

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats - Matthew 25:31-46

1. **Dispensational Context:** In the sequence of Matthew's parables, why is this specific parable considered the "official end" of the Lord's Great Prophecy?
2. **The Stage of Authority (Verse 31):** What is the distinction between the Lord's "presence" (*parousia*) during the Gospel Age and his "sitting on the throne of his glory"? How does Daniel's vision provide the prophetic background for this scene?
3. **The Associate Judges (Verse 31):** Who are the "holy angels" or messengers accompanying the King? How are they identified in Daniel's prophecy regarding the "saints of the Most High"?
4. **The Subjects of Trial (Verse 32):** To whom does the term "all nations" refer? Does this include the Church, and how does it involve the billions awakened from the dead for their individual "Judgment Day"?
5. **Individual Decisions vs. General Harvest (Verses 32-33):** How does the timing of an individual's judgment during the Millennium compare to the trial of the Church during the Gospel Age?
6. **Symbolic Dispositions (Verses 32-33):** What inherent animal behaviors make "sheep" and "goats" appropriate symbols for the two classes developed during the Millennium?

7. **The Inherited Dominion (Verse 34):** What is the specific “Kingdom” that the sheep inherit? How does its origin “from the foundation of the world” distinguish it from the spiritual reward promised to the Church?
8. **Internal Character vs. External Assignment (Verses 35-40):** Why are the “sheep” surprised by the King’s list of their deeds? What does this reveal about the nature of a successful heart-judgment?
9. **The Restitution Work (Verses 35-36):** Since literal hunger and sickness will eventually be eliminated, what do these acts of mercy symbolize in the context of human restoration?
10. **The Identification of “Brethren” (Verse 40):** In the Millennial application, who specifically are the “least of these my brethren”?
11. **The Nature of the Fire (Verse 41):** What is the significance of “everlasting fire” being “prepared for the devil”? How does this symbol apply to the destruction of evil powers and institutions of the “old world”?
12. **The Finality of the Kingship (Verse 46):** What is the etymological meaning of the Greek word ***kolasin***? How does the purpose of Christ’s kingship ensure the world is cleansed of the last trace of evil?

Numbered reference list:

1. **Bible Study Monthly Sheep and Goats** (Articles: January 1940; January/February 1946; April/May 1958; January/February 1972; May/June 1992)
2. **HTDB Version 8** (Watch Tower Reprints: R367, R719, R2303, R2606, R2607, R2833)
3. **Jesus' Parables in Contexts**
4. **MEGGISON** (Notes from the Bible of John A. Meggison)
5. **Our Lords Teachings by Parables — Dawn**
6. **Passover-Memorial — Frey**
7. **Thy-Word-is-Truth**
8. **Topical Comments Loomis**
9. **Vol 1: The Divine Plan of the Ages**
10. **Vol 3: Thy Kingdom Come**
11. **Vol 4: The Battle of Armageddon**
12. **Vol 5: The Atonement Between God and Man**

PARABLE STUDY NOTES

1. Dispensational Context: Why is this parable considered the “official end” of the Lord’s Great Prophecy?

- **Notes:** This parable completes the dispensational picture by dealing with the final group in the divine plan: the **World of Mankind** [3, p. 179]. The sequence in Matthew moves from the seven periods of the Gospel Age Church (Chapter 13) to the testing of the "sanctuary class" (Virgins and Talents), finally reaching the **Millennial Age Judgment**, which is the ultimate objective of all Jesus' teachings—the restoration of the human race [3, p. 3; 5, p. 58].
- **Individual Timing Lesson:** While there is a "general harvest" at the end of the 1,000 years, the trial is individual. Just as the trial for members of the Church ends and their case is decided **long before the Gospel Age ends** (as Paul finished his course and was ready for his crown, **2 Timothy 4:7, 8**), the decision for individuals in the Millennium will be reached according to their own character development. Some may reach perfection or incur the "Second Death" (symbolized by dying at a hundred years old, **Isaiah 65:20**) long before the Millennial Age is finished [1, Jan. 1940].
- **References:** *Jesus' Parables in Contexts*, pages 3 and 179; *Our Lord's Teachings by Parables — Dawn*, page 58; *Bible Study Monthly*, January 1940.

2. The Stage of Authority (Verse 31):

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.”

- **Notes:** This represents the **Mediatorial reign** established after the Gospel Age "time of trouble" has swept away the old order [5, p. 59]. Jesus modeled this "throne of glory" after **Daniel's vision (Daniel 7:9–10)**, where the "Ancient of Days" sits on a throne of splendor while myriads are assembled to receive dominion. It is distinct from the *parousia* (presence) used to gather the Church; this stage involves **individual judgment** and restoration for the world, occurring after the Son of Man is formally committed the kingship [1, Jan./Feb. 1946; 12, pp. 479–480; 2, R2606:3].

Volume 3 C-Foreword iv: "Messiah's Kingdom has various stages of inauguration. First, in His Parousia the glorified Jesus quickens, or resurrects, the sleeping members of the Body of Christ. This is the first executive act of the Great One whom God has so highly exalted – the Heir of the great Abrahamic promise. His members must be completed before He will officially take His position as the King of the world. Assurance of this fact is given by the inspired Word: "When Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." ([Col. 3:4](#)) Next in order the Master [Civ] deals with the living members of His Body, the Church. As shown in the parables of the pounds and the talents, the Master's judgment concerning worthiness or unworthiness in the Kingdom must pass upon all of His consecrated ones and the full number of the Elect must be found and be glorified by the resurrection "change" – because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." ([1 Cor. 15:50](#)) Then the dominion of the world will be assumed. The glorified One will ask of the Father, and He will give Him the heathen for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. "He will rule them with a rod of iron. As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken into shivers." [Psa. 2](#); [Rev. 2:27](#)"

- **References:** *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. 5: The Atonement Between God and Man*, pages 479–480; *Watch Tower Reprint R2606*, section 3; *Our Lord's Teachings by Parables — Dawn*, page 59; *Bible Study Monthly*, January/February 1946.

3. The Associate Judges (Verse 31):

- **Notes:** The "angels" (messengers) are the **glorified Church** (the Bride) [8, p. 64]. Having been "changed" to the divine nature and seated with Christ in his throne, they share his glory and assist as **associate judges** in the work of blessing and sifting the nations [10, p. 302; 2, R2606:3]. These "holy angels" are identified in Daniel's prophecy as the "**people of the saints of the Most High**" (Daniel 7:18, 27) who are joined with Christ in his Kingdom to assist in the "pruning" and blessing of the world [1, May/June 1992].
- **References:** *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. 3: Thy Kingdom Come*, page 302; *Watch Tower Reprint R2606*, section 3; *Topical Comments (Loomis)*, page 64; *Bible Study Monthly*, May/June 1992.

4. The Subjects of Trial (Verse 32):

"All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats."

- **Notes:** "All nations" represents the **world of mankind**, including those living at the start of the Millennium and the **billions awakened from the dead** for their individual trial [3, p. 180]. The **Church is not included** in this gathering; their judgment ends before the world's begins, and they already serve as the "judges" and "angels" in this scene [9, pp. 142–143; 2, R2606:3].
- **References:** *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. 1: The Divine Plan of the Ages*, pages 142–143; *Watch Tower Reprint R2606*, section 3; *Jesus' Parables in Contexts*, page 180.

5. Individual Decisions vs. General Harvest (Verses 32–33):

- **Notes:** While there is a final separating time at the close of the age, the **trial is individual** and based on heart development [1, Jan. 1940]. Just as the trial for members of the Church often ends **long before the Gospel Age ends** (2 Timothy 4:7, 8), the decision for individuals in the Millennium will be reached according to their own speed of character development. Some may reach perfection or incur the "Second Death" (Isaiah 65:20) long before the 1,000 years are completed, for sin will not be permitted to linger in those who are willfully rebellious [1, Jan. 1940; 5, p. 59].
- **References:** *Our Lord's Teachings by Parables — Dawn*, page 59; *Bible Study Monthly*, January 1940.

6. Symbolic Dispositions (Verses 32–33):

- **Notes:** These represent **internal dispositions**. **Sheep** are meek, teachable, and obedient; they "study the Shepherd's voice and run to obey," preferring the welfare of the flock over self-interest [4, p. 541]. **Goats** are self-willed, stubborn, and characterized by a desire for **prominence**, often "climbing on the rocks" of selfishness and isolated independence rather than following the Shepherd's leading [2, R2606:4–5; 3, p. 181].
- **References:** *Watch Tower Reprint R2606*, sections 4–5; *Jesus' Parables in Contexts*, page 181; *Notes from the Bible of John A. Meggison*, page 541.

7. The Inherited Dominion (Verse 34):

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:'"

- **Notes:** This is the **earthly kingdom**—the dominion of earth originally given to Adam, lost through sin, and restored to perfected mankind at the close of the Millennium [9, p. 305]. It was "prepared" for man as a human being from the start, unlike the "high calling" reward promised to the Church, which involves a change to the **divine nature** and was prepared in the secret counsel of God before the world began [2, R2606:6; 6, p. 640].
- **References:** *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. 1: The Divine Plan of the Ages*, page 305; *Watch Tower Reprint R2606*, section 6; *Passover-Memorial — Frey*, page 640.

8. Internal Character vs. External Assignment (Verses 35–40):

- **Notes:** The sheep are surprised because their goodness has become **instinctive** [3, pp. 183–184]. They did not follow a literal "list" of assignments to earn a reward; rather, they absorbed the **Spirit of God-likeness** (Love) so fully that they served others without thinking of it as special merit. The goats, conversely, may have performed outward acts as a calculated assignment without a genuine change of heart, looking merely for the reward [5, p. 60].
- **References:** *Jesus' Parables in Contexts*, pages 183–184; *Our Lord's Teachings by Parables — Dawn*, page 60.

9. The Restitution Work (Verses 35–36):

- **Notes:** These acts symbolize **restitution work** required for those still "**under ward**"—struggling with inherited weaknesses while on the way to perfection [5, p. 62]:
 - **Hunger/Thirst:** Assisting others to "hunger and thirst for righteousness" and providing **righteous information** [3, p. 182; 1, Jan./Feb. 1972].
 - **Stranger:** Helping those awakened from the dead to **assimilate and integrate** into the new holy society [3, p. 183].
 - **Nakedness:** Aiding others in obtaining the "robe of righteousness" (justification through righteous works).
 - **Sickness/Prison:** Encouraging those still "captured" by inherited Adamic infirmities as they progress toward **full human health** [3, p. 183].
- **References:** *Jesus' Parables in Contexts*, pages 182–183; *Our Lord's Teachings by Parables — Dawn*, page 62; *Bible Study Monthly*, January/February 1972.

10. The Identification of “Brethren” (Verse 40):

- **Notes:** In the Millennium, “brethren” refers to **all who reach perfection as human sons of God** [2, R2607:2]. The King identifies with all his restored people, counting service to any perfected human as service to himself, as all God’s sons (human, angelic, or divine) are brethren when they stand in harmony with the Father [3, p. 184].
- **References:** *Watch Tower Reprint R2607*, section 2; *Jesus’ Parables in Contexts*, page 184.

11. The Nature of the Fire (Verse 41):

“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:’”

- **Notes:** This “fire” is a symbol of **utter destruction** or the **Second Death** [12, p. 480]. Fire is chosen because it is an element that **“always destroys and never preserves life”** [9, p. 159]. This symbol also applies to the **“holocaust of fire”** which destroys the **evil powers and institutions of the “old world”** as the Son of Man assumes his kingship [9, p. 128; 1, Jan./Feb. 1946; 1, April/May 1958].
- **References:** *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. 1: The Divine Plan of the Ages*, pages 128, 159; *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. 5: The Atonement Between God and Man*, page 480; *Bible Study Monthly*, January/February 1946 and April/May 1958.

12. The Finality of the Kingship (Verse 46):

- **Notes:** The Greek word ***kolasin*** signifies a **“cutting off” or restraint** (as in pruning a branch from a tree) [2, R719:2]. This is a “death” punishment that is everlasting in its results, not a state of conscious torment [2, R367:4]. Christ’s kingship ensures the world is **cleansed from the last trace of evil**, for no trace of sin will be permitted to pass beyond the Millennial Age [7, p. 12; 1, Jan./Feb. 1972].
- **References:** *Thy Word is Truth*, page 12; *Watch Tower Reprints R719*, section 2 and *R367*, section 4; *Bible Study Monthly*, January/February 1972.