

Article

Daniel 9 and ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ in Matthew 18:22

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Abstract

In understanding the unusual numerical construction ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ in Matt. 18:22, Matthean scholars have routinely directed their attention to Gen. 4:24. This study does not downplay the relevance of Gen. 4:24, but argues that equally important is the intertextual connection between Matt. 18:22 and Dan. 9:24. While Matthean studies that are attentive to intertextual allusions have been silent about the connection between Matt. 18:22 and Dan. 9:24, with respect to the theme of forgiveness, the present article illuminates how Jesus's instruction to forgive ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ can be read alongside Dan. 9:24. It thus seeks to demonstrate that the numerical construction ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ in Matt. 18:22 signals the completion of forgiveness for all sins in the light of the "seventy weeks" of Dan. 9:24. Although the exact linguistic expression in LXX Dan. 9:24 is different from Matthew 18, both texts commonly articulate the completion of forgiveness and the multiplication of seventy and seven (70×7). This study suggests that the ideas (e.g., the completion of forgiveness, multiplication, global totality) presented in Dan. 9:24 offer a helpful analog for understanding the nature of Jesus's instruction to forgive seventy times seven. When reading the two texts based on these connections, we can read that Jesus's instruction to forgive seventy times seven signifies the completion of forgiveness for all sins.

Keywords: Matthew; Daniel; forgiveness; seven; seventy; echo

1. Introduction

It has been recognized that the book of Daniel serves as an important backdrop to interpret the Gospel of Matthew. Jonathan T. Pennington observes, "Matthew is drinking deeply at the well of Daniel and at many levels we can discern his intertextual use of this important book ... Indeed, several core ideas presented in Matthew seem to stem directly from Daniel" (Pennington 2009, p. 67). But curiously, Matthean studies that are attentive to intertextual allusions with the Old Testament are silent about the connection between Matt. 18:22 and Dan. 9:24, with respect to the unusual numerical construction ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ.¹ Pennington identifies several key parallel themes between Daniel and Matthew—Son of Man (Dan. 7:13–14 and Matt. 24:30; 25:31; 26:64; 28:18–20), God's kingdom and earthly kingdoms (Dan. 2:28–29 and Matt. 13), and eschatology and tribulation (Dan. 11:31; 12:11 and Matt. 24:15). Pennington and other Matthean scholars, however, do not mention Matthew's connection with or allusion to Dan. 9. The absence of the connection between Matthew 18 and Daniel 9 is partly because the cross-reference in the margin of 18:22 in NA28 does not provide any allusions to Dan. 9:24, only cross references to Gen. 4:24 (e.g., Brown 2012, pp. 49–51).

The present article seeks not to downplay the significance of the intertextual link between Matthew 18 and Genesis 4, but to argue that equally important is the intertextual



Academic Editor: Fergus King

Received: 23 June 2026

Revised: 22 July 2026

Accepted: 23 July 2026

Published: 26 July 2026

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connection between Matthew 18 and Daniel 9. The aim of the present article is thus to shed light on the intertextual links between Matthew 18 and Daniel 9, which seem to have been largely neglected. The present study seeks to demonstrate that the numerical construction ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά (“seventy times seven”) in Matt. 18:22 signals the completion of forgiveness for all sins in the light of the “seventy weeks” of Dan. 9:24.² In what follows, this article explores interpretive options with regard to the construction ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά. It then examines the literary contexts of Matt. 18:22 and Dan. 9:24 to observe what is at stake in each text and how both texts can be connected. Through examining the parallels and echoes between them, this article shows the theological significance of Matthew’s allusion to Daniel, especially with respect to the construction ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά in Matt. 18:22. In doing so, the ongoing discussion on the numerical construction in Matt. 18 can be made interpretively productive.

2. Interpretive Options for ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά

The formulation ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά comprises a numerical adverb ἑβδομηκοντάκις and a cardinal number ἑπτά. Scholars have sought to identify the implications of this particular construction. Among others, there are four major interpretive options.

2.1. *Seventy-Seven*

There has been a strong tendency in Matthean scholarship to interpret the number ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά as “seventy-seven.”³ The cross-reference in the margin of Matt. 18:22 in NA28 indicates Gen. 4:24, where Lamech’s claim for vengeance is ושבעה שבעים (seventy and seven) in the Masoretic text. LXX Gen. 4:24 translates the Hebrew phrase ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά, which is identical with the formulation found in Matt. 18:22. Matthean scholars routinely compare Matt. 18:22 with LXX Gen. 4:24 and the formulation may translate ושבעה שבעים in the Masoretic text. Richard T. France, for instance, translates the compound number as “seventy-seven times” and goes on to note that “[i]ts meaning here is determined by the clear allusion to Gen. 4:24, where the same phrase ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά in the LXX translates the Hebrew ‘seventy-seven’” (France 2007, p. 701 n. 1). In a similar vein, Ulrich Luz claims, “It is possible that the evangelist is thinking of Gen. 4:24; otherwise there is no explanation for the unusual formulation of the number seventy-seven” (Luz 2001, pp. 465–66). Moreover, Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts suggest that compared to the number 490, “the number 77 is much more likely, as it is the clear referent of the Hebrew of Gen. 4:24” (Brown and Roberts 2018, p. 173 n. 42). What is significant is the precise verbal equivalence between the Greek of Matthew and the Greek of Genesis (ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά). In this regard, scholars have maintained that the LXX may translate the Hebrew phrase ושבעה שבעים as “seventy and seven,” such that LXX Gen. 4:24 is the clear referent of the Hebrew of Gen. 4:24. As will be shown, however, the formulation ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά in the Greek of Genesis is not translated as “seventy and seven” as found in the Hebrew of Gen. 4:24. In the NETS (New English Translation of the Septuagint), the Greek of Genesis is translated as “seventy times seven.” This suggests that Matthew refers to the LXX in Matt. 18:22 rather than to the Hebrew text. Granted, Matthew does not consistently use the LXX when citing or alluding to the Old Testament. In Matt. 2:15, for instance, Matthew seems to use the Hebrew of Hosea (“my child”) rather than the LXX (“his children”).⁴

2.2. *Seventy Times Seven*

While many scholars translate ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά as “seventy-seven,” I argue that this phrase is best interpreted as “seventy times seven.”⁵ A close look at the numerical construction ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτά shows that the construction does not denote seventy-

seven. It has been known that when Greek writers separate two numbers with a conjunction such as *καί*, it would indicate the sum total of the two numbers. Josephus, for instance, signifies “seventy-seven” with the construction *ἐπτά καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα* (Ant. 1.2.2). After having examined the numerical constructions in the ancient Greek works, Lucas Gregorio Moncada III observes that when a numerical adverb with the *-άκις* suffix is paired with a cardinal number and the conjunction *καί* is absent, it consistently signifies multiplication rather than addition (Moncada 2023, pp. 19–28). Thus, the construction *ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά* in LXX Gen. 4:24 denotes “seventy times seven” rather than seventy-seven as in the Hebrew text. Moncada analyzes that in the ancient Greek works, “a numerical adverb with the *-άκις* suffix plus a cardinal number signifies the multiplication of the two numbers” (Moncada 2023, pp. 22, 25). For instance, Artemidoros of Daldis notes that *τὰ πεντάκις δέκα πεντήκοντα καὶ τὰ ἑξάκις δέκα ἑξήκοντα καὶ τὰ ἐπτάκις ἑβδομήκοντα* (5×10 signifies 50 and 6×10 signifies 60 and 7×10 signifies 70, Oneir. 2.70). This indicates that a numerical adverb with the *-άκις* suffix is an indicator of “multiplication” rather than the sum total of the two numbers. Given that *ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά* in Matt. 18:22 comprises a numerical adverb with the *-άκις* suffix and a cardinal number, *ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά* is best interpreted as the multiplication of seventy and seven, that is, seventy multiplied by seven (70×7), which would equate to 490.

2.3. No Precise Value of the Number

Another familiar feature of the landscape of Matthean studies is the tendency to suggest that determining the precise value of the number does not add to the meaning of forgiveness in Matthew. On this view, the numerical construction is not interpreted as a specific number of times defined by the term, such as 77 times or 490 times. Instead, the number can be understood as a symbolic reference to the unlimitedness of forgiveness. Scholars such as Warren Carter note, “Jesus’s response effectively knows no limits: Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times (or seventy times seven)” (Carter 2000, p. 369). Similarly, John Nolland remarks, “It is uncertain whether *ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά* in Matt. 18:22 means ‘seventy-seven times’ or ‘seventy times seven times’ ... the number is designed to break through any notion that there are limits to forgiveness” (Nolland 2005, p. 755). Likewise, William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr. opine that “both numbers (i.e., seventy times seven or seventy-seven) amount to the same thing” (Davies and Allison 2004, p. 793). Luz also remarks, “The passage seems to imply that there are no tangible limits to forgiveness” (Luz 2001, p. 106). It is hard to see, however, that the numerical construction does not add to the meaning of forgiveness when the construction is read against the background of the Old Testament, especially Daniel. To see the number as merely a symbolic reference to the unlimitedness of forgiveness underestimates its theological significance in the context of Matthew. This is not to say that numbers in Scripture do not have symbolic or figurative implications, but it is to say that it is impossible to constrain their meanings merely as symbolic references. As suggested by several scholars, the numerical construction indeed can convey the sense of the unlimited practice of forgiveness. But it is my contention that it is difficult to take the line that the number does not add to the meaning of forgiveness and that it denotes merely a symbolic indication, such as the unlimitedness of forgiveness, even if this symbolic indication is apparent in some cases in the New Testament.⁶

2.4. Increase Method

More recently, some scholars suggest the “increase method” that might be used in the interpretation of *ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἐπτά*. Scholars such as Bohdan Kuryliak and Ihor Kuryliak articulate the view that just as Lamech uses the increase method in Gen. 4:24, so

Jesus uses this method in Matt. 18:22. According to Kuryliak and Kuryliak, the increase method was “a practice of amplifying numbers to enhance and deepen meaning both in ancient times and in the first century CE” (Kuryliak and Kuryliak 2025, p. 21). In the context of Gen. 4, God promises Cain that if someone killed him, God would avenge the person sevenfold (Gen. 4:15). Genesis shows that Lamech increases it to seventy-sevenfold for himself. In chorus with this increase, Kuryliak and Kuryliak contend that Jesus uses this technique in response to Peter, increasing the number of seven that Peter suggests to “seventy times seven” (Kuryliak and Kuryliak 2025, p. 21). However, it is not entirely clear how this increase method can be neatly applied to the translation of ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ. If Lamech’s vengeance is increased from sevenfold to seventy-sevenfold, it remains unclear how the number seven is drastically increased to seventy times seven in Matthew rather than to seventy-seven as in the case of Lamech (i.e., from seven to seventy-seven). Without substantiating the process of how it increases from seven to seventy times seven, the interpretation of ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ as “seventy times seven” is untenable. More importantly, Kuryliak and Kuryliak do not attend to the theological implication(s) of seventy times seven in conjunction with the Old Testament. Accordingly, a task is left for us to explore the implication(s) of the numerical construction.

3. Literary Contexts of Matthew 18 and Daniel 9

While scholars routinely identify the connection between Matt. 18:22 and Gen. 4:24, equally important is the intertextual connection between Matthew 18 and Daniel 9. There are indeed strong connections between Matthew 18 and Genesis 4. Genesis 4, for instance, operates as a continuation and intensification of the Cain-Abel narrative, which revolves around several intertwined themes shared with Matthew 18: ἀμαρτάνω (Gen. 4:7), ἀδελφός (Gen. 4:8), ἀφίημι (Gen. 4:13). This study thus does not downplay the relevance of Gen. 4:24. Instead, this study seeks to demonstrate that when the contexts of Matthew 18 and Daniel 9 are taken into account, we can also identify the links between these texts. To put it another way, we can hear the echo of Dan. 9:24 in Matt. 18:22. To observe this, it is necessary to examine the literary contexts of Matthew 18 and Daniel 9 to see what is at stake in each text and how they might be related. It will be shown that we can find the echo of Dan. 9:24 in Matt. 18:22 through identifying the parallels between these texts.

3.1. Matthew 18:22

Matthew 18:22 is given in the context of how members of the “church” (ἐκκλησία) should treat the sinning siblings, especially with respect to the practice of forgiveness (Matt. 18:15–35).⁷ If the sinning person has repeatedly denied his or her misdeed(s), showing no room for repentance, Jesus teaches that we should treat the sinning person as a gentile or a tax collector (Matt. 18:17). While many interpret this as excommunication (See, for instance, Forkman (1972); Stanton (1992, p. 391); Luz (2001, p. 452); Runesson (2017, p. 124); Davies and Allison (2004, p. 785)), to treat the person as a gentile or a tax collector is not necessarily to excommunicate the person in Matthew. Just as it is not the will of the Father to lose one of these little ones (Matt. 18:12–14), so the church is called to gain or restore the wayward (Kim 2022, p. 53). This is in line with Jesus’s instruction to love enemies in Matthew (Matt. 5:44). Moreover, Jesus reaches out to tax collectors and the gentile people rather than excludes them (e.g., Matt. 8:5–11; 9:9–13). It is in this context that Jesus’s answer is given to Peter’s question about how often to forgive siblings who sin against him (Matt. 18:21–22). Peter’s own answer is “up to seven times” (ἕως ἑπτάκις, Matt. 18:21), whereas Jesus answers him to forgive ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ (Matt. 18:22). Thus, Jesus’s answer goes beyond Peter’s expectation.

The implication of Jesus's answer can be found within its immediate literary context. The parable of the unforgiving servant that immediately follows the conversation between Jesus and Peter shows an enormous debt—ten thousand talents—one cannot pay during one's lifetime (Matt. 18:23–35). Ten thousand talents are comparable to the construction expense of Solomon's temple (1 Chron. 29:4–7). The debtor (ὀφειλέτης) asks mercy of his or her master (Matt. 18:26). Having compassion on the debtor, the master cancels enormous debt (Matt. 18:27). In chorus with this enormous debt one owes, Jesus may speak of the practice of forgiveness that far outstrips the expectation of Peter. The implication would be that just as God forgives one's enormous debts, so his people are called to embody God's forgiveness, practicing forgiveness graciously. That is, the kingdom of heaven is like people who have an enormous capacity for forgiveness. As will be shown, moreover, the implication of ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ spoken by Jesus can be better understood when it is read against the backdrop of Daniel 9.

3.2. Daniel 9:24

Daniel 9:24 is given in the context of Daniel's penitential prayer for his people, with respect to Israel's sins (Dan. 9:19). Compared to the LXX (Old Greek) Daniel 9, Theodotion uses the language of ἱλασμός in the context of Daniel's plea for God's forgiveness (e.g., Dan. 9:9, 19). In the New Testament, the language of ἱλασμός is used to describe Jesus as being a ἱλασμός for sins in 1 John and Jesus as making a ἱλασμός for sins in Hebrews 2 (e.g., Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). In response to Daniel's prayer, the angel Gabriel appears to him and announces that "seventy weeks (ἑβδομήκοντα ἑβδομάδες, LXX Dan. 9:24) are decreed for your people and your holy city" (NRSV). In the LXX Dan. 9:24, it is said that "seventy weeks have been decided (ἐκρίθησαν) for your people," whereas in Theodotion, it is said that "seventy weeks have been cut short (συνετμήθησαν) for your people." The term κρίνω primarily means "judge" or "decide," whereas the term συντέμνω means "shorten" or "limit." Theodotion nuances God's decision for his people in a way that God consecrates a certain period of time for his people by limiting it to seventy weeks. Both LXX and Theodotion commonly talk of the completion of forgiveness for all sins after the seventy weeks of years. Both the LXX (Old Greek) and Theodotion use the singular ἁμαρτία and then employ the plural ἀδικίας and ἁμαρτίας respectively (Dan. 9:24). Daniel thus seems to use ἁμαρτία and ἁμαρτίας interchangeably, and Daniel uses the plural ἀδικίας and ἁμαρτίας more frequently than the singular ἁμαρτία. The frequency of the plural noun suggests that after the seventy weeks, God puts an end to the sins of his people.

The "seventy weeks" prophecy is about the future of Israel and God's plan of deliverance for his people. In light of the "seventy years" mentioned in Dan. 9:2, Daniel's connection with Jeremiah's seventy years is made explicit, with the result that the seventy weeks announced by the angel indicate the number of years.⁸ The angel informs Daniel that the prophecy refers to "seventy sevens" rather than to seventy years prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10).⁹ Gabriel thus announces that the seventy years of Jeremiah's prophecy are multiplied by seven (70×7), that is, seventy weeks of years. With regard to the terms "seventy" and "weeks," Carol A. Newsom points out that the words "seventy" and "weeks" look the same because "the Hebrew of the time was written only consonantly" and thus "the potential for double reading was undoubtedly activated" as in Lev. 26:18, where God will punish the people "sevenfold" because they do not listen to God. As the angel announces, the seventy weeks (70×7) prophecy culminates in the end of Israel's sins, the completion of forgiveness for all sins, and God's restoration (Dan. 9:24).¹⁰

The references connected to Dan. 9:24 are found variously in early Jewish writings.¹¹ The multiplication of the number seven in conjunction with the end of sins, for instance,

is reflected in the Testament of Levi 16:1, where it says that the people go astray for seventy weeks (70×7). A thorough discussion on the connection between Daniel's "seventy weeks" prophecy and early Jewish writings goes beyond the scope of this present study. Among other things, the seventy weeks (70×7) prophecy can be connected to the Jubilee period (7×7) in the Old Testament. We can find an analogy between the seventy weeks and the Jubilee period as both point to the multiplication of the number seven and the end of a particular reality. According to the calculation of the Hebrew people, the Jubilee period, a time of remission of sins, is calculated as a forty-nine-year period, which comprises seven times seven (7×7) years (Lev. 25:8). At the end of this period, the people of Israel will end their debts and return to their land. This principle applies to the seventy weeks prophecy given to Daniel. Just as the people of Israel end their debts after seven times seven years (7×7), so what the angel of God promises Daniel is that the people of Israel will put an end to their sins after the seventy weeks of years (70×7). The theme of Jubilee is also found in 2 Chronicles 36, where the land of Judah enjoys its Sabbath after the seventy years of exile according to the prophecy of Jeremiah (2 Chron. 36:21). The king Cyrus decrees that the people of Israel ought to return to their land and rebuild their temple (2 Chron. 36:23). In this way, 2 Chronicles 36 applies the seventy years of exile prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11–12) in a way that reflects the sabbatical motif in Leviticus. Given Daniel's connection with Jeremiah's prophecy (Dan. 9:2) and the angel's prophecy of the end of sins after the seventy weeks of years (Dan. 9:24), the seventy years of exile and the sabbatical motif envisioned in Jeremiah and 2 Chronicles are thematically connected to and are extended in Daniel to seventy weeks of years (70×7).¹²

3.3. *Parallels and Echoes*

The above observations show that both Matthew 18 and Daniel 9 implicitly or explicitly talk of debt, forgiveness, and the numbers "seventy" and "seven." Despite the fact that different authors write in different contexts, both of them are concerned about the themes of debt and forgiveness and the numbers seventy and seven. This study wishes to suggest that these striking similarities serve to activate intertextual links between Daniel and Matthew in a "metaleptic" fashion, which is articulated by Richard B. Hays. Hays defines *metalepsis* as follows: "Metalepsis is a literary technique of citing or echoing a small bit of a precursor text in such a way that the reader can grasp the significance of the echo only by recalling or recovering the original context from which the fragmentary echo came and then reading the two texts in dialogical juxtaposition. The figurative effect of such an intertextual linkage lies in the unstated or suppressed points of correspondence between the two texts" (Hays 2016, p. 11).

The present study will then demonstrate that allusions to Daniel 9 can be found in Matthew 18 and that Daniel 9 illumines the theology of Matt. 18:22. To illustrate this point, of Hays's seven criteria of echo, "availability," "volume," and "thematic coherence" are particularly relevant to this study (Hays 1989, pp. 29–32).¹³ With regard to availability (i.e., whether the echo is available to Matthew and his audience), as we have observed at the outset, Matthew's practice of citation and his frequent allusion to Daniel indicate that Daniel is obviously available to Matthew and his readers. It is not difficult to imagine, then, that a reader of Matthew would have known that Matthew utilizes Daniel.

Regarding volume (i.e., whether the echo is determined by the degree of explicit repetition of words or syntactical patterns), words like "seventy" and "seven" can be heard as an echo of Dan. 9:24 because they reproduce the language of the LXX closely. The syntactical expression ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ in Matt. 18:22, however, is transferred from noun structure to adverbial structure. The volume of this echo is thus moderate compared to the relationship between Matthew and Gen. 4:24. Yet, Hays also articulates that "when

we speak of the *volume* of an echo, we must consider not only the degree of exact verbal correspondence but also the relative weightiness of the material cited" (Hays 2005a, p. 37, emphasis original). He goes on to say that volume also depends on "the distinctiveness, prominence, or popular familiarity of the precursor text" (Hays 2005a, p. 36). As an example, Hays notes that 1 Cor. 8:6 echoes Deut. 6:4: Although "the number of words repeated from Deuteronomy is small, the Shema is such a familiar and foundational text within Judaism that only a slight verbal cue is needed to trigger the full-volume echo. For an analogy, we might consider how the simple words 'Our Father' serve to conjure up the entire text of the Lord's Prayer for any Christian reader" (Hays 2005a, p. 36). In this light, the unusual formulation—the multiplication of seventy and seven (70×7)—becomes a verbal cue that triggers the full-volume echo. As such, it not only links Matthew and LXX Genesis but also links Matthew and LXX Daniel.

The echo meets another important criterion, particularly the criterion of thematic coherence (i.e., whether the echo fits the context of Matthew's argument). In Hays's terms, Dan. 9:24 is "formative for [Matthew's] understanding of what God is doing in the world" through the announcement of the seventy-weeks prophecy: God is revealing his rule by ending the transgressions, putting an end to sins, atoning for iniquity, and bringing in everlasting righteousness in Jesus, who brings forgiveness (e.g., Matt. 1:21; 9:6; 26:28) (Hays 2005a, p. 40). Thematically, the idea of the completion of forgiveness for sins in Daniel 9 resonates with what Jesus teaches in Matt. 18:22, which will be discussed below. Of particular interest is the echo in Matt. 18:22 of Dan. 9:24, suggesting that Matthew understands the unusual numerical construction seventy times seven (70×7) as the complete forgiveness of sins. In response to Peter's question about how often to forgive siblings, Jesus suggests seventy times seven as the number of completion. This means that this particular number denotes the complete forgiveness of sins. If we read this construction in the light of Dan. 9:24, moreover, we can identify the nature of this construction more clearly—that is, the completion of forgiveness for all sins.

4. Daniel and 70×7 in Matthew

Rather than seven times or seventy-seven times of forgiveness, it would be important to ask the interpretive significance of the multiplication of seventy and seven. Moncada is the only scholar known to me who seriously attends to the value of ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ. But the theological meaning of the construction ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ can be made more interpretively productive. Based on the parallels and echoes we have observed, we now turn to examine the significance and the effect of Matthew's allusion to Daniel 9.

4.1. "Seventy" and "Seven"

The numbers seventy and seven link Matt. 18:22 and Dan. 9:24. Granted, there is a difference between the function of the numbers. Peter's question is concerned with how many times he must forgive his siblings, not with how broadly that forgiveness should extend. By contrast, in Daniel 9, the number does not contemplate frequency of forgiveness or extent of forgiveness but a duration of time or suffering (seventy weeks) until forgiveness is achieved. Thus, Matthew is concerned with frequency, whereas Daniel is concerned with duration. Despite this difference, both texts commonly talk of forgiveness. The purpose of the seventy weeks prophecy is not merely about the duration of suffering. Rather, it is about the vision of the end of sin after this period (Dan. 9:24). It is about the liberation from the bondage of sins that makes God's people suffer. Thus, the seventy weeks in Daniel signify not merely a prolonged period of suffering, but rather the full measure of divine grace—a period of complete forgiveness ordained by God to atone for and accomplish the end of sins. In this sense, Daniel's vision of the complete forgiveness resonates with

what Jesus teaches in Matt. 18:22. Moreover, both texts talk of the numbers seventy and seven in a way that articulates the multiplication of seventy and seven. Although the exact linguistic expression in LXX Dan. 9:24 is different from Matthew 18, Dan. 9:24 uses the phrase “seventy weeks” (ἑβδομήκοντα ἑβδομάδες), which articulates the multiplication of seventy and seven. Thus, the lack of linguistic congruence between Dan. 9:24 and Matt. 18:22 is in some ways resolved, since both texts contain the same numerical organization—that is, the multiplication of seventy and seven.

The number “seven” is usually recognized as the number of perfection or completion in Jewish literature.¹⁴ In the creation account of Genesis, God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it as the completion of creation (Gen. 2:2–3). Philo regards the number seven as the number of completion (Opif. 102). The martyrdom of seven brothers brings to an end the wrath of God that has fallen on the whole nation (2 Macc. 7:37–38). In Matthew, whose audience is arguably Jewish or Jewish Christians, the number seven is used in reference to seven evil spirits (Matt. 12:45), the number of which presumably indicates the complete domination of evil spirits (Luz 2001, p. 221). Similar to the number seven, the number “seventy” is also regarded as a special number in Jewish writings. Moses appoints seventy elders who can help him (Num. 11:6). Also, seventy bulls are sacrificed as the total number for sacrifice (Num. 29:12–34).¹⁵ The people of Israel experienced the seventy years of exile until they were released from their exile (Jer. 29:10). In particular, Moncada notes the observation of a later rabbinic tradition and the works of Philo that “some Jews identified the entirety of wisdom with the number seventy” (Moncada 2023, p. 32). In b. Sotah 36b, for instance, when Pharaoh appoints Joseph to take charge of the land of Egypt, the astrologers demand that Pharaoh know that Joseph must know seventy languages. On this view, “if the seventy languages indirectly referred to all the nations of the world, then the ability to speak seventy languages demonstrated a knowledge of every language” (Moncada 2023, p. 32). The association of the number seventy with the fullness of wisdom is also found in the writings of Philo, where he interprets the seventy appointed elders as wise men because they possess the spirit of Moses (Sobr. 19–20; Gig. 24) (Moncada 2023, p. 33). In sum, the number seven indicates completion, and the number seventy signifies “all nations, all languages, or all wisdom,” indicating “a global totality” (Moncada 2023, p. 33). In conjunction with this symbolic value, according to Moncada, the numerical formulation ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ comprises the number of completion (seven) and the number of totality (seventy). Thus, ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ does not simply signify the total 490 but denotes “seventy sevens,” “a symbolic value for completion multiplied by a global totality” (Moncada 2023, p. 33). Based on these observations, Moncada suggests that Jesus’s instruction to forgive seventy times seven symbolically indicates the completion of forgiveness for all sins.

Moncada’s observations can be made more interpretively productive when we read the symbolic meaning of seventy times seven in the light of Dan. 9:24. Despite the discrepancy of the exact linguistic expression, the ideas presented in Daniel 9 offer a useful analog for understanding the implications of Jesus’s teaching on forgiveness in Matt. 18:22. It is said in the LXX Dan. 9:24 that “seventy weeks are determined ... to put an end to sins” (ἑβδομήκοντα ἑβδομάδες ἐκρίθησαν ... συντελεσθῆναι τὴν ἁμαρτίαν). Daniel speaks of complete forgiveness through the completion of the seventy sevens (70×7). Here, the scope of God’s complete forgiveness is applied to all people, especially with respect to all Israel, since the seventy weeks prophecy is given for “your people” (λαόν σου), namely, all Israel (LXX Dan. 9:24).¹⁶ This is further evidenced by the fact that the seventy weeks prophecy is given in the context when Daniel prays for “all Israel” (πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ, LXX Dan. 9:11). The theme of forgiveness and the construction of multiplication (70×7) in Matthew 18 form a highly suggestive allusion to the seventy weeks (70×7) and forgiveness of sins

described in Daniel 9. The completion of forgiveness for all Israel's sins in Daniel 9 resonates with Matthew's presentation of Jesus, who embodies the forgiving presence of Israel's God—"God-with-us" (Matt. 1:23; cf. Isa. 7:14). Indeed, as the shepherd of the people of Israel (Matt. 2:6), Jesus's mission is oriented to delivering his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), and his sacrificial death is for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28).

4.2. Debts and Forgiveness

The themes of debts and forgiveness link Dan. 9:24 and Matt. 18:22 more explicitly. While Theodotion employs the term ἱλασμός in the context of Daniel's request for God's forgiveness in Daniel 9, Matthew employs the term ἀφίημι to articulate the idea of forgiveness in Matthew 18. Despite this linguistic difference, both Daniel and Matthew are concerned with forgiveness. In particular, Matthew uses ἀφίημι to describe Jesus's sacrificial death for the forgiveness (ἄφεσις) of sins (Matt. 26:28).¹⁷ The term ἀφίημι is concerned with "freedom, release, letting go (aphiēmi, aphasis, apolyō)" (Spencer 2013, p. 284). In Matthew, the meaning of ἀφίημι includes a release from debts. Jesus, for instance, prays, "Forgive (ἄφεξ) us our debts (ὀφειλήματα), as we forgive (ἀφήκαμεν) our debtors (ὀφειλέταις)" (Matt. 6:12). Here, Matthew uses "debt" (ὀφείλημα) language alongside forgiveness.¹⁸ The implication would be that to be forgiven is to be released from debts. In Matthew's literary context, moreover, the forgiveness of debt (ὀφείλημα) is related to the idea of sins because ἀφίημι is also used in connection with παράπτωμα ("sin," or "transgression") in Matt. 6:14–15, which is known as an appendix to Matt. 6:12.¹⁹ The juxtaposition of forgiveness and debt is found in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18.

Before we attend to the relationship between Daniel 9 and Matthew 18, it is worth noting that Matthew echoes Daniel's language of Son of Man in conjunction with forgiveness of sins in Matthew 9. Jesus is presented as "Son of Man," who exercises God's heavenly forgiving power on earth (Matt. 9:8). The title Son of Man is linked to a figure of unique authority in Daniel 7. The link between Matthew and Daniel is evidenced by the fact that both Daniel and Matthew commonly link the Son of Man with the phrase "he comes" (ἔρχομαι) (e.g., Dan. 7:13; Matt. 10:23; 16:28; 24:44; 25:31) (Davies and Allison 2004, p. 51). The repeated use of the particular phrase ἔρχομαι makes the volume of echo strong. In Dan. 7:13–14, "one like a son of man" is given the authority of the Ancient Days, the power to rule over all peoples. By alluding to Daniel, Matthew presents Jesus as the Son of Man who rules over his people, specifically through forgiveness. Here, the ruling of the Son of Man in Daniel 7 and Matthew is especially concerned with a vision of the forgiveness of Israel's sins in connection with Daniel 9. Contrary to this view, France insists, "The forgiveness of sins as such was not, of course, a part of Daniel's vision of the authority of the Son of Man. Jesus is not expounding Dan 7, but boldly extrapolating from that vision to make a claim for his present status" (France 2007, p. 347). If we, however, read Daniel 7 in connection with Daniel 9, the authority to rule includes the authority to forgive sins. In a similar vein, Joel Marcus adequately points out, "The statement about the Son of Man forgiving sins may reflect midrashic activity by which other Danielic texts have been linked with Daniel 7. In Dan. 9:9, for example, we read, 'To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness'" (Marcus 1994, p. 205). On this view, "[s]ince the 'one like a son of man' in Daniel 7 is given the authority of the Ancient of Days, it is not hard to imagine that a reader of Daniel would have assumed that this included the authority to forgive sins" envisioned in Daniel 9 (Marcus 1994, p. 205). In this regard, Matthew metaleptically brings Daniel 7 and Daniel 9 together to show that just as the forgiving power of one like a son of man in Daniel 7 is exercised over all peoples, so Jesus as the Son of Man exercises God's forgiving power over all (Kim 2023, p. 63). Here, Daniel explicitly shows the vision of

global totality—that is, “all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Dan. 7:14 NRSV). This vision sheds light on Jesus’s work of forgiveness—that is, the completion of forgiveness for all sins. In Hays’s term, the literary and thematic similarities between them suggest Matthew’s echoing of Daniel’s language. That is, the alleged echo found in Daniel fits into the line of argument that Matthew is developing in the narrative, especially with respect to forgiveness of sins.

As we have seen above, the completion of forgiveness for all sins in Dan. 9:24 is connected to the Jubilee period. It should be emphasized that the idea of debt is operative in both Daniel 9 and Matthew 18 in conjunction with forgiveness of sins. Daniel 9:24 speaks of God’s plan for the completion of forgiveness of sins at the end of the seventy weeks of years (70×7). This resonates with the idea that debts are forgiven at the end of the Jubilee period (7×7). The idea of debt is explicitly expressed in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. In Daniel 9, moreover, Daniel’s prayer for forgiveness is not merely for himself. Instead, it is for the communal life of Israel as Daniel keeps using the plural “we” throughout his prayer. Daniel takes his ancestors’ and people’s sins as his own and asks for forgiveness on their behalf. This suggests that forgiveness is not merely personal, but it has to be embodied in one’s relationship with others. That is to say, forgiveness should be embodied communally. Such a communal practice of forgiveness is painted in the parable of the unforgiving servant that comes right after Matt. 18:22. The master forgives his servant’s enormous debts by having compassion on the servant and thus taking his servant’s debts as his own (Matt. 18:27). This means that the master bears all the consequences of his servant’s debts. The implication of the parable would be that just as the master, presumably God (Matt. 18:35), forgives his people’s sins by taking their sins as his own, so God’s people are called to embody that forgiveness by taking others’ sins as their own. In doing so, God’s people can fully enjoy and embody God’s forgiveness of their debts in their communal life. Matthew thus metaleptically brings Daniel’s idea to express the dynamic of forgiveness at work in one’s communal life.

Further, just as Daniel asks for forgiveness for all Israel on their behalf in Daniel 9, so Jesus’s forgiving work is done for all on his people’s behalf. In the Last Supper, Jesus declares his death “for many (πολλοί) for the forgiveness (ἄφεσις) of sins” (Matt. 26:28). Jesus’s death is not for himself but for his people. Here, the term “many” in Matt. 26:28 is better interpreted as “all.” It echoes Isaiah 53, where it is said that God’s righteous servant will bear the sins of “many” (e.g., Isa. 53:11–12). The sense of the term is “all” because “the redemptive benefits of the death of Jesus” are not denied to those who are regarded as being outside the kingdom of God in Matthew (Carroll and Green 1995, p. 44 n. 17). Indeed, “all sins” (πᾶσα ἁμαρτία) are forgiven in Matthew except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31). This is because blasphemy against the Spirit prevents one from experiencing the forgiving presence of God revealed in Jesus (Matt. 1:21), whose forgiving power is enabled by the Spirit (Matt. 12:28). That the term πολλοί connotes all is evidenced by Matthew’s presentation that Jesus does not include some and exclude others throughout the narrative. Jesus becomes “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” those who are regarded as being excluded from the kingdom (Matt. 11:19). Jesus even instructs his followers to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44). The most striking example is that Jesus commissions the disciples to embrace “all nations” (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη), including both Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 28:19; cf. Matt. 8:5–11; 10:6; 15:24, 32–39). This view is already envisioned in the earlier narrative when both Jews and Gentiles are invited to share the heavenly banquet as “many” (πολλοί) will come from east and west to dine with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in heaven (e.g., Matt. 8:11). In context, those who will come from east and west (i.e., “many”) are Gentiles as they joined the table fellowship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are the

representative of the people of Israel. The parallel between “all” and “many” suggests that the term πολλοί, if not all, can be used as the equivalent of “all” in Matthew.

In this light, Jesus’s atoning death “for many for the forgiveness of sins” in Matt. 26:28 evokes Daniel’s picture of the fulfilment of atonement, the completion of forgiveness for all sins. Just as Jesus’s instruction to forgive seventy times seven indicates the completion of forgiveness for all sins, so his sacrificial death denotes the completion of forgiveness for all sins as his death is for many (all) for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28). Accordingly, the ideas (e.g., the completion of forgiveness, multiplication, global totality) presented in Dan. 9:24 offer a helpful analog for understanding the nature of Jesus’s instruction to forgive seventy times seven and of his sacrificial death in Matthew.

5. Conclusions

While Matthean studies that are attentive to intertextual allusions have been silent about the connection between Matt. 18:22 and Dan. 9:24, with respect to the theme of forgiveness, this study examined how Jesus’s instruction to forgive εβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ (70×7) can be read alongside the seventy weeks (70×7) prophecy in Dan. 9:24. By using Hays’s criteria of echo (i.e., availability, volume, thematic coherence), this study sought to demonstrate that the numerical construction in Matt. 18:22 signals an allusion to the seventy weeks of Dan. 9:24—that is, the completion of God’s forgiveness for all sins. Although the exact linguistic expression in Daniel 9 (i.e., seventy weeks) differs from Matthew 18 (seventy times seven), both texts commonly articulate the completion of forgiveness and the multiplication of seventy and seven (70×7). In the light of Daniel 9, we can read that Jesus’s instruction to forgive seventy times seven signifies the completion of forgiveness for all sins.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ For intertextual analysis between Matthew and the Old Testament, see [Beaton \(2002\)](#); [Hays \(2005b\)](#), pp. 165–90; [Gundry \(1967\)](#); [Chung \(2017\)](#); [Brown \(2012\)](#), pp. 42–59.
- ² Unless noted otherwise, translations from Greek are my translations.
- ³ English Bible translations that opt for the sum total of the two numbers (i.e., seventy-seven): CEB, ESV, ISV, NIV, NRSV. Cf. Some English translations such as KJV and NASB read “seventy times seven.”
- ⁴ On the influence of the Hebrew text on Matthew, see [Johnson \(1943\)](#), pp. 135–53). With regard to Matthew’s use of the LXX, one needs to define the term LXX (i.e., Septuagint) and identify what is being used and cited. While most scholars use the term LXX loosely to mean the Old Testament in Greek, it is most likely that books now called LXX were translated from a Hebrew text that is not precisely identical with the Masoretic text we use today. See, for instance, [Greenspoon \(2003\)](#), pp. 80–113; [Tov \(2004\)](#), pp. 159–88; [Wagner \(2008\)](#), pp. 17–28.
- ⁵ Scholars such as [Hagner \(1995\)](#), p. 534 support this view.
- ⁶ This appears to be the case, especially in the interpretation of the numbers in Revelation. [Beale \(1999\)](#), p. 721 favors an approach that views the number such as 666 as having figurative or symbolic significance rather than indicating one historical reality such as Nero Caesar.
- ⁷ The “Paul within Judaism” *Schule* favors an approach that translates ἐκκλησία as “assembly.” See, for instance, [Runesson \(2015\)](#), pp. 68–76; [Eyl \(2014\)](#), pp. 315–39). For the sake of convenience, this study translates the term as “church.” On the appearance of the term ἐκκλησία in the LXX, see, for instance, Deut. 4:10; 2 Kgs. 8:14; Ezra 2:64.

- ⁸ Daniel 9:2: “I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years” (NRSV).
- ⁹ The Chronicler views the seventy years of Jeremiah’s prophecy as the time of exile (2 Chron. 36:17–23). After this period, the people of Israel will return to their land. Newsom (2014, p. 402) notes, “The decree of Cyrus allowing a return and rebuilding the temple occurred slightly less than fifty years after the destruction of Jerusalem (586–538 BCE) or slightly less than sixty years after the first deportation (597 BCE). The point, however, was not about a strict chronology but about constructing a meaning for the exile and a way of understanding the prophecy of Jeremiah as having been fulfilled.”
- ¹⁰ With regard to the nature of sins, Collins (1993, p. 354) points out, “The iniquity that must be completed surely includes the desecration of the temple by the Syrians and the Jewish Hellenizers.” While the scope of sins may include the sins of Jewish Hellenizers, the context of Daniel 9 rather suggests that sins more likely refer to Israel’s sins as Daniel prays for his people’s sins (9:6–19). For a possibility of the connection between sins in Daniel 9 and Gentile transgression, see Newsom (2014, p. 405).
- ¹¹ In 1 Enoch 10.11–12, the Watchers or the fallen angels are imprisoned for “seventy generations” until the day of judgment. See also Josephus, *J.W.* 6.310–15. Moreover, Hess (2011, p. 320) notes, “A consistent pattern emerges in early Judaism in which the 70 weeks or generations or shepherds form a time of apostasy.” On the interpretation of the seventy weeks, Hess (2011, p. 321) notes further that early Fathers tend to focus on “a precise calculation from some time in the Persian period until either the birth or death of Jesus Christ.” For more discussion, see Knowles (1945, pp. 136–60).
- ¹² A similar concern is reflected in Hess (2011, p. 326): The seven weeks of years—Jubilee period—described in Lev 25 are related to “the 70 years of exile mentioned by Jer. 25:11–12 and extended here in Daniel to 70 weeks of years.”
- ¹³ Here, Hays identifies seven criteria for detecting possible echoes of Old Testament texts in Pauline letters. Hays also adapts his approach to the Gospels. See Hays (2014).
- ¹⁴ The completeness of seven represents a growing up to maturity. Goldingay (1989, p. 232) points out that the seventy years convey “a period such as a human lifetime,” indicating the fullness of a human life.
- ¹⁵ With regard to seventy, Ayali-Darshan (2015, p. 9) writes that during “the seven-day autumn pilgrimage festival, also known as Sukkot,” a large number of bulls are sacrificed as burnt offerings (Num. 29:12–34). Ayali-Darshan (2015, p. 9) goes on to note, “In addition to the two rams, fourteen yearling lambs, and a goat sacrificed each day of the festival, thirteen bulls were to be sacrificed on the first day, twelve on the second, eleven on the third, ten on the fourth, and so forth. The total number of bulls offered was thus seventy.”
- ¹⁶ The term λαός refers to the people of Israel (cf. Matt. 27:25). On the connection between λαός and Israel, see Senior (1975, p. 259); Hamilton (2017, pp. 185–86).
- ¹⁷ With regard to the sacrificial nature of Jesus’s death in Matthew, Senior (1975, pp. 81–82) observes that the use of περί in Matt. 26:28 resonates with the language of sacrifice in Isa. 53:4. In a similar vein, note Heil (1991, p. 37): “The blood of sacrificed animals was ‘poured out’ by priests on the altar as a sin offering to atone for the sins of the people (Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34), so the blood that will be ‘shed’ or ‘poured out’ by the death of Jesus represents a sacrifice for the atonement of sins.”
- ¹⁸ On the relationship between debt and forgiveness in Matthew, see Riddlehoover (2023, pp. 691–99).
- ¹⁹ With regard to the connection between ὀφείλημα and παράπτωμα in both Jewish and Greco-Roman writings, see Mbabazi (2013, pp. 133–36).

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