

Humble Child and Straying Sheep**Matthew 18:5—14**

Jesus uses a child to illustrate that believers must come to Him in humility. He will not accept those who come with an air of pride because they think they are sufficient within themselves. The Pharisees were full of pride in their own good works (Matthew 23:5). They defined their own good works instead of seeking what God desired. Why would they look to Christ for their salvation when they were the great and pious religious leaders in charge of the people? Only those who realize their great spiritual need and come in faith, believing that Christ is the only way of salvation, will be given eternal life (Matthew 23:12).

Receive or offend a child (verses 5—6)

The verses just previous to this emphasized the need to be humble just as a child is naturally humble in the presence of adults. Verse six tells us this section is about believers and seems to specifically apply to the Little Flock of believers who will gain entrance into the Millennial Kingdom. These people are humble, not puffing themselves up as the Pharisees do, but willingly put themselves under their Messiah with the realization that it is through Him alone that they can gain righteousness and a place in the Kingdom.

Those who accept the Little Flock of believers will be credited with accepting their Messiah, Jesus Christ. During the Tribulation there will be many in Israel who will call the Remnant evil and will try to destroy them (John 16:2; James 4). Saul (Paul) was already killing this “evil” Remnant before the Tribulation had even started so I can only imagine that things will be much worse when the Tribulation is underway. Isaiah 66:5 states that this will be the case during the Tribulation. Good will be called evil while evil will be praised as respectable. This is why the righteous remnant will need to hide during the Tribulation. Their family and friends will become their enemies as stated in Mica 7:5—6 and Matthew 10:21, 35.

According to Matthew 25:31—44 the Gentiles will be judged for how they treat the remnant of believers during the Tribulation. Those who help Israel during this time are in effect doing it to Christ. Those who mistreat Israel do so against Christ. I believe it will be their faith that is being demonstrated through works. As James says, faith without works is dead (James 2:14—25). Their actions show whether they receive the Remnant (child) or do things that will cause the Remnant to stumble.

Stumbling blocks and stumbling (Verses 6—9)

Those who cause any of the righteous Remnant to stumble and sin will be condemned. It would have been better for that man to drown himself instead of having the guilt of tripping up a godly man rest on his shoulders. According to verse 7 there will be a number of stumbling blocks that will trip up the Remnant however, these stumbling blocks come out of one man. I believe this man is the Antichrist who will be empowered by Satan. He will cause many to stumble by making them take the mark of the beast. It will be too hard for them not to do this because not taking it will often mean certain death for him or his family.

Verse 7 also contains an interesting phrase stating that offences must come. This is because the time of offences being spoken of here is the Tribulation and Daniel has already stated in his prophecy that the Tribulation was to come after Jesus’ death. There is no way to avoid this time of offence. It was delayed but not done away with. The Tribulation will begin sometime after the Rapture.

It’s interesting to juxtaposition Christ as a stumbling block to apostate Israel (Isaiah 8:14; Romans 9:32—33) with the Antichrist as a stumbling block to the Remnant. During the Tribulation, those who stumble will appear as evil while the Antichrist will appear good and using miracles to convince Israel that he is from God. These signs will even fool the remnant if it weren’t for the power of God (Matthew 24:23—24).

Their angels (verse 10)

Israel has a very special relationship with angels. From Abram and the burning bush (the Angel of the Lord was a Christophany—an appearance by the preincarnate Second Person of the Trinity) to the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19) and at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:13). Michael seems to be

Israel's guardian angel (Daniel 10:13, 31) and in the last days God will send His angels to fight with Israel (Zechariah 14:5; Matthew 24:31).

The special relationship Israel has with angels does not carry over to us today in the Church, the Body of Christ. Hebrews 1:13—14 clearly teaches that they are sent from God to minister to Israel. Since Hebrews is written to Israel, we can learn from it but we should not take it for ourselves. Passages such as Hebrews 13:2 are often used to show how we need to be hospitable to people because we might end up offending an angel if we don't. I personally believe this refers to special manifestations of angelic beings to Israel such as when angels came to Abraham and Sarah to announce the upcoming birth of Isaac (Genesis 18).

Most people from this Matthew passage believe we each have guardian angels that watch over us. This idea is propagated with shows like "It's a Wonderful Life" and "Touched by an Angel." This does not apply to us but will apply to the believing remnant of Israel as they go through the Tribulation. We have something much better than angels to help us in our daily life. God has given us the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit who seals us unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30), opens up spiritual things to us (1 Corinthians 2:10—13), Intercedes for us (Romans 8:26—27), strengthens us (Ephesians 3:16), and more.

The straying sheep (verses 12—14)

Sheep in Scripture always refers to Israel except for one reference in Matthew 25:31—33. Most people will understand this passage to be talking about the future Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:11—12. The goats are people who are cast into hell while the sheep are the saved who are given eternal life. Many use this passage to show that there is salvation by works. Dispensationally this passage is a judgment of Gentiles after the Second Coming. These Gentiles, I believe, will be considered a part of Israel as proselytes and therefore stand before God as sheep. They have nothing to do with the Body of Christ in this Age of Grace. Using sheep to refer to the today's believers is simply wrong.

This parable is almost always misinterpreted to mean that we need to go out into the world to bring unbelievers to Christ. What they don't explain is why this sheep was once part of the sheepfold. This parable also fits in with the lost coin and the prodigal son (Luke 15:8—32). The son was already part of the family but had wandered away. At best these parables are about the turnabout of a wayward Christian.

From a dispensational vantage point we can understand the sheep are the nation of Israel. They are all in the sheepfold regardless of their spiritual condition. The lost sheep is actually the one who becomes a believer. They become the little flock of Luke 12:32. Ezekiel 34 supports this by showing the leadership of Israel as bad shepherds who have been taking from the sheep (the people whom they are to care for) for their own profit. They were to feed, heal and bind them together but instead had grown fat at the flock's expense and caused them to scatter. Compare the bad shepherds with the good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. He came to feed, heal and bind together His little flock of believers. Since these leaders of Israel were mistreating the flock, God is going to take Israel away from them (verse 10).

Verse 11 continues by spelling out Jesus' ministry while on earth, searching for His lost sheep. According to Matthew 10:6 His mission was to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. We know from our vantage point that almost all of Israel was lost but very few knew their condition. The ninety-nine sheep in this parable are the ones who thought they were already righteous and didn't need a Savior. It was that one sheep who realized his need and he is the one whom the Good Shepherd was searching for. When the leaders of Israel saw Jesus eating with publicans and sinners they wondered how He could stoop so low. Jesus told them those who are healthy (the leaders thought they were) don't need a physician (Matthew 9:10—13). The leaders and most of Israel were completely blind to their true condition.

This explains why Isaiah 53:6 compares Israel with lost sheep and why David in Psalm 119:178 compares himself with a lost sheep that needs to be sought after by the Lord. David is a picture of the Little Flock going through the Tribulation. Just as David sought the face of the Lord, the remnant of believers going through the Tribulation need to seek His face also (Psalm 27:8; Hosea 5:15).

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