



In this study the meaning of the Greek verb **'aphiemi'** is considered.
In the Bible this is translated as: **to forgive**, among other things.

This Greek verb appears in 133 Bible texts and is only translated as **to forgive** on approximately **1 in 4 occasions** and then always in the context of sin and guilt.
Probably as a result of this, the expression has taken on a fraught content and many people have great difficulty **forgiving**.

Forgiving often gives the impression that someone's error, or the terrible things that happened in the past, should not be held against them.

Biblical forgiveness does not smooth these events out, however, but desires to set people free from the past and point them towards the present and the future.

That is the reason for this study, in the hope that, through it, a better understanding of **'aphiemi'**, **to forgive** will become more easily manageable and people will go on to experience freedom in Jesus Christ, as God has intended them to do.

This is only a word study that does not consider emotional questions concerning relationships between people.

Word study:

According to the OLB **'aphiemi'** is a combination of two words:

- **apo:** a preposition with the meaning of **separation**, of distance or time.
- **hieme:** to be translated as **to send, to go**.

'Aphiemi' is therefore also translated by the OLB as:

- to send away, to bid going away, yield up, to let go, give up a debt
- to permit, allow, not to hinder
- to leave, go way (in order to go to another place, to depart from one)

The Greek/Dutch dictionary translates it as:

- to send away, to let go, to renounce
- to chase away, to throw away
- to set free, to acquit, to free from
- to forgive, to absolve
- to let loose, to set oneself free from something, to sail away

Notice: that **to forgive** in the OLB's translation only occupies a subordinate place.
To forgive is only mentioned at the fourth place in the dictionary.

'Aphiemi' is therefore translated 3 times out of 4 by words such as **to send away, to let go** or **to let loose**, with the underlying thought of separation in distance and time (see the make-up of **'aphiemi'** on the page above).



'Aphiemi' in the Bible translation:

A few Bible texts that give a different view of forgiving, and that better reflect the real drift of 'aphiemi'.

'Aphiemi' is indicated in **'bold'** letters in these examples.

Matthew 3:15

Jesus asks John the Baptist to baptise Him in the Jordan and John refuses.

- *Jesus replied, "**Let it be** so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John **consented**.*

This could have possibly been translated here as **to forgive**, in the sense of: *John, **forgive** me for putting this question to you and just baptise me. He then **forgave** Him and he baptised Jesus.*

However, what Jesus asks John is **to let go of the question** he has asked Him.

When Jesus asks to be baptised, it is not up to John to comment on this and to attempt to prevent Him from doing so.

Matthew 15:14

- ***Leave** them; they are blind guides.*

The disciples came to tell Jesus that the Pharisees were offended by His words.

The answer Jesus gave His disciples to this could have been translated as: **Forgive** them, they are blind; they lead the blind.

As it is translated now, what Jesus means is clearer, i.e.: **Let go of** the fact that the Pharisees are offended in Me. They cannot understand my words. They are blind.

Matthew 4:22

- ... and immediately they **left** the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus calls James and John to follow Him and they immediately orientate themselves towards their new future. They **let go of** what is occupying them, including their family.

Matthew 19:27

This is translated differently once again in Peter's declaration.

- *Peter answered him, "We **have left** everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*

Matthew 8:15

Peter's mother-in-law lay in bed with a fever:

- *He (Jesus) touched her hand and the fever **left** her, and she got up and began to wait on him.*

Matthew 13:30

A landowner has sown wheat and an enemy sows weeds among it.

The workers want to remove the weeds from among the wheat.

Because they would then also damage the wheat, the landowner says:



- ***Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.***

Expressed otherwise: **Let go of your desire to remove the weeds, so that both will grow together until the harvest.**

Luke 17:35

A statement by Jesus about the future, in which it is difficult to trace the notion of **forgiving** as it is generally understood.

- *Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other **left**.*

While two women are working together a separation between them comes about, because one of them suddenly disappears. The second woman is **left behind**, whereby the idea of **forgiving** is once again traceable with difficulty, in view of the fact that **leaving behind** rather implies **judgement** here.

John 4:1/3

- *Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John ... So he **left** Judea and went back once more to Galilee.*

In His thoughts Jesus was not occupied with what He had had to do in Judea, so that they would understand Him better.

He temporarily **left** His ministry in Judea **behind** (resting) and concentrated on Galilee once again.

John 4:28

A clear example of what forgiving actually means.

Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman who comes to the well to draw water.

When she understood who Jesus was she forgot why she had come to the well.

- *Then, **leaving** her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ...*

John 11:48

The Pharisees took counsel to kill Jesus. They were worried that everyone would believe in Him and came to the conclusion:

- *If we **let him go** on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.*

The Pharisees say something like: *If we **let Him go, let Him free** to do as He wishes, they will all believe in Him.*

1 Corinthians 7:13

Paul, concerning marriage with an unbeliever:

- *And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not **divorce** him.*



The woman is not **to let her husband go**, go away from him, because of his unbelief. She must not view his unbelief as a reason to break up their marriage relationship, but rather **let go of** the fact that he does not believe.

John 14:18

Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit.

- *I will not **leave** you as orphans; I will come to you.*

Revelation 2:4

In the letters to the seven churches the Ephesians are reproached for having **forsaken** their first love, having distanced themselves from it.

- *Yet I hold this against you: You have **forsaken** the love you had at first.*

Matthew 4:11

In the desert the devil does not succeed in seducing Jesus to disobey His Father.

- *Then the devil **left** him, and angels came and attended him.*

It is difficult to assume that the devil **forgives** Jesus because He does not go along with his suggestions. He does not persist, however. He temporarily **lets go of (rests)** his attempts to seduce Jesus and goes away.

Hebrews 2:8

God has subjected everything to Jesus and, in a manner of speaking, not **left** anything **to chance**, or overlooked anything.

- *... and put everything under their feet. In putting everything under them, God **left** nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them.*

Matthew 18:27

The notion of **forgiving** is clearly reflected in the parable of the slave who owes his master 10,000 talents and is unable to repay.

- *The servant's master took pity on him, **cancelled** the debt and let him go.*

The master does not **forgive the slave**, but he **lets him go free**, because he **'forgives' the debt** (literally: the loan).

Expressed otherwise: **Waives the demand** that the slave must repay the debt.

What is forgiving?

100 of the 133 texts could be included in the survey above, whereby **'aphiemi'** is not translated as to forgive.

It is clear from the texts mentioned here that **'aphiemi'** is a **general expression**, which usually means that one

- lets go of **something** (an expression or a statement)
- whereby **people** are set free. (the person who is 'forgiven' and/or the person who 'forgives')



'Aphiemi' is a word that is used in many situations.

When it refers to the relationship between two people it does not usually directly refer to one person, but to **that which in fact fundamentally influences the relationship**.

In that relationship **'aphiemi'** only says something about the **attitude** of the person who **forgives**, i.e. that he literally **lets go of** the past, distances himself from it and is no longer occupied with it.

The last text from Matthew 18:27, which is mentioned above, gives a splendid example of this and is therefore discussed further in the study 'Forgiveness – basic principles 1 and 2'.¹

The master **Cancels** the slave's **debt** .

The master no longer demands that the slave reimburse the enormous debt from the past.

The master **lets go of** the debt from **the past** .

Freedom in the present comes in its place:

- **freedom for the master** , who no longer lives under tension, because the slave is unable to pay off the enormous debt from the past
- **freedom for the slave** , who is no longer enslaved, pursued by his past.

Continued in the study: Forgiving in practice.²

¹Study: Forgiveness – basic principles 1 and 2.

² Study: Forgiving in practice.