

Matthew 25:33

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Analysis

Sheep on his right hand (τὰ πρόβατα ἐκ δεξιῶν, ta probata ek dexiōn)—The right hand (dextros) symbolizes honor, favor, and power throughout Scripture (Psalm 110:1, Acts 2:33-34). Sheep represent the redeemed, characterized by recognizing the Shepherd's voice (John 10:27).

Goats on the left (τὰ ἐρίφια ἐξ εὐωνύμων, ta eriphia ex euōnymōn)—The left hand position signifies dishonor and judgment. While goats aren't inherently evil in Scripture, here they represent those whose profession of faith proved empty, lacking the fruit of genuine conversion (James 2:14-26).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern courts positioned honored guests at the king's right hand (1 Kings 2:19). The imagery reflects biblical covenant theology where blessing and cursing, life and death, are set before humanity (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). This spatial division at judgment fulfills Jesus's earlier teaching about the narrow and wide gates (Matthew 7:13-14).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the sheep/goat distinction challenge cultural Christianity that claims faith without transformation?
2. What does positioning at Christ's right hand teach about grace versus works in salvation?
3. How should the reality of final separation affect our evangelistic urgency today?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	στήσει	τὰ	μὲν	πρόβατα	ἐξ	δεξιῶν	αὐτοῦ	τὰ
And	he shall set			the sheep	on	right hand		
G2532	G2476	G3588	G3303	G4263	G1537	G1188	G846	G3588
δὲ	ἐρίφια	ἐξ	ἐωνύμων					
but	the goats	on	the left					
G1161	G2055	G1537	G2176					

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 100:3 (Parallel theme): Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Psalms 110:1 (Parallel theme): The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Psalms 45:9 (Parallel theme): Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.

Hebrews 1:3 (Parallel theme): Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Psalms 95:7 (Parallel theme): For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice,

Psalms 79:13 (Parallel theme): So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations.

Ephesians 1:20 (Parallel theme): Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,

Mark 16:19 (Parallel theme): So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

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