THE QUESTION

Does the eye of a needle in Jesus' saying mean a sewing needle?

Asked by a THF member on May 17, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 13 early Christian passages and 69 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/does-the-eye-of-a-needle-in-jesus-saying-mean-a-sewing-needle

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

The early writers here take it as an ordinary needle. They repeat the saying plainly, and Origen speaks of the narrow eye of a needle as a picture of the narrow way to life. They treat it as something impossible for people but possible for God. None of these passages explains it as a gate.

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POINT 1 OF 6

Early writers repeat the saying plainly

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tatian's Gospel harmony gives the saying in its plain form. Clement of Alexandria even shortens it to a camel passing through a needle, which reads most naturally as the small hole in a needle.

1 “And I also say to you, it is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 29 (c. 150–180 AD) *THF's updated English* **Source 2, page 6** Read it in the library ›

2 “But if not, more swiftly will a camel pass through a needle than such a rich man will pass over into the kingdom of God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 26 (c. 190–215 AD) *THF's updated English* **Source 5, page 6** Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 6

Origen points to the needle's narrow eye

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Answering a critic, Origen asks why a camel was chosen and what the narrow eye of a needle means. He links its narrowness to Christ's words about the narrow way that leads to life. He treats the needle's eye as a real narrow opening with a spiritual lesson.

3 “He would also have considered what meaning the narrow eye of a needle had for the one who saw that "strait and narrow is the way that leads to life.""”

later in the same passage

“Now if Celsus had not read the Gospels with hatred and hostility, but had been filled with a love of truth, he would have paid attention to why a camel — an animal that is bent in its bodily shape — was chosen for comparison with a rich man.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 16 (c. 215–254 AD) *THF's updated English* **Source 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›

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POINT 3 OF 6

Needles were everyday tools to these writers

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

In other writings, the word needle simply means the everyday tool. Tertullian speaks of embroidering with the needle, and Arnobius lists a needle among common household things. This fits reading Christ's saying as a real needle.

4 “Come now; if from the beginning of the world the Milesians sheared sheep, and the Serians spun trees, and the Tyrians dyed, and the Phrygians embroidered with the needle, and the Babylonians with the loom, and pearls shone, and onyx stones flashed; if gold itself had already come out of the ground along with the greed that goes with it; if the mirror too had already had license to lie so much, then I suppose Eve, expelled from paradise and already dead, would also have wanted these things.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Apparel of Women* 1.1 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 7, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

5 “What if you went on to ask him what a wheel is, or a sledge, a winnowing-fan, a jar, a tub, an oil-mill, a ploughshare, or a sieve, a millstone, a plough-tail, or a light hoe; a carved seat, a needle, a strigil, a layer, an open seat, a ladle, a platter, a candlestick, a goblet, a broom, a cup, a bag; a lyre, a pipe, silver, brass, gold, a book, a rod, a roll, and all the rest of the equipment by which human life is surrounded and sustained?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Arnobius,** *Against the Heathen* 2 (c. 290–330 AD) **Source 13, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

Impossible for people, possible for God

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The saying is meant to sound impossible. Tatian's harmony follows it with Christ's answer that it is impossible with men but not with God. Clement says many fail to ask how what is impossible among men becomes possible.

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6 “And Jesus looked at them intently and said to them, With men this is impossible, but not with God, for everything is possible for God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tatian,** *Diatessaron* 29 (c. 150–180 AD) *THF's updated English* **Source 2, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**

7 “They no longer trouble themselves to ask either whom the Master and Teacher is addressing as 'the rich,' or how what is impossible among men becomes possible.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 2 (c. 190–215 AD) *THF's updated English* **Source 4, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 5 OF 6

Some rich hearers gave up too quickly

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement warns that some rich people heard this saying carelessly, decided they could never be saved, and gave themselves to this world. He says they never stopped to ask whom Christ meant by the rich, or how God makes the impossible possible.

8 “For some, having heard the Lord's saying offhand and superficially — that 'more easily shall a camel slip through the eye of a needle than a rich man into the kingdom of heaven' — give up on themselves as though they were not meant to live.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 2 (c. 190–215 AD) *THF's updated English* **Source 4, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 6 OF 6

The danger is relying on riches

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement says a rich man who seeks God alone and keeps his goods in their place stands by the commandments, free and unwounded by money. Cyprian urges the rich to buy true gold from Christ, cleansed by almsgiving and righteous works.

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9 “But if anyone is able to bend the authority of his goods inward, and to think moderately, and to be self-controlled, and to seek God alone, and to breathe God, and to live as a fellow citizen with God—this man, the poor one, stands by the commandments, free, undefeated, free of disease, unwounded by money.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 26
(c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English
Source 5, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

10 “Therefore, you who are rich and wealthy, buy for yourself from Christ gold tried by fire, so that you may be pure gold, with your filth burned away as if by fire, if you are cleansed by almsgiving and righteous works.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises*
(c. 248–258 AD)
THF's updated English
Source 11, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages directly says the word means a sewing needle; that is our reading of how they use it.
- These passages do not discuss a city gate called the needle's eye, either to accept or to reject that idea.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 13 early Christian passages and 69 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–13, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 14–68, in Bible order), then 14 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

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EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *13 passages from 8 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 1*

1 *Shepherd* “and rotten. Therefore, this illustration is for the servants of God, for the poor man and for the rich." I said, "How so, sir? Explain it to me." He said… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 2*

2 *Diatessaron* 29 **Quotes 1, 6, pages 2, 4** “rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 19:24 And I also say to you, it is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 3–6*

3 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 4 (on point 1) “who have set their trust on possessions to enter into the kingdom of God! More easily shall a camel pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 2 **Quotes 7, 8, page 4** “reason that salvation seems harder for the rich than for those without money among men is probably not just one thing, but many. For some, having heard the Lord's… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 26 **Quotes 2, 9, pages 2, 5** “free, undefeated, free of disease, unwounded by money. But if not, more swiftly will a camel pass through a needle than such a rich man will pass over into the… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Stromata* 5.14 (1885 English; on point 3) “covet not a needle's thread. For God You sees, being near beside you… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 7*

7 *On the Apparel of Women* 1.1 **Quote 4, page 3** “now; if from the beginning of the world the Milesians sheared sheep, and the Serians spun trees, and the Tyrians dyed, and the Phrygians embroidered with the needle, and the… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 8*

8 *Refutation of All Heresies* 1 (1885 English; on point 2) “these, it is said, the Saviour has expressly declared that straight and narrow is the way that leads unto life, and few there are that enter upon it… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 9–10*

9 *Against Celsus* 16 **Quote 3, page 2** “would also have considered what meaning the narrow eye of a needle had for the one who saw that "strait and narrow is the way that leads to life." He… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Commentary on Matthew* 12 (on point 2) “when we understand how each sin, through which there is a way to Hades, is a gate of Hades, then we will grasp this: the soul that has spot or… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 11–12*

11 *Treatises* **Quote 10, page 5** “are mistaken and deceived, whoever you are, if you think you are rich in this world. Listen to the voice of your Lord in Revelation, rebuking people like you with… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 2) “and narrow is the way through which we enter into life, but excellent and great is the reward when we enter into glory… [continues online] **read ›**

Arnobius, *c. 290–330 AD · source 13*

13 *Against the Heathen* 2 **Quote 5, page 3** “carved seat, a needle, a strigil, a layer, an open seat, a ladle, a platter, a candlestick, a goblet, a broom, a cup, a bag… [continues online] **read ›**

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THE BIBLE *55 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

14 **Matthew 5:29** If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. **read ›**

15 **Matthew 6:22** The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. **read ›**

16 **Matthew 7:3** Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye? **read ›**

17 **Matthew 7:4** Or how will you tell your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye,' and behold, the beam is in your own eye? **read ›**

18 **Matthew 7:5** You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye. **read ›**

19 **Matthew 7:6** Do not give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. **read ›**

20 **Matthew 7:13** Enter in by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter in by it. **read ›**

21 **Matthew 7:14** How narrow is the gate and confined the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it. **read ›**

22 **Matthew 9:16** No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch would tear away from the garment, and a worse hole is made. **read ›**

23 **Matthew 11:30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." **read ›**

24 **Matthew 18:9** If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the hell of fire. **read ›**

25 **Matthew 19:21** Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." **read ›**

26 **Matthew 19:22** But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions. **read ›**

27 **Matthew 19:23** Jesus said to his disciples, "Amen, I say to you, a rich man will enter the kingdom of heaven with difficulty. **read ›**

28 **Matthew 19:24** Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." **read ›**

29 **Matthew 23:13** "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and as a pretense you make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. **read ›**

30 **Matthew 23:24** You blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel! **read ›**

31 **Mark 2:21** No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new patch pulls away from the old, and a worse tear is made. **read ›**

32 **Mark 4:31** It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown in the earth, is smaller than all the seeds on the earth; **read ›**

33 **Mark 8:18** Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? **read ›**

34 **Mark 9:47** If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out. It is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire, **read ›**

35 **Mark 10:22** But his face fell at that saying, and he went away sorrowful, for he was one who had great possessions. **read ›**

36 **Mark 10:23** Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" **read ›**

37 **Mark 10:24** The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus answered again, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! **read ›**

38 **Mark 10:25** It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." **read ›**

39 **Mark 12:41** Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and saw how the multitude cast money into the treasury. Many who were rich cast in much. **read ›**

40 **Luke 2:30** for my eyes have seen your salvation, **read ›**

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41 **Luke 2:35** And a sword shall pierce through your own soul, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." **read ›**

42 **Luke 4:10** for it is written: He shall give his angels charge concerning you, to guard you; **read ›**

43 **Luke 5:2** He saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. **read ›**

44 **Luke 5:36** He also told a parable to them. "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old garment, or else he will tear the new, and also the piece from the new will not match the old. **read ›**

45 **Luke 6:24** But woe to you who are rich! For you have received your consolation. **read ›**

46 **Luke 6:41** Why do you see the speck of chaff that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye? **read ›**

47 **Luke 6:42** Or how can you tell your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck of chaff that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the beam that is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First remove the beam from your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck of chaff that is in your brother's eye. **read ›**

48 **Luke 11:34** The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore when your eye is good, your whole body is also full of light; but when it is evil, your body also is full of darkness. **read ›**

49 **Luke 13:24** "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. **read ›**

50 **Luke 16:19** Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. **read ›**

51 **Luke 16:22** The beggar died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's chest. The rich man also died and was buried. **read ›**

52 **Luke 18:22** When Jesus heard these things, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." **read ›**

53 **Luke 18:23** But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was very rich. **read ›**

54 **Luke 18:24** Jesus, seeing that he became very sad, said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter into God's kingdom! **read ›**

55 **Luke 18:25** For it is easier for a camel to enter in through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into God's kingdom." **read ›**

56 **Luke 21:1** He looked up and saw the rich people who were putting their gifts into the treasury. **read ›**

57 **Luke 21:2** He also saw a certain poor widow putting in two lepta. **read ›**

58 **John 10:1** Amen, amen, I say to you, one who does not enter by the door into the sheep fold, but climbs up some other way, is a thief and a robber. **read ›**

59 **John 19:23** Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top throughout. **read ›**

60 **John 19:37** Again another Scripture says, "They shall look on him whom they pierced." **read ›**

61 **Acts 5:18** and laid hands on the apostles, then put them in public custody. **read ›**

62 **Acts 26:2** "I consider myself happy, King Agrippa, that I am to make my defense before you today concerning all the accusations the Jews bring against me, **read ›**

63 **Acts 26:7** which our twelve tribes, earnestly serving night and day, hope to attain. Concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa! **read ›**

64 **1 Corinthians 12:16** And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body," does that make it any less a part of the body? **read ›**

65 **1 Corinthians 12:17** If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the smelling be? **read ›**

66 **1 Corinthians 12:21** The eye cannot tell the hand, "I have no need for you," or again the head to the feet, "I have no need for you." **read ›**

67 **James 5:1** Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming on you. **read ›**

68 **Revelation 21:21** The twelve gates were twelve pearls. Each one of the gates was made of one pearl. The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. **read ›**

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ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *14 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Matthew 10:42 · 13:54 · 22:14

Mark 6:2 · 10:17

Luke 12:42

John 7:15 · 10:9 · 15:5

Ephesians 5:27

Philippians 4:3 · 4:13

1 Timothy 6:20

Hebrews 8:11

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Does the eye of a needle in Jesus' saying mean a sewing needle?” on May 17, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY