

Sheep & Goats Ezekiel 34v17 Matthew 25v32 16th February 2023

Ezekiel 34v17 *"And as for you Oh my flock thus saith the Lord GOD behold I judge between cattle and cattle between the Rams and the he goats".*

Matthew 25 V32 *"And before him shall be gathered all nations additional separate them one from another as a shepherd divided his sheep from the goats".*

Under the law of the Passover, it was possible to offer either a lamb or a kid of the goats as both were clean animals, and it was acceptable for them to be sacrificed to provide blood to daub on the doorposts so that the Angel of death would pass by, Exodus 12v5. There was no difference made between a lamb and a kid in that particular offering and there is therefore no intrinsic negativity when considering the clean animal that needed to be offered in order that gods people well covered.

The passage in Ezekiel cited above demonstrates that in certain circumstances God makes a discernment between various cattle and between male sheep and male goats. In context The prophet is Speaking of the concern which a faithful shepherd has for his flock in contrast to the selfish practises of unfaithful shepherds. The faithful shepherd gathers his scattered sheep and delivers them out of all places in order that they are rescued even in inclement weather. The sheep are regarded as representative of the nation of Israel and they are brought back to their own land and fed upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers. Their fold is not restricted to one place but he said to be up on the high mountains of Israel. God himself has concern for this flock and will cause them to lie down in safety you bind that which was broken strengthen the sick and in contrast will destroy the fat and the strong.

The basis of the discernment between the two seems to be based on how the parts of this flock have been careless in their progress. They have trodden down the pasture which was supposed to be eaten and they have defiled the drinking places with their dirty feet. In addition there is a judgement between the fat Cattle the lean cattle Is an indictment against those who are panties overfed and have indulged themselves at the expense of others. Also the fact I have thrust with side and shoulder injuring some of the flock and have had no pity upon the diseased which they have pushed with their horns until they were forced to leave and were scattered abroad. God is not pleased with this selfish behaviour and the offenders will be judged according to God's stated standards.

This appears to be my judgement upon individuals rather than upon groups of people as a class. In this judgement everyone is responsible for their own actions and is individually punished or rewarded according to the individual decisions which they have taken in response to divine requirements.

Is the same basis of interpretation to be used when seeking to understand the parable of the sheep and goats from Matthew 25 which is the second section of our subjects to be considered this evening?

Animals are often used in the scriptures to represent nations. An example of this is found in Ezekiel 17 where a great eagle is used as the symbol of the invading power of Babylon. In Daniel chapter 8 A ram and a he goat are specifically described in verses 20 and 21

as being representative of Medo-Persia and Greece. The Holy Spirit thereby using symbolic representation to teach a truth. Both these nations were enemies of Israel and were instrumental in furthering the sufferings of God's people. In context it is inappropriate to consider the ram good and the goat evil.

Can it be determined in the verse says in Matthew whether the sheep and the goats are representative of individuals or nations which needs need to be judged by the Lord Jesus Christ who is the occupant of the throne at the time of which the vision speaks?

The context of the verse he said to be "*when the Son of man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered to all nations*". Is there to be a universal judgement of everyone then alive where by those who are judged worthy are to "*inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world*". In contrast the rejected are told to "*depart from him you cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*"?

When Jesus sits on the throne of his glory will be after the judgement seat has taken place and the saints glorified, as judgement must begin at the house of God and glory will follow once judgement has been established, 1 Peter 4v17. When Christ sits on his throne he will be surrounded by his adoring and glorified saints. They are his glory as a manifest collective. As an individual he has significant glory now, being seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven itself, something no other human being has ever done nor ever will do! Now that is glory! But it is glory not sufficiently appreciated as many do not "see" it at all and disregard what he has accomplished already, they must see it for themselves with their own eyes being unable to see anything with the eye of faith. The political intervention that will set him on the throne of Jerusalem will be undeniable and the power he will utilise will be unstoppable. A different earth-based glory, and a different throne to the one he now occupies.

In addition to the immortalised saints being part of that glory, the nation of Israel now saved and forming the kernel of the Kingdom will also be part of that glory. In Ezekiel God cared for His flock and has promised to return them to a place of safety. With Christ enthroned they will also be part of his saving glory as he will have saved them from their enemies and elevated them above other nations to a position of responsibility which is their birth right, the Truth is known as the Hope of Israel.

The basis of division is given. Christ will split the assembled throne on the basis of how they have treated his brethren. "*Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me?*" Are these brethren of which Jesus spoke, his spiritual brethren or his physical brethren? Does he mean Jews or the saints, the nation of Israel or the Ecclesia? As both surround his throne of glory perhaps he means both! Those who are his brethren are identified with him personally "*I was sick and you visited me*".

Those who are put on the right side and regarded as sheep, do not know that they have helped Jesus' brethren, they ask "*when saw we thee sick?*" Many are unaware of the true Ecclesia but help some in case of need for the sake of free speech or protecting the innocent. Are these motivations sufficient to earn a place in the Kingdom as a righteous individual? No only the gospel grants such individual salvation and helping someone who you do not realise is not what saves you as a person. However those who aid the Jew and

rescue them from persecution and prejudice do come under an earlier promise of God, Genesis 12v1-3 *"Whoso blesses thee I will bless and whoso curses thee I will curse"*. This divine promise given to Abraham the father of the faithful and the father of the nation of Israel goes right back four thousand years, and is still very much as true today as it has ever been.

Nations can be collectively rewarded and collectively punished. This can include those of that nation who in many ways have not earned the fate by their own individual actions, see Daniel 9v20 but who nevertheless come under the punishment of the nation despite their individual faith. It is therefore quite scriptural to consider the nations themselves as Qataris, Japanese, Nigerians, Americans, Brazilians, Finns, Swiss, Egyptians, Iranians, Indians, Chinese, Russians and Germans as those spoken of in the parable as gathered before him rather than all individual members of every nation. Each nation will be permitted to enter into that Kingdom period of one thousand years of peace and security as a nation but with the ultimate cessation of all nations except that of the state of Israel. Jeremiah 46v28. In this way it can be said that they *"inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world"*. The world here seems to be the Jewish world or society which God fashioned in the wilderness of Sinai and which interacted with the 70 nations from the sons of Noah which replenished the earth after the worldwide destruction in the Noahic deluge.

Sheep are representative of those who are granted entrance into the Kingdom. Sheep have certain characteristics and are herd animals who flock together and follow the shepherd. They have a clean diet, chewing the cud, and are sure footed, having cloven hooves. The goats are very similar being also a clean animal and part of the permissible diet of Israel under the Law of Moses. Their main difference with sheep is that they are a more solitary creature and whilst they can be found in herds are very content to be on their own and they are very destructive eaters devouring all in their path often to the ruination of the fertile ground. Over grazing by goats has devastated many parts of the Mediterranean world.

Those who are aware of the teachings of scripture cannot be included in the number of those who confess that *"when saw we thee an hungred and fed thee? Or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger and took thee in? Or naked and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick or in prison and came unto thee?"* Having read these passages as we have just done, they cannot be included in that group. Notice also that they are addressed collectively; *"Come YE blessed of my Father"* (not individually as thee). YE gave me drink, YE clothed me! They also reply collectively, *"when saw WE thee"*. Ten times these collective words are used here.

This understanding progresses the three parables of Matthew 25 from those caught out by the arrival of Jesus, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, to those individually accountable to him as those who were in receipt of the talents, to those sheep or goat nations who are judged on yet another basis. There is a developing harmony to this exposition, and it has been the standard view within the confines of the Truth since the times of the Pioneer Brethren.