

Digging Deeper: The Greater Meaning of Matthew 16:23

Tuesday, October 13, 2026

“But turning his back, he said to Peter: ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because you think, not God’s thoughts, but those of men.’” (Matthew 16:23)

Just moments earlier, Peter had boldly said that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16) But when Jesus explained that he would suffer and be killed in Jerusalem, Peter took him aside and said: “Be kind to yourself, Lord; you will not have this happen to you at all.” (Matthew 16:22) The main point is that even well-meant advice can work against Jehovah’s will if it comes from human thinking rather than from God’s thinking. As the day’s text says,

leading a self-sparing life was not Jehovah's will for Jesus, and Peter learned a valuable lesson about making God's thoughts his own.

1 “You Think”: What Is Your Mind Set On? (*φρονέω*, *phroneō*)

The Greek word *φρονέω* (*phroneō*) means more than having a passing idea. It describes a person's mindset, what his mind is set on and what he is striving for. The NWT footnote brings this out: “you have, not God's mind, but that of humans.” Peter's mind was set on what seemed kind and comfortable from a human point of view, while Jehovah's purpose called for Jesus to give his life.

Jehovah reminds us: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways.” (Isaiah 55:8) Paul used this same Greek word when he urged: “Keep this mental attitude in you that

was also in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2:5) Jesus’ mindset was humble and fully set on doing his Father’s will, even when it was hard.

- Making God’s thoughts our own starts with what we set our minds on day by day.

2 “Stumbling Block”: A Trap in the Path (σκάνδαλον, *skandalon*)

The word σκάνδαλον (*skandalon*) is thought to have first meant a trap, possibly the stick in a trap that held the bait. Later it came to mean anything in a person’s path that could make him stumble or fall. Notice the contrast: only a few verses earlier, Jesus had spoken of Peter’s name, which means “a piece of rock; a stone.” Now that same Peter had become a stone in Jesus’ path, an obstacle to doing his Father’s will.

Peter did not mean to trip Jesus up. He loved him. But his words, if accepted, would have pulled Jesus away from his assignment. That is why Paul urged Christians to “be determined not to put a stumbling block or an obstacle before a brother.” (Romans 14:13) Our advice to others, even when kindly meant, should always point them toward Jehovah’s will, not away from it.

- Sincere feelings are not enough; our counsel helps others only when it agrees with God’s thinking.

3 “Satan”: Taking the Side of an Opposer (Σατανᾶς, Satan; Hebrew שָׂטָן, *satan*)

The name “Satan” comes from the Hebrew word שָׂטָן (*satan*), which means a resister or an opposer. Jesus was not saying that Peter was the Devil. He was showing that, on this occasion, Peter was

opposing God's will and may have let himself be influenced by Satan. The study note on "Get behind me" explains that Jesus refused to let anything hinder him from doing his Father's will, and his words also reminded Peter of his place as a supportive follower.

Jesus' firm answer echoes what he said when the Devil tempted him with an easier path: "Go away, Satan! For it is written: 'It is Jehovah your God you must worship.'" (Matthew 4:10) Peter took the correction to heart. Years later he wrote: "Since Christ suffered in the flesh, you too arm yourselves with the same mental disposition." (1 Peter 4:1)

- **When we are corrected, we can do what Peter did:** accept it, learn from it, and keep following Jesus.

Key Spiritual Reflections

- **My Mindset:** When I face a hard decision, do I first ask what is easiest for me, or what Jehovah's will is? (Isaiah 55:8; Philippians 2:5)
- **My Advice:** When I comfort or counsel a friend, do my words point him toward Jehovah's will, even if that path takes sacrifice? (Romans 14:13)
- **My Response to Correction:** When someone lovingly shows me that my thinking is off, will I respond as Peter did and let it make me stronger? (1 Peter 4:1)