

The parable of the separation of the sheep and goats in chapter twenty-five of the Gospel of Matthew is one of those passages that many have found difficult to interpret. This fact explains why it has so often been misunderstood and misinterpreted.

Before we get into our discussion, it would be helpful to point out that many commentators prefer to call this portion of Scripture an illustration rather than a parable. This is because it describes a literal future event; a Judgement of the Nations on Earth that will occur at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In describing this judgement Jesus said:

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.*

*(Matthew 25:31-34)*

The people gathered at this judgement are those who have survived the upheavals of the end times. We are told further on that the sheep are believers and the goats are unbelievers; those who opposed the Gospel and showed no concern for the Lord's people.

The goats are judged and sentenced to hell, while the righteous inherit the Kingdom prepared for them since the foundation of the world. To this point most agree, but not all Christians agree as to who “*these brothers of mine*” are referring to in verse forty and forty-five.

According to proponents of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, they are a Jewish remnant who will believe in Christ as the Messiah during the Great Tribulation.

Such an interpretation introduces a third party, making the sheep people who evidenced some faith in God by the means with which they treated these Jewish believers!

Together with these Jewish converts, these “Gentile helpers” will be the only people with unglorified bodies to enter Christ’s Millennial Kingdom and inhabit the Earth during His Reign.

As stated, other Bible teachers disagree with this view. However, we will not discuss these opposite opinions in this article, only one. This is because our intent is not to defend any particular view on the Rapture. Rather, the aim is to address a more serious question the Pre-Tribulation interpretation of Matthew raises – the basis for man’s salvation!

It has been rightly argued that such a conclusion suggests the sheep enter Christ’s Millennial Kingdom based on works, and not through the New Birth!

Certainly, a superficial reading of the text would seem to suggest that salvation is the result of good works. Yet when interpreted in an overall biblical context, it is clear these works of charity were not what made them sheep, but the effect!