

Who Are “Christ’s Brothers”? *Examining Matthew 25:31-46*

“And in reply the king will say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, To the extent that YOU did it to one of the least of these my brothers, YOU did it to me.’”—Matthew 25:40 (NWT)

INTRODUCTION

After completing work on the article titled “Is It *Really* About Loyalty? To Whom?” and some remarks I made therein concerning the Society’s handling of the parable at Matthew 25:31-46, I received some complaints over what I wrote, complaints which included the accusation that my reasoning was unfounded in several ways. In response to those accusations and rebuttals, I am submitting this follow-up article wherein I will try to address the complaints—as well as elaborate on what I have come to believe the passage is saying about the yet-future separation of the “sheep” and the “goats.” I will also provide the scriptural reasons why I feel the Society’s current understanding of the parable is in error, and—as always—it will be up to the reader to weigh the evidences and determine who presents the stronger case.

Please keep in mind that I am not one to write as though I have the only absolute explanation on the Bible, but I *do* strive to ensure that I have scriptural backing for what I write—and what I wrote in the above-mentioned article *does*, I feel, have scriptural support, yet needs clarification and a certain number of amendments. Thus, with this article I will submit further detailed analysis of the passage. This is to not only respond to the accusations raised, but to perform a critical examination of a passage which can and has been apparently misunderstood by mainstream Christianity, and potentially by the Watchtower organization as well.

My premise is that those referred to as “the least of these my brothers” is *not* a reference to the Society’s current application, that being the “faithful and discreet slave” in the sense portrayed within the Watchtower organization—those making up only those who believe they have the “heavenly calling.” At least not in the *exclusive* sense.

However, since that view has been in place within the Watchtower organization for literally *decades*, to the extent that it has become a *traditionalized teaching*, the burden of proof rests upon me to support my premise and argue its validity before fellow Witnesses—and this I will do, Jehovah willing. Still, it is equally understood and acknowledged that regardless of whatever proofs I submit within this article, there will be those who will reject it (and its implications) for the simple reason that I am a (nobody) whereas the Society is not—at least in the eyes of “Jehovah’s Witnesses” the world over. But, whatever may be said about me (and my supposed “intentions” in presenting my arguments), the Bible *must* be allowed to judge the matter.

Timothy Kline, January 7, 2004

Sentence Construction and My Suggestion for a Comma

When I discussed the passage, I brought out how I felt that it was possible (even plausible) that a comma needed to be inserted into the expression “the least of these my brothers” in order to have the expression fit what the remainder of the parable was describing. While I admit that I said this because to keep it in the original construction (without the comma) would seem to lend credibility to the Society’s current teaching on the verse in question, it *also* seemed *logical* from my reading of the scripture in my native English language. As an avid reader, I do not recall ever coming across a sentence written anywhere near what Matthew 28:40 has been. Even so, it would be highly inappropriate for me to say that such a sentence structure hasn’t been used *anywhere* simply because I personally have not come across such in my own experience.

That’s why I drew a comparison to Luke 23:43—because here was another passage which mainstream translations publish a scripture in a particular way while the Society *departed* from such a rendering for the *New World Translation of the Greek Scriptures*. If it was possible that the majority of Christian Bibles are wrong on a particular rendering of a Greek scripture, why would it be so difficult to fathom that Matthew 28:40 might also have an alternative rendering which the producers of the *New World Translation* may have passed over in favor of the widely-accepted rendering currently published in Christian Bibles? These are questions I asked myself as I wrote about the passage in the article “*Is It Really About Loyalty? To Whom?*”

Unfortunately, because I am not familiar with the Greek Language, or, more specifically, not familiar with the Greek used in the Christian Greek Scriptures, I opened myself up to criticism for proposing a rendering which apparently is “impossible” in the original Greek from which the scripture is derived. One such reader submitted the following to me:

I could not help but notice a very serious error you made in regards to your analysis of Matt.25:40. You presented Luke 23:43 with having "a grammatical structure similar" to Matt.25:40. However, the disputed portions of Luke 23:43 and Matt.25:40 are worlds apart. On pages 3 and 4 you also seemed to paint a false picture concerning Luke 23:43, arguing that the only basis for our preferred punctuation is to make a grammatically ambiguous text fit the context of the rest of the Bible. While that is certainly our *primary* motivation, we also have a translation *precedent* for translating Luke 23 verse that way (see Rotherham's Bible and the Codex Vaticanus). Not to mention other grammatical considerations (see Appendix A in *_Jehovah's Witnesses Defended_* second edition, for more details). One should note that the comma(s) could be legitimately be placed anywhere in the phrase AMHN LEGW SOI SHMERON and still be grammatically acceptable. But the same cannot be said of the disputed portion of Matt.25:40. You claim that a much better rendering would be: "To the extent that YOU did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, YOU did it to me."

The problem with [t]his logic now begins to manifest itself. In Matt.25:40, ADELFWN is in the genitive case, and part of the genitive phrase TOUTWN TWN ADELFWN MOU TWN ELAXISTWN. For this structure, there are three possibilities: 1) That TWN ELAXISTWN is in apposition to (TWN) ADELFWN, or 2) That HENI TOUTWN TWN ADELFWN MOU is in apposition to TWN ELAXISTWN (as the head noun (hENI) does not have to be

genitive to form a genitive of apposition), or 3) hENI TOUTWN is functioning as a partitive genitive for the rest of the clause. There is simply no grammatical precedent in koine Greek to justify separating the genitive construction TWN ADELFWN MOU with commas, and taking it as a direct address. In any of the three possibilities, TWN ADELFWN MOU serves as part of the clause in explaining *who* should be treated as they were Christ themselves.

Part of the problem in getting something like this from a person hoping to correct me is that I don't know what a "genitive," "genitive phrase," "genitive of apposition," or all the other technical terms *mean*. Before writing this follow-up article, however, I took the time to acquaint myself with the meaning of these technical terms, although I still do not *understand* them in relation to the placement of the comma in an expression. But, based on what I have since discovered, the inclusion of a comma is not allowed under Greek linguistics in the expression TOUTWN TWN ADELFWN MOU TWN ELAXISTWN because it defies known, established rules governing Greek language structure. Therefore, until I either learn Greek, or someone else can make presentation of a justifiable reason why inclusion of a comma between "least of these" and "my brothers" *is* acceptable and/or plausible, I will concede that I had not considered that possibility when I presented my alternative, proposed rendering.

However, in spite of this, leaving the sentence as it stands—as "the least of these my brothers"—does *nothing* to either prove or disprove the Society's current teaching. All this accomplishes is that the current *translation* is accurate. We are still left to contend with the *interpretation* of the scripture and either proving or disproving the Society's current understanding—or, at the minimum, present a plausible alternative interpretation that can be adequately supported from the Scriptures.

With that goal in mind, let us take a closer look now at the passage in question.

Setting the Stage: “When the Son of man arrives in his glory...”

The first thing we need to do in order to gain an understanding of the passage is to determine the *setting* of the passage. According to Jesus, what we will be examining will take place *when he arrives in his glory*. Since he used the expression “in his glory,” we know that this is speaking of an event still in *our* future, for he has yet to be revealed to the world-at-large in any manner that fits this description.

After his glorious manifestation to the world, he will *afterwards* “sit down on his glorious throne.” This will prove to be the throne of judgment between the “sheep” and the goats.” This will be at a time when “all the nations will be gathered before him.” What is it he will do as he sits upon this throne? “He will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” Those familiar with the Bible will call to mind two references to this “shepherding” of “the nations.”

And she gave birth to a son, a male, who is to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod. And her child was caught away to God and to his throne.—Revelation 12:5 (NWT)

And I saw the heaven opened, and, look! a white horse. And the one seated upon it is called Faithful and True, and he judges and carries on war in righteousness. ¹² His eyes are a fiery flame, and upon his head are many diadems. He has a name written that no one knows but he himself, ¹³ and he is arrayed with an outer garment sprinkled with blood, and the name he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ Also, the armies that were in heaven were following him on white horses, and they were clothed in white, clean, fine linen. ¹⁵ And out of his mouth there protrudes a sharp long sword, that he may strike the nations with it, and he will shepherd them with a rod of iron. He treads too the winepress of the anger of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ And upon his outer garment, even upon his thigh, he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.—Revelation 19:11-16 (NWT)

It is this second instance which we will be including in our examination of Matthew 25:31-46, because it seems to tie directly in with what Jesus describes. The use of the expression “a sharp long sword” in the Bible often is symbolic of *judgment* rendered. The judgment Jesus renders in separating the “sheep” and the “goats” will indeed be decisive. Interestingly, in both accounts in Revelation, the shepherding is done with “a rod of iron.” This is interesting because in the second account, the “sharp long sword” will be used to “strike the nations,” whereas the “rod of iron” will be used to shepherd. A sword, when it is struck against something, *cleaves* or *divides*. So, the separating of the “sheep” and the “goats” must evidently take place *before the shepherding begins*, but *after* the separation work. And since, according to the account, those who are judged as “goats” will be cast off in a summary judgment, it’s also evident that the “goats” aren’t the ones being shepherded by the “rod of iron.” Therefore, “*them*” in Verse 15 doesn’t refer to “the nations” in their entirety prior to the separation, but those remaining *after* the separation, yet the remnant of “the nations.” That will be a significant point which we will examine later.

Now, in the second passage cited from Revelation, in Verse 14, we are told that “the armies that were in heaven were following him on white horses.” This, if the parallel with Matthew 25 holds correct, is a reference to the angels which will arrive with the

“Son of man.” Their task will be to gather out from the “fields” (world) all those causes for stumbling and the ones engaged in lawlessness.

“When the Son of man arrives in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne. ³² And all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”—Matthew 25:31-32 (NWT)

The harvest is a conclusion of a system of things, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Therefore, just as the weeds are collected and burned with fire, so it will be in the conclusion of the system of things. ⁴¹ The Son of man will send forth his angels, and they will collect out from his kingdom all things that cause stumbling and persons who are doing lawlessness, ⁴² and they will pitch them into the fiery furnace. There is where [their] weeping and the gnashing of [their] teeth will be. ⁴³ At that time the righteous ones will shine as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let him that has ears listen.—Matthew 13:39-43 (NWT)

What this does is once again establish the point raised in the previous article, that the Society is very much in error by saying that the fulfillment began its fulfillment back in the early part of the previous century, since: 1) the “weeds” and the “wheat” continue alongside one another until the time of the harvest (Matthew 13:30); 2) the “sheep” and the “goats” continue alongside each other until the time of the judgment (harvest) (Matthew 25:31-32); 3) the separation of the “sheep” from the “goats” (the “wheat” from the “weeds”) will result in a removal of the “things that cause stumbling and persons who are doing lawlessness,” obviously events which have not taken place yet, because there continues to be causes for “stumbling” and wicked ones among “Jehovah’s Witnesses” in spite of written claims that we are enjoying a “spiritual paradise” at the present time.

The “sheep” will be put on Jesus’ “right hand” while the “goats” will be placed “on his left.” Throughout the Bible, the “right hand” symbolizes a position of *favor* and or *great importance*. (Compare Psalm 110:1; Acts 7:55, 56; 1 Peter 3:22) This positioning of the two groups is of interest to students of God’s Word because of what was recorded at Ecclesiastes 10:2, cited below:

The heart of the wise *is* toward his right, but the fool's heart toward his left.—Ecclesiastes 10:2 (LITV)

Here in this scripture, we see that the wise course of the “sheep” places them in the right hand of Jesus, while the foolish course of the “goats” causes them to be placed on the left.

But what course did these two groups take? What was it they did (or did not do) which caused Jesus to judge them in such a way? Let’s examine the passage further.

“When did we see you...?”

One of the most intriguing aspects of the passage is that there are three groups being discussed by Jesus as he relates the details to his disciples.

We have the “sheep,” who are somehow pronounced “blessed” and allowed to “inherit the kingdom” and have “everlasting life.” We have the “goats,” who are cast off into “everlasting cutting-off.” And we have the *catalyst* for this decision, an otherwise unknown group referred to only as Jesus’ “brothers.” How these “brothers” are treated by the “sheep” and the “goats” is the determining factor on how Jesus judges them.

It is also curious that such an *important* and apparently *life-threatening* event is mentioned *only* in Matthew’s account. Is this due to the audience that the Gospel of Matthew was written to, namely, the Jews? Why, if this is such an important aspect of the Truth, is it not discussed in the remaining Gospel accounts? Or even in later letters of Paul, Peter, or even John? It is difficult to conceive how something so vital is relegated to a mere 15-verse illustration, yet it will have far-reaching consequences.

Be that as it may, let us move ahead in the discussion. We will explore just *who* Jesus’ “brothers” are shortly, but first we need to finish the current aspect: what makes the “sheep” sheep and the “goats” goats, in relation to Jesus’ “brothers.”

At face value, one thing should be clear to us by now, and this was mentioned in the previous article: neither the “sheep” nor the “goats” are aware of the implications of their actions towards Jesus’ “brothers,” thus ruling out the Society’s current interpretation and insistence that we must “do good” towards the Society in order to secure our place among the “sheep” and obtain salvation. Notice the following:

Jesus says:	The “sheep” say:
For I became hungry and YOU gave me something to eat; I got thirsty and YOU gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and YOU received me hospitably; ³⁶ naked, and YOU clothed me. I fell sick and YOU looked after me. I was in prison and YOU came to me.’	
	Then the righteous ones will answer him with the words, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and receive you hospitably, or naked, and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to you?’
And in reply the king will say to them, ‘Truly I say to YOU, To the extent that YOU did it to one of the least of these my brothers, YOU did it to me.’	

This is not some rhetorical question that is being asked by the “sheep” when Jesus makes his judgment concerning them: they *really are* not aware of the implications of

their actions regarding Jesus’ “brothers.” There is a reason for this, but we’ll get into that shortly. For now, pay particular attention to the fact that the “sheep” keep asking, “When did we see you?” Again, there is no scriptural basis to read this as though it is rhetorical, that they already have their answer. But there *is* scriptural grounds for accepting it at face value.

Similarly, with the “goats,” we see the following conversation taking place.

Jesus says:	The “goats” say:
<p>“Then he will say, in turn, to those on his left, ‘Be on YOUR way from me, YOU who have been cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. ⁴²For I became hungry, but YOU gave me nothing to eat, and I got thirsty, but YOU gave me nothing to drink. ⁴³ I was a stranger, but YOU did not receive me hospitably; naked, but YOU did not clothe me; sick and in prison, but YOU did not look after me.’</p>	
	<p>Then they also will answer with the words, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you?’</p>
<p>Then he will answer them with the words, ‘Truly I say to YOU, To the extent that YOU did not do it to one of these least ones, YOU did not do it to me.’</p>	

It is another curious fact that belief and acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah is *not* a factor in this judgment, and therein lies our first clue in actually identifying who “the nations” are in this illustration. These individuals are judged based on their works in relation to Jesus’ “brothers,” not on their *faith*. Did they act kindly toward these “brothers”? Did they *not* act kindly? Are we talking about someone that closes the door to us on Saturday mornings? Or that refuses to join our organization? Most certainly not, as will be made clear. The facts will show that these “nations” are those who have never even had the opportunity to learn of the Christ, which is why they are not judged on acceptance or rejection of Jehovah’s provision for reconciliation and atonement.

Remember what Jehovah said to Abraham concerning “the nations”?

And Jehovah said: “Am I keeping covered from Abraham what I am doing? ¹⁸ Why, Abraham is surely going to become a nation great and mighty, and all the nations of the earth must bless themselves by means of him.—Genesis 18:17-18 (NWT)

And Jehovah’s angel proceeded to call to Abraham the second time out of the heavens ¹⁶ and to say: “‘By myself I do swear,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘that by reason of the fact that you have done this thing and you have not withheld your son, your only one, ¹⁷ I shall surely bless you and I shall surely multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens and like the grains of sand that are on the seashore; and your seed will take possession of the gate of his enemies. ¹⁸ And by means of your seed all nations of the earth will certainly bless themselves due to the fact that you have listened to my voice.’”—Genesis 22:15-18 (NWT)

Obviously, these “nations” haven’t yet “blessed themselves,” have they? For the remainder of the Hebrew Scriptures, the nations continued in their course, apart from God. The Jews referred to the “nations” as the *Gentiles*. And it wasn’t until the early years of Christianity that these peoples of “the nations,” the Gentiles, were invited to become Christian.

The reason why this is mentioned is that in Abraham’s case, the nations that he encountered nearly always acted *favorably* towards the patriarch, even though they did not worship his God. In many instances down through the generations, surrounding “nations” *recognized* that God was with the nation of Israel, even though they themselves did not worship Jehovah God. Because they recognized this fact, they acted favorably toward Israel. Of course, we can find numerous exceptions to this, but then we also can see some will act unfavorably towards Jesus’ “brothers” up until the time of their being declared “goats,” so we should not be surprised to find exceptions in the Hebrew Scriptures. But there are definite indications that a parallel situation is going to occur at some point in our future.

How so?

Did you notice what it was that the “sheep” and the “goats” needed to do for Jesus’ “brothers”?

According to Jesus, they would provide food, drink, clothing, even health care. They would visit those imprisoned. And while their heart moved them to do these things, they will not realize the full import of what they are doing, or who they are caring for! That’s why they are seen asking the question, “When did we see *you* in such-and-such condition?” If they really *knew* Jesus, they would’ve understood what it meant to Jesus and Jehovah God that they were doing such kindnesses to Jesus’ “brothers.” Still, Jesus is not counting their ignorance against them—only their either doing the right thing, or not doing the right thing will be counted against them.

Which brings us to the question we should already be asking: Is this a reference to the poor and less-fortunate among us? Admittedly, I felt this was the case until it was pointed out to me that the Greek expression cannot be broken up as I had presented in the previous article, and my attempt to show that how we treat and what we do for “the least of these,” that is, the less fortunate, will qualify us as Jesus’ brothers. And, as I said at the outset of this article, I am not qualified to argue against established rules of Greek grammar, so I am left with presenting my case in light of the fact that the “sheep” and the “goats” are acting favorably or unfavorably toward those described as Jesus’ “brothers.”

So, if this is not about how we treat the less-fortunate among us, but instead is about Jesus’ “brothers,” what does the illustration then mean?

To find the answer to that question, we must look to events yet to occur.

“For I became hungry and YOU gave me something to eat...”

Students of God’s Word may already be familiar with events which are expected to take place in our future, and this is good, because we are told to “keep on the watch.” Still, one of those events yet to unfold is probably not one we spend a lot of time thinking about, and yet it ties directly into our discussion.

The “sheep” and the “goats” each have opportunities to feed, clothe, visit and care for Jesus’ “brothers.” This opportunity has not yet presented itself, however. It will occur somewhere ahead of us in the stream of time.

Again, let us turn to Jesus for how we know this to be the case:

“Then people will deliver YOU up to tribulation and will kill YOU, and YOU will be objects of hatred by all the nations on account of my name. ¹⁰ Then, also, many will be stumbled and will betray one another and will hate one another.—Matthew 24:9-10 (NWT)

The account in Mark records it in this way:

“As for YOU, look out for yourselves; people will deliver YOU up to local courts, and YOU will be beaten in synagogues and be put on the stand before governors and kings for my sake, for a witness to them. ¹⁰ Also, in all the nations the good news has to be preached first. ¹¹ But when they are leading YOU along to deliver YOU up, do not be anxious beforehand about what to speak; but whatever is given YOU in that hour, speak this, for YOU are not the ones speaking, but the holy spirit is. ¹² Furthermore, brother will deliver brother over to death, and a father a child, and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death; ¹³ and YOU will be objects of hatred by all people on account of my name. But he that has endured to the end is the one that will be saved.—Mark 13:9-13 (NWT)

In both accounts, we are warned that betrayals will take place, even within one’s own family. In addition, we will become “objects of hatred” on account of our bearing Jesus’ name—in other words, because we are *Christians*.

Is *this* what leads to the scenario where the “sheep” and the “goats” will have an opportunity to act merciful towards Jesus’ “brothers”? The answer is yes...and no. To better understand, we must now take a few moments to look at a passage in the book of Revelation.

By now, you may have already anticipated where this discussion is going, but if so, please bear with me.

At Revelation 13, we first are told of an event which calls for a “marking” upon every living person:

And I saw another wild beast ascending out of the earth, and it had two horns like a lamb, but it began speaking as a dragon. ¹² And it exercises all the authority of the first wild beast in its sight. And it makes the earth and those who dwell in it worship the first wild beast, whose death-stroke got healed. ¹³ And it performs great signs, so that it should even make fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the sight of mankind.

¹⁴ And it misleads those who dwell on the earth, because of the signs that were granted it to perform in the sight of the wild beast, while it tells those who dwell on the earth to make an image

to the wild beast that had the sword-stroke and yet revived. ¹⁵ And there was granted it to give breath to the image of the wild beast, so that the image of the wild beast should both speak and cause to be killed all those who would not in any way worship the image of the wild beast.

¹⁶ And it puts under compulsion all persons, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the slaves, that they should give these a mark in their right hand or upon their forehead, ¹⁷ and that nobody might be able to buy or sell except a person having the mark, the name of the wild beast or the number of its name. ¹⁸ Here is where wisdom comes in: Let the one that has intelligence calculate the number of the wild beast, for it is a man's number; and its number is six hundred and sixty-six.—Revelation 13:11-18 (NWT)

Clearly, those *without* the “mark” will be unable “to buy or sell.” And yet the only ones who will refuse this “mark” are Christians, for they will recognize the meaning behind it. But because of our resolve to refuse the “mark,” the system of things is going to go particularly hard on us. We will literally be unable to buy the necessities of life, or sell our possessions to obtain them. While some of us are caught and sent off to prison, the rest of us are going to be pushed to the limit trying to provide not only for ourselves, but for our families, and yes, even our children. If ever there will be a need for endurance on our part, it will be when this prophecy is fulfilled! (see Revelation 14:12)

We can begin to understand, can we not, what is meant when Jesus spoke those words at Matthew 25:35-36 and Matthew 25:42-43. Through some means yet to be revealed, certain ones will, in spite of the risk of their own lives and livelihood, come to our assistance in that time. They will provide us with food, a drink of water, clothing. Think of it as the situation described by Anne Frank in her remarkable diary, and it is very possible that it will be akin to her experience. The conscience of some will cause them to act favorably toward us, without realizing the full implications of their positive actions, and what it will mean to Jesus when they do.

On the other hand, there will also be those who will have the opportunity to help, but will not do so. These are likely to prove out to be the betrayers that Jesus warns us against. They will likely be of the mindset that we brought our troubles on our own selves, and that we are getting what we deserve.

However, since these events are yet to occur, we can only speculate. Even so, we certainly will be in no position to rely upon *anyone's* help, for we will not know who to trust or who to avoid. So, the time we use now to establish Christian friendships with one another, perhaps even privately putting together a course of action for when such an event does occur, may be in our best interests.

But is this speaking only of deeds done towards the Society? More specifically, is this speaking of only deeds done towards those who feel they are of the “heavenly class,” and make up the theoretical “faithful and discreet slave” class within the Watchtower organization? Just who *are* Jesus’ “brothers”? That is what we shall now determine.

“...the least of these my brothers...”

As was brought out in the previous article, it is my contention that the expression “my brothers” is *not* exclusive to the Society nor to the group of “Jehovah’s Witnesses” who believe they are of the “anointed, heavenly class.”

I do find it interesting that there are so many theories regarding the identity of the “brothers” mentioned in Matthew 25:40. They can’t *all* be correct, can they?

One school of thought is that the passage is speaking of Christian missionaries. Another is that this is speaking of Jews. The Society promotes still another explanation, saying that it is speaking of “Jesus’ anointed brothers.”

While there are several Bible-based reasons why I feel that applying the term “Jesus’ brothers” to missionaries would do the passage injustice, there is, in my opinion, scriptural reasons one could present for this referring to Jews. Among them: Jesus himself was born a Jew. If one feels that this is a reference to natural-born brothers through heritage (born of Israel), then one could start their case there. Second, the book of Matthew was written to Jews, according to the majority of Bible scholars both past and present. This may tie in with the reason that Matthew is the only Gospel to discuss this illustration.

Since I do not personally subscribe to this particular application of the passage, I will leave it to someone else to argue the possibility. For me, the Society’s explanation for “Jesus’ brothers” leaves certain unanswered questions, some of which have already been asked in this follow-up *and* in the previous article. It is also a matter of historical record that when the Bible speaks of “the nations,” it is speaking of those who are not worshipers of Jehovah God. This, in itself, should be enough to give us pause in assigning the general ranks of “Jehovah’s Witnesses” to being among those who will be judged as “sheep” or “goats,” since every Witness considers themselves a worshiper of Jehovah God, and thus not to be included among “the nations” in the sense that it is used throughout the Bible. Somehow, the Society overlooks or dismisses this facet of the illustration.

We can also establish that *only* Christians will refuse the “mark” which is foretold to be imposed upon the world, according to the book of Revelation. That means that those who *do* accept the mark must be the ones known as “the nations,” since they *will not* be worshipers of Jehovah God and disciples of Christ (otherwise, they would reject the “mark,” knowing its significance). Can it really be proven by the Society that *only those of the “anointed class” of Jehovah’s Witnesses* will refuse the “mark”? I do not believe so, and if they did, the implications would be far-reaching upon Witnesses the world over who are not of the “anointed class.”

By default, we are left with the conclusion that since Christians will be the only ones who refuse the “mark,” subsequently placing themselves in a situation where they will be unable to obtain the necessities of life, and *non-Christians* will be accepting the “mark,” some of whom will (aid and abet) the Christians in that time—whether out of conscience, pity, mute disagreement, or totally unaware that they are actually helping Christians—and some will not, out of loyalty to the system, hard-heartedness, spite, all of

which can easily be classed as “lawlessness.” This doesn’t mean that only certain Christians (namely, the “anointed class” among Jehovah’s Witnesses) will be refusing the “mark,” but rather *all* who are Christian will do so. The conclusion, then, is that Jesus’ “brothers” *are the entire body of Christian believers*.

Of course, one would expect that if this is a true and accurate identification, we will find scriptural support for an otherwise outlandish suggestion (at least the Society considers it outlandish and baseless). One might argue that only a Christian would “do good” to Jesus’ “brothers,” but such reasoning would require overlooking the facts as presented by the illustration: those among the “sheep” and the “goats” do not know Jesus as the Christ! Whether this is through ignorance, one’s culture, or this is due to the fact that while they may *say* and *claim* to be Christians, they really haven’t come to *know* what it means to be Christian, we cannot say—for only Jehovah and His appointed King, Jesus can read hearts of men. Whatever the case, it is evident that they are *not yet Christian*. They also are not to be confused with those described as having “come out of the great tribulation,” for those ones are described as not hungering anymore nor thirsting anymore (Revelation 7:9-10; 7:13-17).

How can I make this last statement when Revelation 7:9 *clearly* says that there will be a “great crowd” that comes out of the tribulation? One reason is because this “great crowd” is such that “no man was able to number.” This does not require us to conclude that the number is so numerous that they can’t possibly be numbered. Nor does it require us to link those judged as “sheep” with those having coming “out of the great tribulation.” Rather, the “great crowd” is described as unable to be numbered by men because they become “hidden” during the tribulation. Conversely, if they were able to be numbered, they could also be found and killed during the time that the “mark” is imposed upon the world. (Confer with Amos 6:10; Isaiah 26:20-21; Matthew 10:16-23) Those judged as “sheep” may actually play a role in “hiding” the members of this “great crowd.”

Another reason why we cannot say that the “sheep” and the “great crowd” are one and the same is because those described as the “great crowd” are said to “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb.” This, by the Bible’s own description, cannot include those declared “sheep,” since they are not judged on the basis of their faith in Jesus—and by extension, they have yet to “wash their robes and [make] them white in the blood of the lamb.” The “sheep” will do so during the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus, along with countless others who will be raised up in the resurrection. This view lends support to Revelation 20:8, where upon his release from abyss, Satan then proceeds to “go out to mislead those nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war.”

In this scene, “those nations” are those who were declared “sheep” and allowed to enter the Kingdom and come to knowledge of Jehovah and of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to seek forgiveness on the merits of the ransom sacrifice—but *will still need to have their faith tested* through the release of Satan after the thousand years have ended. This is not a reference to those of the “great crowd” who already had their faith tested and galvanized by the aforementioned tribulation, only somehow then needing to *once again* have their faith tested at the end of Jesus’ Millennial Reign, as the Society currently teaches in their “one final test” myth.

By the process of logical reasoning and deduction, we have at last defined *who* Jesus' "brothers" are in the illustration of the "sheep" and the "goats." They are the followers of Jesus—disciples of the Christ and advocates of Jehovah's Kingdom. Not just an elite group referred to as the "anointed heavenly class" but *all believers*. They are the ones who will loyally refuse to accept the "mark" which will be imposed upon the world, but, because of their resolve, face life-threatening conditions during the time of the "great tribulation" which is to come upon the earth, unable to obtain even the necessities of life because they will be unable to buy or sell under the coming imposition of Satan's will upon the world of humankind. They will have their faith tested and refined, and afterwards declared righteous. From the greatest to the least, they are precious to our Grand Creator; and how they are treated by non-believers during the tribulation will determine which non-believers will be allowed to enter into the Kingdom to also have the opportunity to "wash their robes" and make them white "in the blood of the lamb" during the Thousand Years.

There are several scriptures which support such a view, but it is outside the scope of this article to address them. These will have to be discussed in a later article on "Who Is the 'Faithful and Discreet Slave'?"

However, one suggested scripture to reference is found at Matthew 10:40-42:

⁴⁰ "He that receives YOU receives me also, and he that receives me receives him also that sent me forth. ⁴¹ He that receives a prophet because he is a prophet will get a prophet's reward, and he that receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will get a righteous man's reward. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water to drink because he is a disciple, I tell YOU truly, he will by no means lose his reward."—Matthew 10:40-42 (NWT)

Notice that Jesus says that "whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of water to drink," an expression that leads us back to Matthew 25:35. Not because the "little one" that is given "a cup of water to drink" is of the "anointed, heavenly class," but because they are a *disciple* of Jesus—in other words, they are a Christian. There are other scriptures we could examine, but as was mentioned, such a discussion will need to wait until another article.

One more point that needs to be discussed (but falls outside the scope of this discussion on identifying *who* Jesus' "brothers" are) is what is meant by "inherit the kingdom prepared for YOU from the founding of the world," because this remark is made to the "sheep" in the illustration. (Matthew 25:34, NWT) Such a discussion is important, because there are certain aspects which seem to be getting overlooked by many Witnesses. Jehovah willing, we will discuss those soon.

--Timothy Kline, January 8, 2004