

Speckled Sheep and Goats

The Blessing of God Upon Jacob

- ²⁵ As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country.
- ²⁶ Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you."
- ²⁷ But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you.
- ²⁸ Name your wages, and I will give it."
- ²⁹ Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me.
- ³⁰ For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?"
- ³¹ He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it:
- ³² let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages.
- ³³ So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen."
- ³⁴ Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said."
- ³⁵ But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons.
- ³⁶ And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock.
- ³⁷ Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks.
- ³⁸ He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that

- is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink,
- ³⁹ the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted.
- ⁴⁰ And [Jacob separated the lambs](#) and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban's flock.
- ⁴¹ Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks,
- ⁴² but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's.
- ⁴³ Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Genesis 30:25-43

Sheep and Goats

The words “[sheep](#)” and “[goats](#)” appear together in the ESV a total of nine verses in the Bible. Three of these are in the NT. [Hebrews](#) speaks of the prophets saying, “[They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated ... wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth](#)” ([Heb 11:37-38](#)). Sheep are dumb animals. Because of this, they are also in constant danger from predators and their own lack of sense. The prophets wearing their garments, perhaps personifying these sheep the people of Israel, were themselves forced to wander into the wild places, because their messages were

rarely received in a good light. Predators such as corrupt kings and priests were constantly trying to silence them.

The other NT text that speaks about sheep and goats is in [Matthew](#). The Lord Jesus said, “[Before him \[the Son of man\] will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ ... Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ ... all these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” \(\[Matt 25:32-33, 41, 46\]\(#\)\). In this passage, our Lord \[refers to people as sheep and goats\]\(#\). Here, the elect are sheep and the non-elect are goats. Those who care about the poor and tend to the needy and downtrodden are sheep, those who do not are goats.](#)

It is obviously a metaphor, but it [has roots in the OT](#). Ezekiel says, “[As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between](#)

rams and male goats” (Ezek 34:17).¹ Here, the metaphor is changed slightly. There are both good and bad sheep and there are both good and bad goats. All are in the same flock.

In other places where these metaphors are used, sheep are not always good: “I will bring them [Babylon] down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams and male goats” (Jer 51:40). Goats are not always bad: “Flee from the midst of Babylon, and go out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as male goats before the flock” (Jer 50:8). In this verse, God is warning his people. “When the sheepfold was opened, the rams would lead the way. The summons was for the exiles to flee the coming catastrophe to be brought by a coalition of great nations from the north.”² Yet the point remains, people are called both sheep and goats in both the OT and NT.

The origins of this metaphor come from the pastoral, shepherding culture that Israel would have to become after

¹ “The separation of sheep from goats in 25:32 may allude to Ezek. 34:17–19.” Craig Blomberg, “Matthew,” in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 90.

² Gerald L. Keown, *Jeremiah 26–52*, vol. 27, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 365.

the Exodus. Thus, the Psalmist says, “Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock” (Ps 78:52). Like the sheep, the people were completely in the hand of the Shepherd. They had to trust him completely for their care. Of course, they didn’t.

In light of their rebellion as sheep, the very image would have been profoundly vivid to a people whose laws demanded the regular sacrifice of both sheep and goats because of their sins. The first time “sheep” and “goats” appear in the Law of Israel it says, “Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats” (Ex 12:5). Here, we can see that sheep (*kebes*) and goats (*ez*) can both be called “lambs” (*seh*). But the more important point is that any sacrificial goat had to be “without blemish.” One commentator summarizes what a blemished lamb would be when he says, “Lame, spotted, off-colored animals are just as tasty as perfect ones.”³ Blemished animals were spotted or off-colored.

³ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 275.

Slaves and Wages

It is into all of this biblical theology of sheep and goats that we must read the story before us today, for this is the origin story of all later biblical reflection on sheep and goats. It is the story of **Jacob** desiring to leave for home, and **Laban** his uncle trying to keep him in Haran. As these are the two main characters in the story, you are to remember about how both of them have been shown to be **deceivers**. Jacob deceived his brother Esau; Laban deceived his nephew Jacob. What we will discover is that Jacob is beginning to show signs of becoming a changed man, while Laban becomes ever more hardened in his sin.

“As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, ‘Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country’” (**Gen 30:25**). **Eleven sons** have just been born to Jacob from four different women. But the moment **Joseph** is born to his precious Rachel, Jacob finally decides to return home. His father Isaac had told him, “**Go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become**

a company of peoples” (Gen 28:2-3).” Then God himself came to Jacob and said, “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Gen 28:15). Now, finally, his fourteen year agreement to serve Laban for his daughter Rachel has come to an end. It is time to return home.

But Jacob is not free to leave unless Laban releases him. “Send me away” is the same language Abraham’s servant used years earlier when he came to the same place and found Rebekah (Gen 24:56). It is the language of someone who does not belong to himself, but rather belongs to another. In other words, Jacob is Laban’s slave. But this is not slavery as we in America are accustomed to thinking of it. Laban does not own Jacob as property. Jacob is not considered sub-human. Rather, Jacob has willingly become an indentured servant.

What is an indentured servant? Some of you may “feel” what it is on a daily basis, as you reluctantly go to work. One person recently said, “We live in a place now that feels just about like a plantation. We're all indentured

servants.”⁴ In America, indentured servants were people who paid for their passage to the New World by working for an employer for x number of years. Their “wage” was to come to America. Modern indentured servants seem to work, not because they love the work, many can’t stand what they do. They work, not because they freely choose to follow their dreams, but simply because they are slaves to their material possessions, possessions that do not seem to bring them very much happiness in the end. They are “**working for the weekend.**” They have to work to have all those material things that they want to badly. They are slaves to their own riches.

Jacob was in some ways like both the older and the newer indentured servant. He had entered into an agreement where his “wage” would be Rachel. She would become his new world, and with her, he could return victorious with the promise to his home land. **But Leah became the wage** he was in bondage to, as he was tricked by Laban on his wedding night. For that, he had to work seven more years for Rachel and their freedom. So he

⁴ This was Prince in a strange interview I happened to watch this week. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwjefpNkuas>.

loved working for Rachel, but hated it for Leah.

Yet, he works anyway, and now the time has come. The debt has been paid. “Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you (‘serve’ can also be translated as ‘slaved’), that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you” (Gen 30:26). Jacob has finished his side of the bargain. But Laban is not so quick to return the favor. His response is both courteous and cunning. He does not want Jacob to go.

We find out why: “If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you” (27), Laban tells Jacob. This verse reveals two things that demonstrate he does not want Jacob to leave. First, Laban is probably using things later forbidden in Israel’s law code, in an attempt to figure out what he should do with Jacob. “Divination” here is the verbal form of *nachash* (the Serpent of Gen 3:1). These laws say things like, “There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these

things is an abomination to the LORD” (Deut 18:10-12).⁵

The idea is that Laban is trying to discover the source of his newly found wealth, and so he resorts to divination.⁶ So Calvin says, “Some interpreters imagine that Laban, having been instructed in magic arts, found that the presence of Jacob was useful and profitable to him ... To me the true interpretation seems to be, as if he had said, that the blessing of God was as perceptible to him, as if it had been attested by prophecy, or found out by augury.⁷ But the point is, Laban has no intention of just letting Jacob go.

⁵ Some argue that the phrase should be translated, “I have grown rich” rather than “practiced divination” (“The translation *I have grown rich* is obtained by taking *ni ašî* as cognate with Akk. *na āšu*, “to flourish, prosper.” Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995], 282) so that you have something like, “If it pleases you, I have grown rich, and the Lord has blessed me because of you” (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998], 250). But this supposes too positive a view of Laban, as we will see shortly.

⁶ So Walton, “... such as lots or extispicy using animal entrails, or passive, such as celestial observation). Given Laban’s report of the result of the divination, it is most likely that he consulted an expert in extispicy. In this procedure, a binary (yes/no) question is posed and then the specialist slaughters an animal and examines the entrails (usually the liver) for indications that their experience dictates as being positive or negative. To get the information Laban conveys, he must have asked whether Jacob’s God was the one bringing prosperity.” John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 110.

⁷ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 150–151.

When the next verse says, “Name your wages, and I will give it” (28), you know from the previous verse that something is not quite right here. So does Jacob. Jacob has already named his wages—his wives and children—and he has already worked for them! There are no more wages to be earned, no more work to be done. If anything is left, it is simply that Laban might send Jacob away with some kind of gift for his service.

So Jacob says, “You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?” (30). Jacob knows Laban is stalling. How can Laban afford to lose a man who brings him such wealth?⁸

Laban asks in a slightly different way, “What shall I give you?” This time, he is not talking about a wage, but that gift I referred to. At this point, a little background information can be helpful. According to the later Law of Moses:

⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 255.

- ¹² "If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.
- ¹³ And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed.
- ¹⁴ You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him ...
- ¹⁸ It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you, for at half the cost of a hired worker he has served you six years. So the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.

(Deut 15:12-14, 18)

The law continues, if he did not wish to leave, then he had to remain a slave. But if he wanted to leave, custom demanded that the slave be **sent away with something**, something like **a percentage of the flock** that he helped tend. The percentage of that flock, as is recorded on ancient tablets for instance, would normally be 20%.⁹ Now,

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Laban was not bound to later Mosaic law, of course. But the same kind of practice was known throughout the ANE.

So Jacob wants to leave, Laban is supposed to send him away with something, but he doesn't want him to even leave in the first place. Jacob understands this and so tries to figure out a middle way. Laban is his uncle after all. “You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages” (31-32).

The plan involves continuing to work for Laban for a time, even though he does not have to. It also involves taking the worst of the flock and the blemished of the flock. Almost all of the sheep in any flock were white and the goats black or brown. It was rare to find a speckled or spotted animal. And remember what I said earlier about how a speckled or spotted animal would later be considered an unworthy sacrifice. Thus, they are the “worst” of the flock. What is more, since kinds produce kinds, Jacob will take out all of the speckled and striped animals at the start,

leaving only the full colored ones. Then, if any blemished are born, those alone will be his. Most certainly, this would have resulted in much less than 20% of the entire herd.

Character and Hard Work

In the next words, we learn something about Jacob's new found character. "So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen" (33). We can't help but think about how just a couple chapters ago, Jacob had effectively stolen Esau's inheritance. He was anything but righteous.

But now, Jacob is counting on his uncle believing in his honesty, which seems to imply that if Jacob had not been like this for the past 14 years, there would be no basis for such a bargain. Hard work and righteous character is how Jacob has been known by his entire extended family for fourteen years, seven more than he was supposed to work. In the face of great deception, personal challenges, and being an indentured servant in a job he did not ask for, with a wife he did not want, this has become a man much different from the one we saw at first.

James Boice spends his entire sermon on this text focusing on these two elements, because in our day hard work is not something valued by most Americans. Our culture has done a 180 on this in just the past 50 years. This country used to be known as the **hardest working**, most industrious nation on earth. And her people were **good for their word**. Today, we need whole files worth of forms to be filled out just to get a job in a factory, with all kinds of background information just to see if the employer can even trust this person. And that hardly guarantees that the worker will even do a good job. Sadly, this includes many Christians. Should we not rather be like Jacob? His is the direction we should all be moving morally, but it seems in many instances we are going the opposite way. In many ways, Jacob is a model here to be emulated, and who would have ever thought we would say that about this man? Therefore, “**Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free**” (Eph. 6:7–8).¹⁰

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 794.

Back to the story. The moment Laban hears this plan, he says, “**Good! Let it be as you have said**” (**Gen 30:34**). Laban understands that this will allow Jacob and his God to continue to bless him for a while, and he will not have to give much of anything back by way of sending him off once the job is finished. But Laban has something else in mind too. It is something that begins to reveal itself here, and in the next chapter will come to full fruition. “**But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black and put them in charge of his sons. And he set a distance of three days’ journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban’s flock**” (**35-36**). A cheat himself, rather than take any chances on Jacob’s integrity, Laban does the sorting and then insures that there can be no monkeying with the agreement by putting the flocks three days away from each other.

Satan and Christ

While we are not entirely sure of it here, as the story unfolds to the end in the next chapter, Laban will for a time become a type of Satan: standing in the way of God’s

plan, turning on Jacob no longer regarding him with favor but with suspicion and malevolence, reneging ten different times on this very deal, and other evil things. God has blessed this man, continuing to fulfill the words to Abram that all nations will be blessed because of him. But God will strip Laban of his wealth and give it all to Jacob, who in an amazing way becomes, for the first time, **a type of the Lord Jesus**. How so?

By the wages that Jacob will now earn for himself. Be thinking about what we have said this morning about the sheep and the goats as we come to the conclusion of this chapter. Jacob began to pasture the rest of Laban's flock, all of the white lambs and dark goats, as he said he would do (**Gen 30:36**). Then Jacob got **an idea**. It is an idea that we do not know the origin of, was it his idea or did God put it in his mind to do it? It is an idea that we do not know scientifically how it could even work, but perhaps in the ancient mind there was something to it, or perhaps what comes out of it is purely a miracle of God.

“Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and place trees” (37). Why these trees? It could be that there are word plays going on here, that would have teased the

Hebrew ear. “Poplar” () sounds similar to “white” (), which is Laban’s name, just as the word “striped” (, vv 35, 39) contains two consonants and two vowels that also appear in “Jacob.”¹¹ But it was trees nonetheless.

Early Father’s knew there was something of Christ here, so they began to spiritualize. **Ambrose** said, “He would set before them in the troughs the bough of storax [poplar] and walnut [almond] and that from the plane [place] tree; those who felt desire for the mysteries of the most blessed Trinity that were prefigured there could engender offspring that were not at all discolored, by conceiving them in a devout mind ... By the storax is meant the incense and the evening sacrifice that is offered to God the Father in the psalm (141:2); by the walnut bough, the priestly gift that is offered by Christ. For this is Aaron’s bough, that blossomed when it was set down, and through it the grace of priestly holiness was manifested (Num 17:6-8). By the plane tree is meant an abundance of spiritual fruit, because a vine attaches itself to this tree so that the tree may be fertile through the symbiosis and pour

¹¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 257.

itself out into rich offspring” (Ambrose, *Jacob and the Happy Life* 2.4.19).¹²

Maybe. But I think what happens in a more straight forward idea is easier to argue. For these trees had a purpose. Jacob “peeled white streaks in them, exposing the

¹² Mark Sheridan, *Genesis 12-50*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 202. Cyril of Alexandria is a bit different, seeing Christ in the text in a way that is worth putting here: “But where did Jacob place his rods? In the troughs of water. And these troughs, in which the reasonable herd, that is we, go to water, must be interpreted as the writings of Moses and the prophetic predictions that nearly burst forth for us like a heavenly sermon from God. In fact, it was written, “You draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation.” And there we will find the Immanuel, the rod of power. And in his death for us he is also the firstborn from the dead, and is exalted in glory and increases the number of the believers, as I have just said. Every word of the holy prophets, including Moses, hints at the mystery of Christ. Therefore also the wise Paul says, “Christ is the end of the prophets and the law.” Jacob peeled in the rods white stripes alternated with green ones, and the sheep that were by them conceived a spotted and speckled progeny. Jesus somehow removed the shadow from the law and the veil from the prophetic writings. And he showed the pure and beautiful doctrine which was in them, and he transferred it to the spiritual song, in order that he might lead people to virtue since they wanted to be speckled, that is, they wanted to exercise a double virtue in words and actions. And therefore the divine prophets of those who were justified in the faith, by bringing the image before them, openly proclaim, “Because of the fear of you, we conceived, O Lord, and were in pain and brought forth the spirit of your salvation.” And the same blessed Isaiah, in another passage, says properly: “Strengthen your relaxed hands and palsied knees; comfort one another, you faint-hearted; be strong, fear not. Behold, our God renders judgment, and will render it.” And again: “Behold the Lord! The Lord is coming with strength, and his arm is with power. He shall tend his flock as a shepherd, and shall gather the lambs with his arm and shall soothe them who are with young.” That is, he will be a spiritual consolation for those who have already brought forth the divine sermon, for those who will be fruitful and for those who are about to bring forth the glories of evangelical life. This is the fruit of the holy and uncorrupted soul” (*Glaphyra on Genesis*, 5.4).

white of the sticks” (Gen 30:37). Remember, Jacob wants speckled and striped lambs to be born, and these sticks are now striped. I imagine they look like a candy cane. “He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted” (39).

Again, we have no current understanding that Jacob’s plan had anything scientific to it. In other words, you could go out and try this same thing, and you would not get striped and spotted sheep. But Jacob did. Why? The answer began to present itself earlier. **God blessed Laban because of Jacob.**

It continues, “Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban’s flock. Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban’s, and

the stronger Jacob's" (Gen 30:40-42).

God is blessing Jacob in a miraculous way, in order to point Jacob to the need for faith. Speculating a bit, Boice says, "God commanded Jacob to set up the striped branches, which he did, not as a physical means to the end of producing striped or spotted offspring, but as a symbol of Jacob's faith and obedience, much as God later caused Moses to set up a bronze snake in the wilderness when the people had been bitten by serpents."¹³ But he is also doing it through something that is ordinary and natural—survival of the fittest, not in a macro-evolutionary way, but in a scientific breeding kind of a way. Dog owners breed the best dogs with the best dogs, fillies with the best studs, and so on, because strong produces strong and weak produces weak. It is genetic. God is using Jacob's learning here, his cunning, his planning in conjunction with God's own plan to bless. So notice, "Jacob did not adopt these procedures indiscriminately; he reserved them for the strongest and healthiest animals in the flock. This ensured that the spotted kids and black lambs were healthier than

¹³ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 798.

the black kids and white lambs.”¹⁴ Laban begins to decrease; Jacob begins to increase. We read the summary, “Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys” (43).

And so on one level, it is as simple as that. God had sworn a promise to this man and God is keeping that promise. This man is going to be the one through whom the kings would come, through whom the Christ would come. God is going to see that his promise to this man will be fulfilled, even as it had been to his father and his father’s father. This is about God proving once more than he is God and that his will shall be accomplished.

Sheep of His Pasture

But brothers and sisters, **why the spotted sheep and goats?** To me, with all of the interesting things with the trees and exposing the inside white to the outside bark, with the cunning way he put the rods next to the water, the way he ingeniously went about the later breeding of the animals, those things show God’s sovereignty and

¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 259.

providence, but the spotted sheep and goats, they do something else. As we have seen in our earlier thinking about these animals and how they are used in later in the Scripture, any Jew reading this story would have immediately read about Jacob receiving spotted and striped lambs as his wages as more than odd. They would have seen it as almost un-Jewish.

What kind of a wage is that? For these are the animals of lesser value, unable to even be used as sacrifices. Why would God give these to Jacob? But just here is the essence of the [gospel](#), for those with eyes to see. This is where we need to be thinking about the sheep and the goats on a more personal level, for this has everything to do with you and I and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you remember that when John saw Jesus he exclaimed, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” ([John 1:29](#))? Jesus is would become the sacrificial lamb once for all slain as a sin offering to God. We normally think of Jesus as the spotless lamb, sinless in all that he said, did, or thought. And indeed, he was.

But do you remember what happened to the Savior on that horrible night on which this work for the Father

climaxed? They **beat** him, so that he became **spotted**. They **whipped** him, so that he became **striped**. He **bled** and so became **speckled**. The Father turned his back on him. The perfect sacrifice took our sin and bore it upon his body. The sinless one became sin, for us. The unblemished lamb became full of blemishes, so that it could be fulfilled that “**by his stripes we are healed**” (Isa 53:5; 1 Pet 2:24).¹⁵ And so he was led as a **sheep to the slaughter** (Acts Isa 53:7; 8:32).

Immediately after the prophet predicts this great humiliation of our Lord, he goes on to say, “**All we like sheep have gone astray**” (Isa 53:6). Now **we become the sheep**. But what kind of sheep are we? Because of Jesus’ parable, I have a feeling that many of us think about ourselves as being pure, lily white sheep. We are Christians. But the others, they are wooly black goats, full of darkness and sin.

But if we ever forget from whence does our whiteness come, then we are lost. Is it our nature? Is it our own

¹⁵ The word for “stripes” here in Isaiah is not used elsewhere of a sacrificial animal. It is the word used of a beating or a lashing. The word for a striped lamb is only used in the story of Genesis 30-31, nowhere else is it found in the Bible. Nevertheless, as the next verse shows, the idea of Christ as a sacrificial lamb is certainly there in Isaiah’s mind when he speaks like this.

goodness? No, but our righteousness is the clothing of another. Spotted lambs are considered as white, so that God might bless Christ. Based on the righteousness of another and the branch of wood that is in the following story, consider:

- ¹ Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.
- ² And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?"
- ³ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.
- ⁴ And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments."
- ⁵ And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by.
- ⁶ And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua,

- ⁷ "Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here.
- ⁸ Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch.
- ⁹ For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.
- ¹⁰ In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree."

(Zech 3:1-10)

Our whiteness only comes because of the Righteousness of Christ, and his clothing. Satan is accusing us because of our natural appearance. In one sense, Satan is right. We are not lily white. Yet he is wrong in that we have by the righteousness of another. We are the speckled, spotted, and striped sheep and goats by nature that were given to Jesus by his Father as the wage that he earned

through his obedience unto death. “He will tend his flock like a shepherd.”

He will make them look upon the striped rod lifted up from which flows the water of life. These stopped lambs he will make pure. “He will gather them in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young” (Isa 40:11). He makes them white by his grace alone. They become white by faith in the Righteous Lamb alone. The natural birth of the eleven sons comes before the miraculous birth of the spotted lambs in the Jacob story. Now, the natural birth of spotted lambs comes before the miraculous birth of those that are made pure.

Remember the earlier words of Laban, “The LORD has blessed me for your [Jacob’s] sake” (30:27). Arthur Pink asks, “Do not these words of Laban anticipate the Gospel, and point forward to the present time when we read ‘God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you’ (Eph 4:32), and again in 1 John 2:12 ‘your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake?’”¹⁶ And now we learn that this blessing is a bunch of spotted, striped, and blemished lambs and goats.

¹⁶ Arthur Walkington Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005), 271.

When you consider that the Savior earned you as his reward for becoming like you in his death on the cross, can there be any other response than to humble yourselves before him, crying out to him, “Lord, forgive me for I am a sinner?” And when you repent, can there be anything greater than knowing that he does forgive, and not only that, makes you white with his own righteousness, clothing you in the skins of the beloved Lamb and saying, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world?”