

An Unpayable Debt

By: Wayne Jackson

In one of his parables, Jesus told of a certain king, who, examining his financial records, discovered a debtor who owed him the staggering sum of ten thousand talents (**Matthew 18:24**). According to the footnote in the ASV, a talent was worth about \$1,000; hence, this servant was in debt to the tune of \$10 million. When the servant was called to account for the debt, he promised: "Have patience with me, and I will pay all that I owe." Was his pledge realistic? In the margin of your Bible, beside **Matthew 18:26**, write: See **Matthew 20:2**. There, we learn that the daily wage of a working man in Palestine was "a shilling" — about 17 cents (see 18:28 — ASV fn).

Now, how long would it take to pay off a debt of \$10 million, at the rate of 17 cents per day (assuming that one used his entire income with nothing subtracted for rent, chariot payments!, etc.)? It would take about two hundred thousand years to liquidate the debt! Add this notation to your margin.

In this parable the king represents God and the indebted servant pictures each of us in the state of sin. We never would be able, by our own meritorious labor, to work off the sin-debt to our Creator. Happily, the parable teaches us that the king forgave that servant (cf. **Ephesians 2:8,9**).

This portion of the parable is designed to emphasize our utter helplessness before God. We must not, however, push the parable beyond its intended design and assume that forgiveness is unconditional. That assumption would contradict scores of clear Bible passages (cf. **Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Hebrews 5:8-9**). Whereas forgiveness is freely extended by our loving God, it must be obediently accepted by the contrite sinner.