

# The Parable of the Lost Sheep

## Luke 15: 1-7

**DIG:** Who is in Jesus' mixed audience? How do they respond to Him? How does this parable relate to the muttering of the Pharisees? What did the Pharisees teach God's attitude was toward sinners? What is Messiah's point?

**REFLECT:** When did you stray from the good Shepherd? What did He use to bring you back? How does that make you feel about your value to the LORD? How might this parable affect your relationships with unbelievers you know?

**The one main point to the parable of the lost sheep is that God rejoices over the salvation of one sinner who repents.**

Salvation of a soul is not the stale transaction some think it is. Redemption (see my commentary on **Exodus Bz - Redemption**) is not a matter of divine accounting by which ADONAI keeps books on who is in and who is out. On the contrary, He weeps over the **lost** and celebrates when one is **found** (i.e. **saved**). His pain is profoundly deep over humanity's lost condition, and His joy is full when a sinner **repents**.

The Gospels often contain identical, or very similar sayings addressed to different audiences. This parable would be a good example. The parable in **Matthew 18:12-14** (see **Gh - If Anyone Causes One of These Little Ones to Stumble**) appears to be identical to Luke's parable here. Yet **Matthew's** account is addressed to the apostles (**Matthew 18:1**). In **Luke**, however, the parable is addressed to the Pharisees and Torah-teachers who protest **Yeshua's** practice of eating with **tax collectors and sinners**. It can be argued that **Jesus** told two similar parables on two different occasions to two different audiences.<sup>1096</sup>

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus (**Luke 15:1**). The imperfect Greek tense for **were all gathering** signifies continual action, meaning that the **tax-collectors and sinners** came to **Jesus** as a matter of habit. Wherever **He** went, a crowd of social outcasts gathered around **Him**. There were publicans, criminals, robbers, thugs, prostitutes and other riffraff who made no effort at all to live by either the Torah or the Oral Law (see **Ei - The Oral Law**). As we have seen, this bothered the self-righteous **Pharisees and Torah-teachers** a great deal. **They** could not stomach a **Messiah** who was popular among the outcasts of Jewish society, and who at the same time, was critical of **their** rabbinical traditions.

But the Pharisees and the Torah-teachers muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). In despising sinners, the apostate religious leaders deemed themselves to be reflecting God's attitude toward sinners. **Pharisaic Judaism taught that there is joy before ADONAI when those who provoke Him perish from the world.** Consequently, in their thinking, HaShem hated sinners and withdrew Himself from them. Since Christ welcomed sinners and even ate with them, it was another indication (along with not believing in the Oral Law) that He could not possibly be the long-awaited Mesiach. So the Master Teacher told them a parable to reveal the attitude of God toward sinners in contrast to the attitude of the Pharisees and the Torah-teachers toward sinners.<sup>1097</sup>

Yeshua wanted everyone to relate, so He started in on the men and boys first with a tale of a beloved sheep who strayed. Then Jesus told them this parable: **Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Sheep** have a propensity to wander. Any **shepherd** worth his salt had to work overtime to keep his precious flock in check. Yet there always seemed to be one that slipped his careful watch and steered off the beaten path. What a great concern he must have had. **Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country, literally desert, and go after the lost sheep until he finds it (Luke 15:3-4)?** No self-respecting **shepherd** would be satisfied with **ninety-nine sheep** out of **a hundred**. While no one **sheep** was worth more than all the others, they were all in his care. So he went looking for **the foolish one** that didn't even know that danger it was in. For many **shepherds**, this was not only a duty; it was also a matter of **their** love for **their sheep**. **The shepherd** would know each **sheep by name (John 10:3)**. Every night he would count and examine them when they came back into the fold. If **one** was **lost**, he would go out into the night to find it.

This shepherd metaphor is also seen in the book of Ezekiel, where God Himself said: **I Myself will search for My sheep and look after them.** ADONAI will intervene personally on Isra'el's behalf. His actions would restore Isra'el to her Land from the nations and to pasture her like sheep in good grazing land. God will do what the false shepherds failed to do - tend, search, bring back, strengthen and shepherd with justice. After judging the individual sheep, God will appoint a new shepherd, His servant David (see my commentary on **Revelation Fi - The Government of the Messianic Kingdom**). God's care and protection will result in peace for His people, "I will make a covenant of peace with them." Ha'Shem will restore Isra'el because of her unique relationship with Him. **You are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, and I am your God, declares Adonai ELOHIM (Ezekiel 34: 11-31).**

And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, with the belly of the lost sheep up against his neck and the legs snugly against his chest, and goes home. When he found the sheep he did not punish it or scold it. He only felt a sense of joy that the lost sheep had been found. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." This was not something he could celebrate alone (Luke 15:5-6). Accordingly, Christ taught that joy is the natural response to the recovery of one who is lost.

The apostate religious leaders could not imagine that God would want to pursue any sinner. They believed that HaShem hated sinners and He would only rejoice in their death, not their restoration. But in truth ADONAI loves sinners and actively searches for them. He rejoices when they repent. Thus, the Pharisaic separation from sinners was, in truth, not in keeping with the heart of God.

Then Jesus spells out His point: I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent (Luke 15:7). In other words, when one sinner repents, God calls for a celebration in heaven. He is the good Shepherd whose desire is to rescue His sheep. ADONAI is not simply recording transactions on the big scoreboard in the sky. He so desperately longs for souls to be saved that He goes out of His way to pursue them. Then when the wayward lamb is brought back into the fold, heaven itself is scarcely big enough to contain His joy.<sup>1098</sup>