

Bite Size Bible Study

Sheep and Goats pt 4 #75

By Pastor Lee

This is the last place in the Bible where Goats seem to be related to evil. However, the word goat is only used to stand for the people, or probably more accurately – nations, who do not do good deeds to their fellow man.

In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus speaks of the judgment of the nations using the imagery of sheep and goats:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, accompanied by all the angels, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The ‘sheep’ he will place at his right hand and the ‘goats’ at his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you made me your guest, I needed clothes and you provided them, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

Then the people who have done what God wants will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you our guest, or needing clothes and provide them? When did we see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ The King will say to them, ‘Yes! I tell you that whenever you did these things for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did them for me!’

“Then he will also speak to those on his left, saying, ‘Get away from me, you who are cursed! Go off into the fire prepared for the Adversary and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave me no food, thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, a stranger and you did not welcome me, needing clothes and you did not give them to me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

Then they too will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, a stranger, needing clothes, sick or in prison, and not take care of you?’ And he will answer them, ‘Yes! I tell you that whenever you refused to do it for the least important of these people, you refused to do it for

me!’ They will go off to eternal punishment, but those who have done what God wants will go to eternal life.” Matthew 25:31-46 (CJB)

When the King of kings returns His judgment of the nations seems to be whether or not they were doing good deeds for the people that they were in charge of. He equates doing these good works as to having done them for Himself. Remember everyone exists as the Image of God. Therefore if a nation or a person rejects any person (or treats them with disrespect), he is at the same time rejecting and disrespecting God.

Verse 46 presents us at least two problems: *Then they* [the goats] *will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous* [the sheep] *to eternal life.* It seems to be teaching salvation through works, when the rest of scripture teaches salvation comes through Jesus. If the passage is talking about nations then what happens to the individuals who do the good works? Are they condemned because of the nation they are a part of? Or are we only talking about the nations and not individual people?

The inconsistencies here only prove that we still don't completely understand these passages – not that they are not true; we just don't have all the context of what is being taught.

Final Summary

Because Jesus here uses goats as symbols of evil people who fail to do good deeds for God and the neighbor, does not imply that the goat is the personification of evil. The goat is more difficult to control and is often said to “do it's own thing”, Sheep are easily lead and for the most part stick together in the flock. This could be the basis of the idea that sheep represent those following Jesus where as the goat may be the wanderer.

Although goats generally have a positive meaning in the Bible, there are these few stories in the Bible that must be read and studied carefully in order not to make false assumptions. In extra-biblical literature there are abundant references to animals of many types being associated with evil and the Devil.

While these are the most direct Biblical connections between goats and evil, sheep are frequently and repeatedly referred to in the Bible as a symbol of the people of God. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who takes care of the sheep. Peter was instructed by Jesus to “feed my sheep,”

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