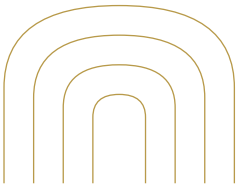
HEKHAL · READER'S EDITION



KATA MAΘΘAION IΔ

# Walking on the Water

*Matthew 14:22–33 · Peripaton epi tēn thalassan*

King James Version (1611)

PUBLIC-DOMAIN TRANSLATION

Edition of 2026-08-13 · hekhal.org

# About this edition

King James Version of 1611, public domain. The Greek text is the Nestle 1904 critical edition, also public domain. The KJV preserves the early modern English idiom in which the pericope entered the Anglophone Christian imagination, with the Authorized rendering of phantasma as "spirit," oligopiste as "thou of little faith," and tetartē phylakē as "the fourth watch of the night." Hekhal hosts the passage as a flagship of the Christian Esoteric Exegesis corpus, the bright and active counterpart to the Peniel pericope; the same text is read on its own terms in the synoptic tradition (cross-link to Mark 6 and John 6).

| | |
|---|---|
| TRADITION | christian-mysticism |
| LANGUAGE | Greek |
| PERIOD | composed c. 70–90 CE; received Greek text Nestle 1904 |
| ATTRIBUTION | Traditionally ascribed to the apostle Matthew; modern scholarship treats the Gospel as an anonymous composition drawing on Mark and the Q sayings source, edited within a Greek-speaking Jewish-Christian community. |
| TRANSLATION | King James Version (1611) |
| LICENCE | Public domain |
| ONLINE | https://hekhal.org/texts/matthew-14/ |

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The pericope of the walking on the water is short, dense, and structurally inseparable from the feeding of the five thousand that immediately precedes it. The disciples are sent ahead in a boat. A storm rises. In the fourth watch of the night Jesus comes to them on the sea. They take him for a ghost. Peter asks to walk out to him on the water, takes a few steps, sees the wind, sinks, and is caught by the hand that did not let go. The wind ceases when they climb into the boat together, and the disciples, for the first time in Matthew's narrative, name him Son of God.

The passage is the second flagship of the Christian Corpus on Hekhal, paired editorially with Jacob at Peniel. Where Peniel figures the dark and passive register of divine encounter, the night-long wrestling under wound and silence, Matthew 14 figures the bright and active register: the call across the water, the stepping out, the brief possibility of walking, the falter, the cry, the hand. The two passages are read together as the two sides of the same contemplative shape.

Hekhal preserves the Greek opposite the King James English so that the reader can track the text at the level it works on: the Septuagintal echo of Job 9:8 in *peripaton epi tēn thalassan*, the technical vocabulary of *phantasma* against which the early Church developed its first christological reflexes, the diminutive sting of *oligopiste* that Matthew alone records, and the apocalyptic texture of *tetartē phylakē tēs nyktos*, the fourth watch. The editorial reading follows the bilingual text. The synoptic parallels in Mark 6 and John 6 are honored in their own register and cross-referenced rather than flattened.

## CROSS-REFERENCES

- Typos (τύπος), the figural mode in which the passage is read.
- Quadriga, the four senses applied to this passage in turn.
- Apophasis (ἀπόφασις), the negative-theological frame for the rebuke "of little faith."
- Kenosis (κένωσις), the self-emptying frame for Peter's stepping out and Christ's stooping hand.

## *Walking on the Water*

MATTHEW 14:22–33

CANONICAL

GREEK · GREEK NEW TESTAMENT · NESTLE 1904

### MATTHEW 14:22–24 · THE BOAT SENT AHEAD

22 And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when

### ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΝ ΙΔ · 22–24

Καὶ εὐθέως ἠνάγκασεν 2
τοὺς μαθητὰς ἐμβῆναι εἰ
τὸ πλοῖον καὶ προάγει
αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ πέραν, ἕως ο
.ἀπολύσῃ τοὺς ὄχλου

the evening was come, he was there alone.

24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

1

καὶ ἀπολύσας τοὺς 2
ὄχλους ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρο
κατ᾽ ἰδίαν προσεύξασθα
ὀψίας δὲ γενομένης μόνο
.ἦν ἐκε

τὸ δὲ πλοῖον ἤδη μέσον 2
τῆς θαλάσσης ἦν
βασανιζόμενον ὑπὸ τῶ
κυμάτων· ἦν γὰρ ἐναντίο
.ὁ ἄνεμο

2

MATTHEW 14:25-27 · THE FOURTH WATCH

ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΝ ΙΔ · 25-27

25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

τετάρτῃ δὲ φυλακῇ τῆς 2
νυκτὸς ἦλθεν πρὸς αὐτοὺ

26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

3

περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τὴ
.θάλασσα

οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ ἰδόντες ٢٦
αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσση
περιπατοῦντ
ἐταράχθησαν λέγοντες ὅτ
Φάντασμά ἐστιν, καὶ ἀπ
.τοῦ φόβου ἔκραξα

εὐθὺς δὲ ἐλάλησεν ὁ ٢٧
Ἰησοῦς αὐτοῖς λέγων
Θαρσεῖτε, ἐγώ εἰμι· μ
.φοβεῖσθ

4

MATTHEW 14:28-31 · PETER ON

ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΝ ΙΔ · 28-31

## THE WATER

28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

5

ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Πέτρος 2
εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Κύριε, εἰ σ
εἶ, κέλευσόν με ἐλθεῖ
.πρὸς σὲ ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατ

ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· Ἐλθέ. καὶ 2
καταβὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ πλοίου
Πέτρος περιεπάτησεν ἐπ
τὰ ὕδατα καὶ ἦλθεν πρὸ
.τὸν Ἰησοῦ

βλέπων δὲ τὸν ἄνεμον 3
ἰσχυρὸν ἐφοβήθη, κα
ἀρξάμενο
καταποντίζεσθαι ἔκραξε
.λέγων· Κύριε, σῶσόν μ

εὐθέως δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς 3
ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρ
ἐπελάβετο αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγε
αὐτῷ· Ὀλιγόπιστε, εἰς τ
;ἐδίστασα

6

MATTHEW 14:32–33 · THE WIND CEASES

32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

33 Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

7

ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΝ ΙΔ · 32–33

καὶ ἀναβάντων αὐτῶν 3
εἰς τὸ πλοῖον ἐκόπασεν
.ἄνεμο

οἱ δὲ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ 3
προσεκύνησαν αὐτ
λέγοντες· Ἀληθῶς Θεο
.Υἱὸς ε

8

▽

*A reading*

The hand was already extended before Peter began to sink. The sinking is what let him feel that it was.

The pericope is the bright counterpart to Peniel. At Peniel a man is left alone in the dark, gripped by a wrestler whose name he is not given, wounded, blessed, renamed. In Matthew 14 a group of men is sent out into a storm at evening, and in the fourth watch of the night a figure approaches them across the water that has been tossing them. One of them, the most impulsive, asks to come out. The

figure says *elthe*, come. He walks. He sees the wind. He sinks. The hand is already there.

The two passages are not opposites; they are the same shape rotated. Peniel is the dark side: struggle, wound, withheld name, the limp. Matthew 14 is the bright side: call, step, falter, cry, the grasp. The patristic reading reads them as the two registers in which the same divine encounter is given. The contemplative tradition that descends from Origen through the Cappadocians through Pseudo-Dionysius through the medieval mystics holds the two together, and the four-cornered figure Peniel and Gethsemane and Tabor and the walking on the water names the four registers in which the encounter arrives: dark struggle, surrender, luminous vision, active call.

## The literal sense (*littera*)

The narrative sequence is precise. Jesus has just fed five thousand men besides women and children. He sends the disciples ahead in the boat, dismisses the crowds, and goes up the mountain to pray. By the time evening comes he is alone. The boat is in the middle of the sea. The wind is contrary; the verb *basanizomenon* in verse 24 is the same root used

elsewhere in the New Testament for torture and for the testing of metals. The boat is being tested by the waves.

The fourth watch (*tetartē phylakē*) is the Roman division running from roughly three to six in the morning, the last watch before dawn. Mark and Matthew use the Roman reckoning of four watches; the older Hebrew reckoning had three. The choice signals a Greek-speaking audience and dates the action to the hour before sunrise, the hour at which Peniel also resolved.

Jesus comes *peripatōn epi tēn thalassan*, walking on the sea. The disciples cry out *phantasma estin*, it is a phantasm. The Greek word does not mean angel or spirit in any neutral sense; it carries the connotation of an apparition, a delusion, a thing that is not what it appears to be. The fear is the fear of being deceived in a moment that already exceeds them.

Peter's request is conditional: *Kyrie, ei sy ei, keleuson me elthein pros se epi ta hydata.* "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee on the water." The *ei* is not skeptical; it is the conditional form by which a request is framed against the possibility that the figure is the phantasm the others have

named. Peter is asking for the call as the proof. The call comes, in a single word: *elthe.* Come.

He walks. The text is matter-of-fact: *periepatēsen epi ta hydata.* Then he sees the wind. Matthew alone records the sight of the wind as the trigger of the falter; in Mark the parallel pericope does not include Peter at all. He begins to sink (*arxamenos katapontizesthai*, the verb *katapontizō* is technical for being thrown into the deep, often in the LXX of judgment). He cries the shortest prayer in the Gospels: *Kyrie, sōson me.* The hand is extended *eutheōs*, immediately. The grasp lifts him. The rebuke names him: *oligopiste*, of little faith.

## The allegorical sense (*allegoria*)

The patristic reading of this pericope is dense and old. The boat is read as the Church. Tertullian, Cyprian, and the early Latin tradition treat it as a fixed figure: the *navicula Petri*, the little boat of Peter, sent ahead through the storm of history. The storm is the world's persecution and the soul's tribulation. The contrary wind is the resistance the world offers to the Church's crossing.

The water itself carries an older weight. The Genesis 1 cosmogony has the spirit of God moving over the face of the deep; the Psalter has the Lord whose way is in the sea, his path in the great waters (Ps 77:19); Job 9:8 has God who alone walks on the waves of the sea (*peripatōn epi thalassēs hōs ep' edaphous* in the LXX). The chaos-waters are the unformed before-creation, the surface that only the creator walks. The patristic reading takes Christ's walking on the sea as the figure of his sovereignty over the chaos that creation rests on, and the Church's sacramental crossing of the same water as the participation of the body of Christ in that sovereignty. Baptism enters the chaos-water and is brought up out of it; the Eucharist is fed in the boat; the Christian life is the crossing.

The fourth watch is read eschatologically. Origen, in his *Commentary on Matthew*, takes the watch as the final hour of the world's night, the hour before the dawn of the parousia. The Church is in its fourth watch when the figure comes. John Chrysostom, in *Homily 50 on Matthew*, develops the same reading at greater length: the boat is tossed because the Lord is praying on the mountain, and the praying is the cause of the eventual stilling. The intercession

on the mountain is the condition of the coming on the water.

The rebuke *oligopiste, eis ti edistasas*, "of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt," is read by the apophatic tradition as the Christian limit. Peter does not lack faith; he has enough faith to step out. He has too little to keep walking once he sees the wind. The Christian apophatic reading takes the diminutive *oligo-* as the standing condition of the soul under encounter: not faithlessness, which would not have stepped out at all, but the always insufficient faith that is the condition of human stepping. The grasp is offered to that condition, not to its overcoming. The rebuke is not punishment; it is the name the encounter gives to the sinking, and the giving of the name is the second half of the saving.

## The tropological sense (*tropologia*)

What the soul learns by doing what Peter does is a five-beat pattern: call, step, falter, cry, grasp. The pattern is the active counterpart to the Peniel three-beat of stay, hold on, ask. Peter does not stay; he is sent out. He does not hold on in the dark; he steps out into the call. He does not ask for a name;

he cries for rescue. The grasp is given to the cry the way the blessing is given to the holding on. The two texts read together give the soul the two motions it must learn: remaining in the dark and stepping out into the light. Each is incomplete without the other.

The first beat is the call. The Christian life does not begin with the soul's initiative. Peter does not invent the walking; he asks for the call and receives it. The second is the step. The call must be answered by the foot leaving the boat. The third is the falter. Matthew alone records that Peter sees the wind; the seeing is the falter. The fourth is the cry. *Kyrie, sōson me* is the minimum prayer of the Christian tradition, the entire Jesus Prayer in its earliest gospel form. The fifth is the grasp. The grasp is not earned by the cry; the cry is what lets the grasp register as grasp. The hand was already extended. The sinking is what let Peter feel that it was.

The lesson is not "do not look at the wind." The lesson is that the looking at the wind is built into the walking, that the falter is included in the journey, that the rebuke and the rescue are one gesture. The contemplative tradition reads this as the doctrine of perseverance in dryness: the soul that has stepped out will look at the wind, and the looking is the

condition of the cry, and the cry is the condition of the felt grasp. The encounter completes itself through the falter, not around it.

## The anagogical sense (*anagogia*)

The walking on the sea is read by the patristic tradition as a divine prerogative text. Job 9:8 LXX names God as the one *who alone walketh upon the waves of the sea as upon a pavement*; Psalm 77:19 names the Lord whose way is in the sea; Isaiah 43:16 names the one who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters. These are not incidental images. In the Hebrew Bible the sea is the chaos that only YHWH treads. When Mark and Matthew place Christ on the water, they are placing him where the Hebrew scriptures reserve only one foot.

The early Christological reading is at this level. The disciples' final cry *alēthōs Theou Huios ei*, "of a truth thou art the Son of God," is not decoration. In Matthew it is the first time the disciples as a group name him Son of God, and the naming follows the sea-walking the way the Tabor confession will follow the transfiguration in chapter 17. The structure of the recognition is the same in both pericopes: the disciples see

what only God does, and the seeing forces the confession. The walking on the water is anagogically the in-history glimpse of the eschatological condition under which the saints will themselves walk, lifted by the same hand, across the same water, into the same dawn.

## The throughline

The four-cornered figure holds. **Peniel** is dark struggle: night, silence, wound, withheld name. **Gethsemane** is surrender: the cup not removed, the will yielded, the sweat as of blood, the *genēthētō to thelēma sou* that completes the Lord's Prayer in the body of the one who taught it. **Tabor** is luminous vision: the face shining as the sun, the garments white as the light, the voice from the cloud, the falling on the face. **Walking on the water** is active call: the figure across the waves, the *elthe*, the step, the falter, the grasp.

The four registers are not stages on a ladder; they are the four sides of a square the Christian life moves around. There are dark nights and there are surrenders and there are flashes of light and there are calls across the water, and the same one who is the wrestler at the ford and the figure in the garden and the transfigured face on the mountain is the hand on the

wave. The contemplative tradition's task is to recognize the encounter under whichever face it arrives, and to give it the response the face requires: hold on, yield, behold, step out.

The hand was already extended before Peter began to sink. The sinking is what let him feel that it was. The same hand was on Jacob's hip in the dark, on the cup in Gethsemane, on the cloud at Tabor. The bright pericope and the dark pericope are the same pericope, read on opposite sides of the same dawn.

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Three Greek terms carry the weight of the pericope. *Tetartē phylakē tēs nyktos* (τετάρτῃ φυλακῇ τῆς νυκτός), the fourth watch of the night, names the hour between roughly 3 and 6 a.m. by Roman reckoning. The phrase signals a Hellenistic and military horarium against the older Hebrew three-watch night; the patristic tradition reads it eschatologically as the last watch before the dawn. *Phantasma* (φάντασμα) is the disciples' word for what they see; the term carries the connotation of apparition or delusion, distinct from *pneuma* (spirit) or *angelos* (messenger), and the early Greek apologetic tradition will use the same word to deny that Christ's resurrection

body is a *phantasma*. *Oligopiste* (ὀλιγόπιστε), "of little faith," is a vocative diminutive Matthew alone among the synoptics deploys; it occurs five times in this gospel and nowhere else in the New Testament. The diminutive is not contemptuous. It names the standing condition of the disciple who has stepped out and seen the wind: faith enough to step, not enough to keep walking.

# Colophon

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