

Luke 15:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

Analysis

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness (τίς ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ὑμῶν ἔχων ἑκατὸν πρόβατα, tis anthrōpos ex hymōn echōn hekaton probata)—The rhetorical question assumes agreement: any shepherd would pursue the lost. Greek *apollymi* (ἀπόλλυμι, to lose/destroy) appears throughout these parables, emphasizing the peril of lostness. The ratio (99:1) shows the shepherd's disproportionate concern for the individual, not utilitarian calculation.

And go after that which is lost, until he find it (πορεύεται ἐπὶ τὸ ἀπολωλὸς ἕως εὑρή αὐτό, poreuetai epi to apolōlos heōs heurē auto)—The present tense 'goes' with 'until' (ἕως, heōs) indicates persistent seeking. This demolishes the common religious assumption that God waits passively for sinners to return. The shepherd takes initiative, abandons security, searches relentlessly. Jesus describes His own mission (Luke 19:10).

Historical Context

First-century Judean shepherds typically worked cooperatively, so leaving 99 in the wilderness didn't mean total abandonment—other shepherds would watch the flock. Sheep were valuable property; losing one represented significant economic loss. The wilderness (ἔρημος, erēmos) was dangerous terrain with predators and precipices. A shepherd's reputation depended on not losing sheep entrusted to him

(cf. John 10:12-13). The good shepherd risked his safety for each animal, a lived parable of divine care.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the shepherd's active pursuit of the lost sheep challenge any notion that God passively waits for us to find Him?
2. What does the 'until he find it' determination reveal about God's commitment to seeking you specifically when you wander?
3. If the 99 represent the self-righteous and the 1 represents repentant sinners, what does this parable teach about God's priorities?

Interlinear Text

Τίς	ἄνθρωπος	ἐξ	ὑμῶν	ἔχων	ἑκατὸν	πρόβατα	καὶ
What	man	of	you	having	an hundred	sheep	and
G5101	G444	G1537	G5216	G2192	G1540	G4263	G2532
ἀπολωλὸς	ἐν	ἐξ	αὐτό	οὐ	καταλείπει	τὰ	
he lose	one	of	it	not	doth		G3588
G622	G1520	G1537	G846	G3756	G2641		
ἐννενήκονταεννέα	ἐν	τῇ	ἐρήμῳ	καὶ	πορεύεται	ἐπὶ	
the ninety and nine	in		the wilderness	and	go	after	
G1768	G1722	G3588	G2048	G2532	G4198	G1909	
τὸ	ἀπολωλὸς	ἕως	εὑρή	αὐτό			
it	he lose	until	he find	it			
G3588	G622	G2193	G2147	G846			

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 34:16 (Parallel theme): I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.

Luke 19:10 (Parallel theme): For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

1 Peter 2:25 (Parallel theme): For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Psalms 119:176 (Parallel theme): I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

Ezekiel 34:31 (Parallel theme): And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.

Matthew 12:11 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

Isaiah 53:6 (Parallel theme): All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jeremiah 50:6 (Parallel theme): My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace.

Luke 13:15 (Parallel theme): The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?

Romans 2:1 (Parallel theme): Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.