthew and Mark record the subsequent repeating of the miracle of feeding a large crowd. This time Jesus fed 4,000 (probably many more, because again, as Matthew notes, it was 4,000 men "beside women and children"; 15:38). He does so out of "compassion on the multitude" (15:32), and this time with seven loaves and "a few little fishes" (15:34) and with a resulting "seven baskets full" (15:37). Seven represents completeness, wholeness, or perfection. The number comes up so often in scripture that some scholars think it should always be considered symbolic when used. Taken together, the two instances of feeding large crowds point to Jesus' priesthood power and perfection.

Why do this twice? The first time appears to have been predominantly a Jewish audience. This time he was in Decapolis so it may have included many if not mostly Gentiles. Adding to this is that in feeding the five thousand, the leftovers were put in twelve small baskets (*kophinos* in Greek), representative of the house of Israel, whereas this time there were seven *spyris* or large baskets of leftovers, perhaps symbolizing the Lord completely meeting the need of all people.

### The Signs of the Times (Matt 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-13)

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16:1 **shew them a sign from heaven.** Jesus' response to the request for a heavenly sign is to talk about the weather, which might seem odd at first. But what the Pharisees were asking for was a sign 'in the sky' (Greek *ouranos*, meaning sky, air, firmament, or heavens—the space above the earth) such as a comet or other manifestation that all could see and recognize. (We remember the wise men in Matthew 2 that had just such a sign, but which went unrecognized by the Jews.) Jesus refused to grant them this request made with no faith but turned their request into a challenge to recognize the signs already displayed in his ministry, just as they could judge the weather from the skies.

16:2 **fair weather: for the sky is red.** Jesus was not giving a way to predict the weather. Rather, he was quoting a proverbial phrase: “When it is evening, *ye say*.” We have a similar phrase today: ‘Red sky at night, sailor’s delight; red sky in the morning, sailor take warning.’

16:4 **the sign of the prophet Jonas.** This is the second time Jesus has given this ‘sign’ to them (Matthew 12:38-41), though this time he only references Jonah without any explanation.

### The Yeast of the Pharisees (Matt 16:5-12; Mark 8:14-21; Luke 12:1)

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16:6 **Take heed and beware.** The text reads “*horate kai prosechete*,” which is perhaps not as strong as the KJV language. *Horaō* means to see or perceive, while *prosechō* means to pay attention, to occupy one’s mind about something. So a better translation might be ‘look and pay attention.’

16:6 **the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.** Leaven (Greek *zunē*) is different from yeast. Leaven is a piece of fermented bread dough (having yeast within it) kept back from the previous baking and allowed to culture, making a sourdough type of product. It could then be mixed with the next batch of dough to make the whole thing rise. Then a portion was withheld again, and the process was repeated. Leaven was potentially dangerous because, lacking refrigeration, it could become tainted and make someone sick. Thus, leaven was generally perceived to be a symbol of evil and corruption that can spread and overcome good. When Jesus made the comment to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees,” the disciples at first believed that he was somehow talking about their having forgotten to bring bread with them on their journey (perhaps something like, ‘Since you forgot the bread, don’t buy any from Pharisees and Sadducees’). Mark’s account is more of a dialog, with the disciples answering Jesus’ questions about the baskets left over, but Matthew is clear that they learned the lesson that he was teaching about the corruptness of the doctrine of these two Jewish groups.

16:9 **Do ye not yet understand.** It seems like Jesus upbraided the disciples many times for their unbelief or lack of understanding. The important thing for us, who read their accounts from the perspective of history and their own reflections, is to ask how we do the same thing. When and how do we show our unbelief? When do we show a lack of faith or understanding? Each time we see this in the scriptures, it’s more an opportunity for self-assessment rather than criticism, which may be exactly why they included such chastisements.

16:12 **but of the doctrine.** The lesson the disciples learned was to see and pay attention to the *didachē* or teachings of these groups of Jewish leaders. It wasn’t a blanket condemnation but a counsel to carefully evaluate them against what Jesus was teaching.

### Peter’s Declaration at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21)

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This passage is a critical one in all three synoptic gospels. It is a clear turning point as Jesus moved from a public ministry of healings and teachings to a more private ministry of preparing the Twelve and other disciples and the single-minded destination of the cross.

16:13 **Caesarea Philippi.** This is the capital city of Herod Philip II (also called Philip the Tetrarch, who interestingly married Salome, the daughter of Herodias who danced before Philip’s half-brother, Antipas, and had John the Baptist killed). This town at the base of Mount Hermon was dedicated to the Greek god Pan and to the divine Caesar, and was a prosperous area in Jesus’ day. Some believe Jesus and his apostles went north to get out of Herod Antipas’ territory (just as they may have done by traveling to Tyre and Sidon and the Decapolis earlier). Perhaps they needed a place to talk and teach that was away from the crowds. Whatever the reason, it is one of the most beautiful parts of Palestine, with water that flows down from Mount Hermon and lush greenery much of the year.

16:14 **one of the prophets.** Jews of that day acknowledged the lack of prophetic ministry among them (see, for example, 1 Maccabees 4:41-46 and 14:41). They looked forward to the day when an Elijah (Malachi 4:5) or a Jeremiah (2 Esdras 2:18<sup>4</sup>) might return and give them the word of the Lord again. John the Baptist was a prophet, but not what many Jews had been expecting. The fact that many saw Jesus as one of those prophets shows their acknowledgement of the power of his ministry and teachings.

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<sup>4</sup> “I will send you help, my servants Isaiah and Jeremiah” (NRSV).

16:15 **But whom say ye that I am?** Those who had been with him from the beginning, who had seen his many miracles and heard his many words, who had heard him bear testimony of his own divinity and mission and had stayed with him when even others turned away—what do they think of him?

What do we think of him? The Lord’s question must be answered by each of us, individually, every day of our lives.

16:16 **Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.** Peter’s answer in Matthew is the most complete, the only one that calls him Son of God. In a world that more often than not believes Jesus to be just a ‘good teacher’ or ‘a moral leader’, Peter’s testimony rings out across the ages. Peter says, ‘You are the long-awaited Messiah, the one we have prayed would come for thousands of years, the one of which all the prophets have testified. But more than that, you are the Son of God, and have taught us that we have a Father who loves us and through you is determined to save us.’

16:17 **Blessed art thou, Simon bar-jona.** Blessed is the same word as that used in the Beatitudes, indicating a state of happiness, not the invocation of a blessing upon Simon Peter. “Bar-jona” is Aramaic for ‘son of Jonah.’ Only Matthew records the next conversation between Peter and Jesus.

16:18 **thou are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.** Though we have his words in Greek, Jesus would certainly have been speaking Aramaic to Peter. The word for ‘Peter’ and ‘rock’ in Greek are quite different here: “Peter” is *petros*, a masculine noun that means a little rock or a stone; “rock” is *petra*, a feminine noun which means a rock, crag, or boulder. The pun is clear in Greek because Jesus would not called Peter a feminine word, so the “rock” must refer to something other than him. But interestingly in Aramaic, the words are the same: *kēpha*, sometimes written Cephas in the NT (e.g., John 1:42; 1 Corinthians 1:12; Galatians 2:9). So in Aramaic, the second reference could indeed be to Peter himself.

Catholics understand this verse as the point where Jesus gave authority to Peter the rock to become the first pope. Protestants view it as in indication that Peter is the founder of the church which later is built on the ‘priesthood of all believers’ with authority derived from the Bible itself, which is the rock. The LDS Church sees this in a way that essentially brings together both positions. Peter did indeed receive the keys of the priesthood (v. 19) because he had sought personal knowledge by revelation of Jesus’ identity. Because of the knowledge that he had received of the Father, and because of his faithfulness, he was given the blessing of leading the Church through those turbulent and eventually fatal early days. But the rock of revelation holds firm as an example of what each of us can enjoy—a personal testimony, by revelation through the Holy Spirit that God lives, that Jesus is his Son, and that the Church is restored in these latter days.

This is the first time the word “church” (Greek *ekklēsia*) is used in Matthew. It appears one other time subsequently (Matt 18:17) and is the only gospel to use the term.

16:18 **the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.** This language is found in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 10:69; 17:8; 18:5; 21:6; 33:13; 98:22; 128:10). “Hell” is *hades*, the abode of the dead, similar to Hebrew *sheol*. The gates would prevail when they were able to hold someone in (a city or a prison). Jesus promised Peter that Hades’ gates would not be able to prevail against him. Why? Because Peter would have the keys to the door/gate that would allow him to unlock the gates at will (v. 19).

16:19 **the keys of the kingdom.** Isaiah 22:22 speaks of someone that will have the keys of governing the house of David and that what he opens, no one will shut, and what he shuts, no one will open. Keys anciently were large objects, often made of wood, stone, or metal, used to lock or unlock doors by inserting them into an opening in the door and lifting pins until they were in the right position (much like mechanical locks today but much larger; see images right). This could be the meaning of “the





government shall be upon his shoulder” in Isaiah 9:6, with the large wooden keys being carried across the shoulder with a looped rope or similar.



16:19 **bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.** Today we interpret this language principally in terms of temple sealings, but Jesus’ declaration is much broader. To “bind” is the verb *deō*, which has the sense of tying, fastening, or even being married. To “loose” (*luō*) is the opposite, to untie, unfasten, or divorce. In two scriptural cases where this authority is called out, it refers to the power to control the weather (which comes from heaven) from the earth (see 2 Kings 17:1; Helaman 10:6-11; 11:3-7).

16:20 **tell no man.** Why have them hold back? In all accounts, the leaders of the Jews were threatening his life—he was probably in Herod Philip’s territory just for that reason. This was a command of preservation, to focus the threats on Jesus himself and away from his future leaders, until the time was right.

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection (Matt 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33; Luke 9:22)

16:21 **From that time forth.** This reflects the turning point in the ministry that was the experience at Caesarea Philippi. It was time for Jesus to focus on the Atonement.

16:21 **go to Jerusalem, and suffer . . . and be killed, and be raised again.** Jesus was very clear with his close disciples. He was indeed the Messiah, but not in the way that many of them expected. Most likely still held the belief that he would free them from the Roman oppression and become a great political leader. Now he was going to regularly remind them that he had this time come to be the suffering servant and was forthright about his coming suffering and death (four specific times in Matthew, 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; and 26:2).

16:22 **Be if far from thee.** For a disciple to criticize a teacher would be nearly unthinkable. For Peter to rebuke Jesus was a bold and unheard-of effort.

16:23 **Get thee behind me, Satan.** Or, ‘move out of my way, adversary.’ Jesus is not calling Peter ‘Satan’ as in Lucifer or the Devil, but is teaching that his words are indeed adversarial. He has set his face toward Jerusalem and his fate there, and cannot allow Peter’s words to turn him one way or the other from his destined and chosen path.

16:23 **offence.** This word (*skandalon*) is better translated ‘impediment’ or ‘stumbling block’. The meaning is that Peter’s words might slow Jesus down or get in his way. Ironically, the man called ‘the stone’ was now acting like a stone in the road that might cause Jesus to trip or fall.

Taking up a Cross (Matt 16:24-28; Mark 8:34 – 9:1; Luke 9:23-27; John 12:25)

16:25 **JST**

Matt 16:25 KJV	JST
For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.	<b>And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself from all ungodliness, and from every worldly lust and keep my commandments. Break not my commandments, for to save your lives; for whosoever will save his life in this world shall lose it in the world to come; and whosoever will lose his life in this world for my sake shall find it in the world to come. Therefore, forsake the world, and save your souls.</b>

Verse 24 first references the notion of “take up his cross, and follow me.” Taking up the cross became Jesus’ metaphor for surrendering our souls to God in order to enjoy ultimate exaltation, giving up our wills in his—just as he will do during his Atonement at the request of the Father.

16:27 **the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father.** As Jesus taught them that he must suffer and die, so he was clear that he was the Messiah who would later come in all the glory of the Father. He would fulfill all the scriptures about the Messiah.

16:27 **then he shall reward every man according to his works.** Compare Psalm 28:4; 62:12; D&C 101:65.

16:28 **shall not taste of death.** This alludes, of course, to John who would ultimately be translated and given the special mission of continuing his work until the Second Coming. See D&C 7. The word used (“some standing here”) is plural; are there others who were always translated among Jesus’ early disciples, much like the three Nephites in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 28:4-8).

### The Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36)

This account is fascinating on many levels. One is that it echoes one in Exodus 24:9-16, where Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu (and seventy elders) ascend upon the mountain and encounter the Lord in a cloud. After six days, Moses entered into the cloud.

17:1 **after six days.** Luke records it as eight days (Luke 9:28), meaning about a week after the events of Matthew 16 (and probably about six months before the crucifixion, or October 29 AD), Jesus took his three key apostles apart and had a marvelous experience with them. The timing of the Transfiguration is important, following on the heels of Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus’ promise of keys to Peter, and Jesus’ declaration of his own coming death and resurrection. The interaction with Moses and Elijah surely gave him strength for the challenging days ahead. But it also served several other purposes, including:

1. Peter, James, and John were also transfigured (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 158) to prepare them to commune with heavenly beings and understand eternal truths.
2. Moses and Elijah—both preserved in a translated state and thus having flesh and bones so they could interact with mortals—not only supported Jesus but conferred keys on Peter, James, and John (*Teachings*, 158) necessary to administer the kingdom after Jesus’ departure, and as promised at Caesarea Philippi. They also represented the passing of the old era (the Law and the Prophets) into the new age of Jesus’ ministry.
3. As mentioned below, John the Baptist appears also to have been present. It is possible that other prophets came and administered keys, too, such as Enoch.
4. The three apostles saw a vision of the future of the earth (D&C 63:20-21).
5. Peter, James, and John appeared to have received their temple ordinances and perhaps even the more sure word of prophecy (2 Peter 1:16-19; *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:165).

Of course, Moses and Elijah, not as translated but as resurrected beings, were among those who appeared in the Kirtland temple in 1836 to give keys to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (D&C 110).

17:1 **Peter, James, and John.** In the equivalent verse in Mark (9:2), the JST adds what sounds like a reason Jesus selected these three to join him in the experience: “Peter, James, and John, **who asked him many questions regarding his saying.**”

17:1 **high mountain.** Several locations have been proposed for this event, and we don’t know which is correct. The traditional site is Mount Tabor in Galilee, not far from Nazareth, which is a possibility. But in Jesus’ day, it had a Roman fortress on top, and it’s probably the wrong location, based on the narrative (they were coming down from Caesarea Philippi). Other mountains in Galilee have been proposed but not without problems, such as Mount Meron in northern Galilee. The best location appears to be Mount Hermon. Though Hermon is too tall (and snow-covered) for them to have gone to the top, the text doesn’t require them to be on the summit, just on the mountain. They could have found a sheltered place on its slopes and had the experience there. It fits the details of the story perfectly and is the highest mountain in the area.

17:2 **transfigured.** In Greek, this is *metamorphothē*, meaning to change appearance on the outside, or to change on the inside, as in Roman 12:2 (where it is better translated, ‘...but be transformed by the renovation of your feelings’). In this case, Jesus very appearance was changed, so that “his face did shine” and his clothing became

“white as the light,” or “dazzling white” as Mark says (9:3, NASB, NIV; compare Exodus 34:29-35). Joseph Smith taught that to be transfigured or translated was to come up to “the terrestrial order” (*Teachings*, 170).

17:3 **Moses and Elias.** “Elias” is the Greek form of the name “Elijah.” In this Transfiguration event, Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets—represented by Moses and Elijah, respectively. Elijah was taken directly to heaven (2 Kings 2:11-12). The Torah says that Moses died but we don’t know the location of his grave (Deuteronomy 34:5-6), but a popular tradition in Jesus’ day said that Moses, like Elijah, didn’t die at all. Modern revelation supports that tradition (Alma 45:19). From the JST and Joseph Smith’s teachings we also learn that Elias is also a title for someone who is a forerunner or preparer, such as John the Baptist (below). Indeed, in Mark 9:4, the JST indicates that John was also there at the Mount of Transfiguration.

17:3 **talking with him.** Matthew and Mark don’t inform us what they talked about, but Luke does, which is further enhanced in the JST: “Moses and Elias...spake of his ~~decease~~ **death, and also his resurrection**, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:30-31). The Greek word translated “decease” in the KJV is *exodos*, meaning his departure from this life and to the Father. The JST expansion reflects that dual meaning beautifully.

17:4 **three tabernacles.** Three shelters (*skēnē* in Greek), the same word used in the Septuagint for ‘tabernacle’ (Exodus 25:9) and for the shelters made during the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:42). Peter apparently alludes to some kind of memorial of the event, just as Jews built tabernacles for a feast in the fall (likely the very time of this experience) to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt.

17:5 **a bright cloud.** In the Old Testament, God’s *Shekinah* or glory filled the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35) and the temple (1 Kings 8:10-13). The JST calls it “a ~~bright~~ **light** cloud,” strengthening the notice that a divine presence is in it.

17:5 **This is my beloved Son.** The same words had been spoken at Jesus’ baptism (3:17) but only heard by Jesus and John. Now the three closest disciples heard it as well, followed by the command: “hear ye him,” which means to hear and obey Jesus’ words. Their reaction at hearing the heavenly voice was to fall down in fear (v. 6). Peter later mentioned this experience in one of his letters (2 Peter 1:18).

17:7 **Arise, and be not afraid.** The experience had ended and the three disciples saw only Jesus when they lifted up their eyes from their prostrate position.

17:8 **saw no man, save Jesus only.** The transfer was complete and symbolically represented by Jesus standing alone—Moses and Elijah had left and Jesus was the sole authority to whom the apostles were now to give heed.

### The Coming of Elijah (Matt 17:9-13; Mark 9:11-13)

17:9 **Tell the vision to no man.** This was a temporary injunction to keep their experience to themselves until after his resurrection. Even then, they seem to have shared only a small portion of their experiences (D&C 63:21). Perhaps Jesus didn’t want this publicized to avoid people mistaking his current ministry, which would end with the cross, for the triumphant ministry later, which will end with him reigning over the whole earth.

17:10 **Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?** Elijah had just appeared, but Jesus had previously begun his mission. Wasn’t Elijah supposed to come first? Jesus’ answer is that John at least partially fulfilled that prophecy because he was an Elias/Elijah that came before Jesus.

17:12-13 **JST.**

Matt 17:12-13 KJV	JST
<del>But</del> I say unto you, That Elias <del>is</del> come already, and they knew him not, <del>but</del> have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.	<b>And again</b> I say unto you, That Elias <b>has</b> come already, <b>concerning whom it is written, Behold I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before me;</b> and they knew him not, <b>and</b> have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

**But I say unto you, Who is Elias? Behold, this is Elias whom I send to prepare the way before me.** Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist **and also of another which should come and restore all things, as it is written by the prophets.**

The JST greatly enhances Jesus' somewhat cryptic answer. The Elias/Elijah of Jesus' day was John the Baptist, which the disciples recognized from Jesus' comments (v. 13). The JST reference to "another who should come and restore all things" is clearly a reference to Joseph Smith, who is thus also an Elias/Elijah and a fulfillment of Malachi's and the Savior's prophecies. As John prepared the way for the first coming of Christ, so Joseph Smith prepared the way for the ultimate Second Coming.

### [A Boy is Healed \(Matt 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a\)](#)

See Mark.

### [Jesus Foretells His Passion Again \(Matt 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43b-45\)](#)

See Luke.

### [The Temple Tax \(Matt 17:24-27\)](#)

17:24 **come to Capernaum.** Jesus and his group were finally back home after a long trip through northern Galilee and beyond. Their journey had taken them to the Gentile areas of Tyre and Sidon and the Decapolis and to the headwaters of the Jordan River at Caesarea Philippi.

17:24 **they that received tribute money.** These were not Roman tax collectors, like Matthew, but representatives of the high priest and those in charge of the temple who went about the land collecting this tax on a regular basis. They would come into a city and set up their trumpet-shaped collection box, similar to what would be found in the Court of the Women at the temple, at prominent community centers, markets, etc. (Outside of Palestine, local synagogue leaders would collect the tax each year on the 15th of Adar, the last day of the Feast of Purim, and send it on to the temple.) It is these agents who asked Peter the question, which they worded with the implication that of course Jesus would pay: 'Your teacher pays the temple tax, right?' The question could also have been a test of Jesus' loyalty to the temple, since some groups in that day (such as those at Qumran) believed the temple was corrupt and so didn't pay the tax, or thought the tax should only be paid once in a lifetime.

17:24 **Doth not your master pay tribute.** This is the temple tax, described in Exodus 30:11-16 (a *gerah* in v. 13 was 16 barley grains; a half-*shekel* ten times that or about one-fifth of an ounce of silver, which at today's [23 Oct 2017] price is about \$3.52). In Jesus' day, it equaled about two days' average wages. In the Old Testament, it was strictly a measure of weight, coins not being used by Jews until well after the return from the Babylonian captivity. In Jesus' day, it was accepted that the half-shekel temple tax would be paid using two *denarii*, or about two times the daily wage of an unskilled laborer. It is estimated that the temple tax collectors brought in about 14.5 tons of silver a year to the temple, today worth about \$8 million today (2017).

17:25 **Jesus prevented him.** The Greek word here means 'be first' or 'be ahead of', indicating that Jesus went in the house ahead of Peter. The JST makes this stronger: "Jesus ~~prevented~~ rebuked him," which fits the context of Jesus' words.

17:25 **custom or tribute.** Or, 'duty and tax', meaning civic and poll taxes collected by rulers from their subjects, never their children.

17:26 **Then are the children free.** 'Thus the children are exempt from the tax.' Jesus is teaching Peter that as the Son of God, and as Jehovah for whom the temple was built and who gave the law to Moses, he doesn't have to pay the tax.

17:27 **hook**. The only reference to a fishhook in the NT; all other fishing references refer to using nets, a much more efficient method. This gave Peter time to think about Jesus’ conversation with him. It also made the miracle greater—he wasn’t hauling in a bunch of fish and finding one that had a coin, he was catching a single fish out of the entire lake which had swallowed a coin. Some think that since the story doesn’t tell of Peter catching the fish, that perhaps Jesus was being a bit ironic (‘if you should happen to find a fish with a coin, then by all means pay the tax’).<sup>5</sup>

17:27 **a piece of money**. Or, *statēr*, a four drachma coin, equal to one shekel, exactly the amount of the tax for both Jesus and Peter. Of note, thirty staters was the amount Judas received for Jesus’ betrayal.

## Church Life and Order (18)

The discourse for the fourth ‘book’ of Matthew is 18:1-35, focused appropriately on church life and order, with much unique material. Jesus addressed both the need to care for little ones (children and those of lower station, 18:2-14) and how discipline is handled in the church (18:15-35). Unique teachings include:

- We must be converted and humble like children to enter the kingdom (18:3-4).
- Angels watching over children always behold the face of the Father (18:10).
- How to handle church discipline, including witnesses and confession (18:16-17).
- Peter’s question about how often to forgive (18:21).
- The parable that answers the question, the unforgiving servant (18:23-35).

### On Greatness (Matt 18:1-5; Mark 9:33b-37; Luke 9:46-48)

See Mark.

### Causing Others to Stumble (Matt 18:6-9; Mark 9:38-48; Luke 9:49-50)

See Mark.

#### 18:9 **JST**

Matt 18:9 KJV	JST
And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast <i>it</i> from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.	And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast <i>it</i> from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. <b>And a man’s hand is his friend, and his foot also; and a man’s eye, are they of his own household.</b>

This is a slightly different interpretation than Mark 9:38-48, which is changed substantially in the JST but with a different meaning than Matthew. Here the hand and foot are friends who have gone astray, and the eye is a member of the household (family, servant, etc.). JST Mark is more focused on church discipline and leadership, which interestingly is the theme for this speech/chapter.

### The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matt 18:10-14; Luke 16:3-7)

Only Matthew and Luke provide this parable (part of what is postulated to come from “Q”). This is also true for the next two sections, making Matthew 18 a significant “Q” chapter.

18:10 **their angels**. Scriptures speak of angels that care for individuals, churches, and nations. But here Jesus notes that children—not even considered ‘real people’ by many in his day—have angels watching over them. Since he also just challenged his disciples to be like children (Matthew 18:1-5), this is a reference to them as well.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *Search, Ponder, and Pray*, 168.

18:11 **that which was lost.** The JST adds after this verse: “...and to call sinners to repentance; but those little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them.” This clarifies that vv. 10 and 11 are to be contrasting images and that “little ones” are *not* those “which are lost.” Poor ancient text support for this verse indicates that it might be a late addition and wasn’t in the original version of Matthew.

18:12 **leave the ninety and nine.** The shepherd is not abandoning his flock to find the one that is lost. Shepherds worked in teams, each with his own flock, so if one needed to leave, the others could keep an eye on his flock.

18:13 **he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine.** It might feel like the shepherd should be perhaps even more happy over the ones that stayed in the right place. After all, he didn’t have to work so hard to keep track of them. It’s not that the lost sheep was more valuable, but the lost one is cause for rejoicing precisely because he had to work so hard to bring it home. See v. 14 which makes all sheep of equal value to the Father.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf used this parable in a general conference talk (April 2016) in which he asked:

Is it possible that Jesus’s purpose, first and foremost, was to teach about the work of the Good Shepherd?

Is it possible that He was testifying of God’s love for His wayward children?

Is it possible that the Savior’s message was that God is fully aware of those who are lost—and that He will find them, that He will reach out to them, and that He will rescue them? . . .

To me, the parable of the lost sheep is one of the most hopeful passages in all of scripture.

Our Savior, the Good Shepherd, knows and loves us. He knows and loves you.

He knows when you are lost, and He knows where you are. He knows your grief. Your silent pleadings. Your fears. Your tears.

It matters not how you became lost—whether because of your own poor choices or because of circumstances beyond your control.

What matters is that you are His child. And He loves you. He loves His children.

Because He loves you, He will find you. He will place you upon His shoulders, rejoicing. And when He brings you home, He will say to one and all, “Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

### Judging a Brother or Sister (Matt 18:15-20; Luke 17:3)

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18:15 **if they brother shall trespass.** The basis for this counsel appears to be Leviticus 19:15-18, but Jesus took it further by again teaching the apostles the role of the Church in settling disputes. Settling the conflict is done in stages, progressing to the next stage only if a resolution is not found: 1) Between the two people (v. 15); 2) Before witnesses (v. 16); 3) Before the Church (v. 17); and, 4) Through Church discipline (v. 17). In that time, the synagogue was not only the place of worship and learning, but the place of correction. The Church that Jesus was establishing would have the same role for his followers.

18:17 **an heathen man and a publican.** Or, ‘a Gentile and a tax collector.’ In Jewish culture, these were the two more easily condemned groups—one outside the covenant and the other rejecting Jewish self-determination and siding with the captors (Romans).

18:20 **where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I.** Alluding back to v. 16 respecting church discipline, Jewish tradition required that two should be gathered together to discuss the law and three gathered to come to a decision in the local council or *sanhedrin*. When they followed this, the *Shekinah* (presence of God in the cloud) would be with them. Jesus taught that he was now the divine presence who would be with them,

giving them support and guidance and advocating for them before the Father when they prayed in his name (v. 19).<sup>6</sup>

### Forgiveness (Matt 18:21-22; Luke 17:4)

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18:21 **how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?** Peter's question was one of open discussion in that time. Some rabbis taught that three was the correct number of times to forgive someone of the same transgression. Others argued that two or even one time was sufficient, because if a person repeated the sin it showed they had not sincerely repented. Peter's offer to forgive seven times was thus well beyond what *any* of the rabbis taught in his day and very generous to the sinner.

18:22 **seventy times seven.** The Greek is ambiguous; Jesus could be saying "seventy-seven times" or "seventy times seven." It really doesn't matter, though; the number was so huge either way that the point was perfectly made. Forgiveness is our responsibility every time and there should be no limit to how often we extend it.

### The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:23-35)

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18:24 **ten thousand talents.** The Greek word for ten thousand here (*myrioi*) can mean a literal number, but also has the sense of 'countless.' (For an interesting comparison, see Mormon 6:10-15.) The debt was so large as to be uncountable and unpayable. By comparison, Herod the Great's annual income from his entire kingdom was nine hundred talents. In other words, if it were possible, the only person who could accumulate that much could only be a high government official who was supposed to be collecting taxes for a king and who had kept the money for himself and not paid the king in very a long time.<sup>7</sup> A "talent" (*talanton*) is not a coin but a large unit of aggregating money, equivalent to 6,000 *denarii*; one denarius is a day's wages for a working man, so one talent would equal nearly seventeen years of work—and he owed 'countless' talents.

18:25 **him to be sold, and his wife, and children.** To pay a debt, a person and their family could be sold into debtor's slavery, which under Jewish law would be for six years. But since the wife was also sold (forbidden among the Jews), this was probably a pagan ruler, and so the slavery could potentially be for life.

18:26 **worshipped.** Not in the sense of honoring a deity but meaning 'prostrated himself before him'. The JST changes it to "**besought him,**" which matches the language of the fellowservant who owed the smaller debt (v. 29).

18:27 **forgave him the debt.** To Jesus' apostles, the act of forgiving the debt would have been even more astounding than the amount of the debt in the first place. The JST appends to the end of this verse the phrase deleted from verse 26: "**The servant, therefore, fell down and worshipped him.**" It is more appropriate to display such an attitude of humble gratitude (as false as it later proved to be) after the debt was forgiven.

18:28 **owed him an hundred pence.** One hundred *denarii*, a large sum but still a miniscule fraction of what the first man had been forgiven.

18:28 **took him by the throat.** Literally, 'began choking him'. This is an act of violence and anger that could have resulted in the second man's death.

18:29 **his fellowservant fell down at his feet.** Because of the JST changes to vv. 26-27, the lesser debtor was by far the more humble, prostrating himself at the feet of the other man as he plead for forgiveness.

18:30 **cast him into prison, until he should pay the debt.** Debtor's prisons were common but harsh places. While there, the person would work for a pittance, and all the money went to the creditor. To pay back one hundred *denarii* would take the man many years.

18:31 **there were very sorry.** The other servants were greatly grieved by the first servant's actions against their peer. The injustice of it was too astounding for them to remain silent, and they went and told their lord/master.

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<sup>6</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 1:114-115.

<sup>7</sup> Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 1:115-116.

18:32 ***I forgave thee all that debt.*** The master is incredulous: how could this slave be so unkind to someone that owed him a relatively small debt when he had forgiven him multiple lifetimes worth of liability?

18:33 ***had compassion on thy fellowservant.*** Compassion is *eleēsai*, to have mercy or pity, so show concern for someone in a bad position. Mosiah 3-4 comes to mind, teaching that once we understand our proper relationship to a God who loves and forgives us though we deserve none of it, how can we not then take care of those around us in need?

18:34 ***delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay.*** Since the first man's debt forgiveness was revoked due to his own unkind actions against another, he now had to spend the rest of his days with the *basanistēs*, the torturers who used a rack and other methods to get the truth from someone. In his case, he would be there forever, since there was no hope of him paying back the debt.

18:35 ***if ye from your hearts forgive not.*** Jesus taught the simple yet powerful truth that not forgiving others would bring a similar judgment to the unforgiving servant upon ourselves, as punishment from heavenly Father.



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- NIV – New International Version
- NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
- NLT – New Living Translation
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

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