

# OpenTheo

## Q&A#115 Seventy Times Seven

March 15, 2019



### Alastair Roberts

Today's question: "Do you know if there is any connection between the "seventy and sevenfold" of Genesis 4:24 and Jesus' "seventy times seven" in Matt 18:22?"

Within this episode, I reference Peter Leithart's recently released second volume of his Matthew commentary, available for purchase here: <https://amzn.to/2TCJYRk>. I also reference James Jordan's The Handwriting on the Wall: <https://amzn.to/2u7UpNB>.

My blog for my podcasts and videos is found here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account: <https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

If you have enjoyed these talks, please tell your friends and consider supporting me on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>. You can also support me using my PayPal account: <https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>.

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, do you know if there is any connection between the 70 and 7 fold of Genesis 4.24 and Jesus' 70 times 7 in Matthew 18.22? Genesis 4.23-24 reads, Then Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Zillah, hear my voice. O wives of Lamech, listen to my speech.

For I have killed a man for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold. Lamech is in essence saying, vengeance is mine.

I can exercise a vengeance that is 70 times greater than God's vengeance that he will enact. In verse 15 of that chapter, And the Lord said to him, Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. So there's an intensification of the vengeance that's associated with Cain in the case of Lamech.

In the next chapter, we have an interesting detail that maybe is supposed to be juxtaposed with that particular detail. We're told that all the days of Lamech, Noah's father, were 777 years and he died. And that leads directly into the event of the flood.

There is something about that particular number that seems to be associated with vengeance on some account. It leads to the flood. The two parallel genealogies, I think, of Seth and Cain, help us to connect these two figures, Lamech at the end of both of them.

And both leading to this event of the flood. The wickedness of man reaches its crescendo. In Matthew, chapter 18, verse 21, following we read, 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 70 times seven.

And then he compares the kingdom of heaven to a man who's settling debts with his servants. A king settling accounts with his servants and a servant who owes him an immense debt that he can't pay. And then he's judged on account of that, but the servant asks for forgiveness and he's given forgiveness, but then he fails to extend it to others.

Now, what connection could there be? In one we see vengeance and another we see forgiveness. There's a very clear juxtaposition there that here is a society formed upon escalating vengeance. In the case of Lamech, we have the vengeance upon Cain for the vengeance that will be enacted against the person who strikes out at Cain sevenfold.

And then we have Lamech ramping that up 70 times seven. And that is a significant development within civilization, this sort of cycle of violence and vengeance, a vendetta culture, a society formed upon violence and revenge, retribution, these sorts of things. Whereas what is Jesus saying? Is he, he seems to be, this text seems to be in the very background.

But I think there's a text that's nearer and the juxtaposition between the society of Lamech and that society based upon vengeance and retribution is important. But what about forgiveness associated with 70 times seven? Where else in scripture do we find that connection? I'll give you a few moments to think about it and then I'll give you an answer that I think is the right one. 70 times seven is 70 weeks of years that we have in the book of Daniel.

In that chapter we read 70 weeks, in chapter nine we read 70 weeks are determined for

your people in your holy city to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. And then it refers to the bringing in of forgiveness, putting an end to sacrifice, these sorts of things. This is the event by which God will restore his people.

It is an event that's associated with forgiveness. 70 times seven, 70 weeks of years. Israel has been in Babylonian captivity for 70 years according to the prophecy of Jeremiah.

But here we see that there's a sort of continued exile theme, 70 weeks of years and after that God will restore. So there is 70 times seven associated with forgiveness there. And this I think helps us to understand what is going on in Matthew 18.

Jesus is alluding to the 70 times seven. That's how many times you should forgive your brother. What is he doing there? He's comparing the way that we should forgive our brother with the way that God forgives his people who owe him an incalculable debt that they cannot repay.

And God is restoring his people through the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus is alluding to the prophecy of Daniel here to help us to see what he is bringing in. He is bringing the fulfillment of this 70 weeks of years in his ministry.

What is 70 weeks as well? 70 weeks is associated with the principle of Jubilee. 70 times seven, seven times seven, it's this kind of super Jubilee. And seven times seven and the next day that follows is the super Sabbath.

It's the year of Jubilee. It's associated with Pentecost. It's associated with all these other themes of the super Sabbath, of this time of great forgiveness.

This year where all debts are forgiven. This time where all the debts and the charges and the transgressions that lie against people are removed. The slate is wiped clean and people are set right.

And he is, in this statement, he's alluding to the fact that that's what he's bringing in. A society that's built not upon the vengeance that we see in the case of Lamech and his speech to his wives. But on the forgiveness and restoration that Daniel prophesies.

In God's delivering his people from their continuing exile and being present to them and restoring them. And then the parable that follows helps to flesh that out. The point of forgiving 70 times seven is to forgive in the way that God himself has forgiven Israel, his people.

And the way that he is restoring them. So if God forgives 70 times seven, then we should forgive in the same way. And the parable that follows elucidates that principle.

The servant that fails to forgive in a small way that might reflect in some miniature manner the way that he has been forgiven by his master, the king. The person who fails to do that is judged. This is a society that's formed fundamentally upon the principle of restoration from exile, of the forgiveness of sins.

And we see that in the ministry more generally of the gospel. The ministry of John the Baptist, who has a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Christ's ministry that talks about the forgiveness of sins, that brings in restoration to an Israel that has been languishing in its sin.

What we have here is a principle of divine forgiveness that should be the model for us to follow. And all of this occurs against the shadow of a Lamechean society of violence, retribution, vendettas, unforgiveness, bitterness and vengeance. And Christ is bringing in a new society.

Now, by far the best treatment of this I've come across and I've read a few things on the subject. Very few really get to the root of this. James Jordan's treatment of some of these themes in his book, *The Handwriting on the Wall in Daniel* is very perceptive.

But this new commentary by Peter Lighthouse, the second volume in his Matthew commentary that has just come out. I cannot recommend this highly enough on this particular passage is absolutely superb. And he brings out many of these themes.

For instance, he writes. This would be the fulfillment of the hopes of all faithful Israelites. Yahweh promised that Abraham and his children, the family of Abraham, would be Yahweh's covenant partner in redeeming the world and bringing blessing to the Gentiles.

Because of Israel's sins, she was under a curse. Because of the curse, the promises and program of God through Abraham have been blocked by Israel's sin and the curse on Israel's sin. Daniel's prophecy assured them that after 70 times seven years, the Lord will finally act and will remove that obstacle.

This will be good news not only for Israel, but for the world. God's program to restore the world through Israel, the covenant with Abraham, depends on the forgiveness of sin. The nations will come to know the Lord only if Israel is released from sin for salvation is from the Jews.

And Jesus, the true Israelite, has come to accomplish that, to release Israel from sin and curse. And so I very strongly recommend that you read this on that and many other things. It's a superb commentary and I've thoroughly enjoyed what I've looked at in it so far.

It gets into some of these themes in a way that's far more developed than many other commentaries on the book, even commentaries of significantly greater length. Thank you very much for listening. Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow with another

answer to a question or review of a book.

If you have any questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you'd like to support this and other videos like it, please do so using my PayPal or Patreon accounts. The links for both of those are in the notes.

Thank you very much for listening. God bless.