

# Bite Size Bible Study

Fate of Nations #166

By Pastor Lee

Do you have sections of the Bible that bug you? I have a number of them. The one I want to discuss here is Matthew 25:31-46. It seems to contradict what I have come to believe in what many other sections of the Bible teach. Recently I think I may have found at least a partial answer to the conundrum.

Let's look at the first few verses and see what it says and not what it doesn't say.

<sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, accompanied by all the angels, he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. <sup>33</sup> The 'sheep' he will place at his right hand and the 'goats' at his left. <sup>34</sup> "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.' (CJB throughout)

All seems well and good, but what seems to be the fate of the sheep and of the goats? <sup>46</sup> *They (the goats) will go off to eternal punishment, but those (the sheep) who have done what God wants will go to eternal life.*"

How is it that those who have done *what God wants* will receive *eternal life* while everyone else is going to have *eternal punishment*, when Paul tells us that <sup>23</sup> *since all have sinned and come short of earning God's praise* (Rom 3:23). And furthermore that Jesus died and rose to pay for the sins of everyone. <sup>16</sup> *For God so loved the world that he gave his only and unique Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life, instead of being utterly destroyed* (John 3:16).

I think that the misunderstanding lies partly with us and partly with our translators. Notice verse 32 again. It says that all of the NATIONS will be assembled before Him. However when we read SEPARATE PEOPLE we forget that He is addressing the Nations and not the people in the nations. But the translators have translated the words as SEPARATE PEOPLE.

The words "separate people" in Greek is *aphorizō autos*. *Aphorizō* meaning separate, divide, sever; and *autos* meaning them, referring back to nations. (Ref Blue Letter Bible) So it makes more sense to have v. 32 say *and he will separate them one from another*.

What have these nations done or not done that requires a separation? The character of the nation is the determining factor.

<sup>35</sup> *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,* <sup>36</sup> *I needed*

*clothes and you provided them, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'* <sup>37</sup> *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?'* <sup>38</sup> *When did we see you a stranger and make you our guest, or needing clothes and provide them?'* <sup>39</sup> *When did we see you sick or in prison, and visit you?'* <sup>40</sup> *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!'*

The character of this type of nation fits perfectly in Jesus' Kingdom. Nations not doing these things do not fit, and will need to change or they will cease to exist.

A few people, who are in power at any given time, virtually control the character of that nation. Look at the nations in the world today. What do you see? Some nations have a ruler that has no regard for the common people, who live in squalor and deprivation. But there are other nations that protect and provide for their people. Which nation is a sheep and which is the goat? Which nation fits into Jesus' Kingdom?

Those rulers of goat nations who possess that power will have much to learn in Jesus' Kingdom, but I believe that they will be re-educated to eventually become a part of His Kingdom.

Luke 12:47-48a shows that those who have much control over a nation – much will be required.

<sup>47</sup> *Now the servant who knew what his master wanted but didn't prepare or act according to his will, will be whipped with many lashes;* <sup>48</sup> *however, the one who did what deserves a beating, but didn't know, will receive few lashes. From him who has been given much, much will be demanded....*

Notice that the servant is not destroyed but may have to endure some consequences of not doing what was required of him. So I believe that those who reign over a nation will be commended or chastised according to their understanding of how God expects them to rule. They will make mistakes just as we as individuals do, but there was a reason that God put them in that position. That reason is not always clear. They are one of God's children, just as much as those of us who are not in those positions.

We each have been given what we can handle and our opportunity to excel in that position. We may have been given a family or a position at work or a position in our community. Are we acting like a sheep or a goat?

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