

Matthew 10:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Analysis

Jesus restricts the mission: 'go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (εις οδον εθνων μη απελθητε και εις πολιν Σαμαριτων μη εισελθητε πορευεσθε δε μαλλον προς τα προβατα τα απολωλοτα οικου Ισραηλ). This temporary restriction (later reversed in 28:19) reflects salvation history's order: 'to the Jew first' (Romans 1:16). Israel received God's covenants, law, and promises; they get first opportunity to receive Messiah. 'Lost sheep of the house of Israel' evokes God's shepherd imagery (Ezekiel 34). Despite Israel's covenant privilege, they're lost and need the Shepherd. The restriction is strategic, not ethnic favoritism—Jesus must offer Himself to Israel before extending salvation to nations. Their rejection becomes grounds for Gentile inclusion (Romans 11).

Historical Context

Jewish-Samaritan hostility dated to the Assyrian conquest (722 BC) when foreigners intermarried with remaining Israelites, creating mixed-race Samaritans with syncretistic worship. Jews considered Samaritans heretics and half-breeds, avoiding contact. Gentiles were 'unclean' outsiders to God's covenant. Jesus' restriction to Israel reflects His primary mission: offering Himself as Jewish Messiah to covenant people. After resurrection, the Great Commission (28:19) sends disciples to all nations. Acts chronicles this expansion: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of earth (Acts 1:8). Paul's missionary pattern likewise prioritized synagogues before turning to Gentiles.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. Why did Jesus temporarily restrict the gospel to Israel before opening it to all nations?
2. What does the phrase 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' reveal about Israel's spiritual condition?
3. How does understanding salvation history's progression help us interpret Scripture's particularistic and universal themes?

Interlinear Text

πορεύεσθε δὲ μᾶλλον πρὸς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα
go But rather to sheep the lost
G4198 G1161 G3123 G4314 G3588 G4263 G3588 G622

οἴκου Ἰσραήλ
of the house of Israel
G3624 G2474

Additional Cross-References

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.

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.

Acts 13:46 (Parallel theme): Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye

put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

Ezekiel 34:6 (Parallel theme): My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

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.

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

Acts 3:26 (Parallel theme): Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

Matthew 18:10 (Parallel theme): Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

Ezekiel 34:8 (Parallel theme): As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock;