

The prophecy of the sheep and the goats

Ken Camplin

The separation of sheep from goats spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 25 is a judgement scene, but is it a judgement of the saints or a judgement of all nations? This article reviews the evidence.

SOME WRITERS go to considerable lengths to argue that the term “all nations” in Matthew 25:32 should be interpreted ‘from/of all nations’, even though it seems clear that the original Greek does not allow for such a translation. The customary explanation is that this prophecy refers to the judgement of the saints, on the basis of them *unconsciously* showing ‘extreme kindness or extreme unkindness to other brothers and sisters’. Arguments supporting the view that saints are *unaware* of being kind or unkind to other saints are not very convincing.

The context of Matthew 25

Jesus relates two parables regarding the judgement of the saints: the Wise and Foolish Virgins, and the Parable of the Talents. These two stories contain a hidden meaning that is characteristic of a parable. The prophecy of the separation of sheep and goats is not a parable, but a clear-cut account using figurative language; there are no hidden meanings. This signifies that Jesus has moved on from the context of telling two parables about the judgement of the saints to a straightforward prophecy about the judgement of the nations.

The broader scenario (Mt. 25, Lk. 21 and other prophecies)

- 1 Jesus returns in glory
- 2 the resurrection
- 3 personal judgement of the saints
- 4 judgement of the nations
- 5 the Kingdom of God established (mortal Jews and Gentiles are ruled by Jesus and the immortal saints).

Sheep and goats

Is there anywhere in the Scriptures where natural or spiritual Israel are referred to as goats? In Psalm 100:3 the psalmist writes concerning God’s

flock, “we are His people and the sheep of His pasture”. * See also John 10 concerning the Good Shepherd and his sheep. Jesus would have been well aware of Ezekiel 34, in which there is a description of *good and bad shepherds*, and *good and bad sheep* in Israel (in particular see verses 2,3,17,20-22 and 31. The AV of verse 17 is inaccurate; for “cattle and cattle” read ‘sheep and sheep’). In this whole chapter there is only a single reference to goats; verse 17 refers to “rams and goats” (*Young’s Literal Translation* has “rams and he-goats”, while the AV margin has “great he goats”.) The “rams” may be seen to represent Jewish elders; “goats” could refer to *secular Jews* who had revolted against Judaism and natural Israel.

The judgement of all nations (Mt. 25:31,32)

At the outset of this section it is appropriate to bear in mind the question, Where does the mortal population of the Kingdom come from? In Matthew 25:31 the Lord mentions that he will rule and judge from the throne of his glory. Clearly this must refer to Jerusalem. (See Luke 1:32 and Isaiah 24:21-23. Chapters 24 and 25 of Isaiah refer to the judgement of the nations and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.) But the question arises, How are good sheep separated from among the nations? Is it not possible that the same principle will apply that exists regarding saints? That is, they will be called out from all nations. Consider the following passages set out in the [table](#) at the top of page 403.

From these passages it can be argued that there are those among the nations (for example, individuals and ‘charity’ organisations) who have been/are kind (or unkind) to saints without

* Quotations from the NKJV unless stated otherwise.

Isa. 2:4	“He shall judge [Heb. <i>shaphat</i> , ‘as a magistrate assesses evidence’] <i>between the nations</i> ”
Isa. 9:7	“to . . . establish it [the Kingdom] with judgment [Heb. <i>mishpat</i>] and justice”
Isa. 11:4	“with righteousness he shall judge [<i>shaphat</i>] the poor”
Joel 3:12	“I will sit to judge [<i>shaphat</i>] <i>all the surrounding nations</i> ”
Zech. 14:16	“Everyone who is left [Heb. <i>yathar</i> , ‘remain over’] <i>of all the nations</i> which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts”
Acts 17:31	“He [God] will judge the <i>world</i> in righteousness”.

the saints in Ephesians 1:3,4,11 (ESV): “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, *even as He chose us in him before the foundation of the world . . . In him we have obtained an inheritance*, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him Who works all things according to the counsel of His will”. At the end of the Millennium the faithful of this mortal group from the nations could receive immortality and would therefore truly “inherit the kingdom” in a similar manner to the saints.

knowing it. So these people’s good works to saints can rightfully be described in this way: “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40).

However, in this context, how do we interpret “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”? Is it not possible to think that the view from the Divine perspective will be similar to that applied to saints? Consider Paul’s description of

Conclusion

In the light of the above comments it seems reasonable to conclude that Matthew 24 and 25 contain three separate judgements:

- 1 The Jewish nation 24:1-41
- 2 The saints 24:42–25:1-30
- 3 All the nations 25:31-46.

In each case, after the particular judgement, a remnant will enter the Kingdom.