

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their heart December 2022

Jacob's Speckled Lambs

By: Chris Johnson



One of my favorite things about reading the Old Testament is how reading it in light of the New Testament can give whole new meaning to what seem to be the details that get in our way if we're just looking for a good bedtime story.

Foreshadows of the coming Messiah are everywhere in the Old Testament, where you'd least expect them. Like when Moses throws the branch into the bitter water of Marah (bitter) in the desert, and it becomes "sweet" water that gives life. Then, hundreds of years later in the time of the Judges, Ruth hands a baby to her mother-in-law who calls herself Mara (also meaning bitter) and that baby is Obed who will give birth to Jesse, who's called the "stump" from which David and ul-

timately the Messiah will come. Mara then again becomes Naomi (meaning "pleasant" or we might say "sweet"). As the branch brought the water of life to Israel in the wilderness, the root of Jesse turns bitterness into sweet.

I want to look at an even stranger Old Testament story though, and see if we can't pull a Christmas story out of it. You won't find it in many story Bibles, but if you've read through the Bible you probably ran across this one and wondered why God saw fit to pass this of all stories down throughout the millennia. Genesis 30 recounts how Jacob earns his flocks from his father-in-law, Laban. Having made an agreement with Laban that any spotted lambs or goats found or born in the flock would belong to him, Jacob discovers (probably not a surprise) that Laban has snuck away all of the spotted animals. Jacob then uses this unusual method to ensure that he not only gets his flock, but that he gets the best of the flock.

Here it is from Genesis 30:37-43: *"Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. 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. 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. 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. Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants*

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and male servants, and camels and donkeys.”

Answers In Genesis gives a great job of explaining the possible science behind all this – and it’s not that seeing spotted sticks made the sheep have spotted babies – but whether there is a natural explanation or a purely supernatural explanation is not what I find interesting.

Several decades later, Jacob’s family survives famine by driving their speckled flock to the land of Goshen, in Egypt, and there, for 430 years, they grow from a family of 12 sons running their father’s sheep business until “the land was filled with them.”

This part of the story we’re more familiar with. “There arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” He saw Jacob’s family as a threat and to deal with this threat he turns them from shepherds into slaves.

But, as we know from the account of the Passover and the Exodus, Israel still kept sheep. So, at the time of Moses, Israel was likely still pasturing the great-great grand-sheep of Jacob’s speckled flock.

So, while genetics would have allowed for some white sheep to be born, the abundance would have been speckled. Yet when God commands that each household take a lamb for Passover, what is the qualification? It was to be unblemished.

An unblemished lamb would not be so rare as an unblemished person, but yet it would have stood out among its speckled kin, an understated illustration of Psalm 13:10: “None is righteous, no, not one.” And yet, we need a righteous Sacrifice to cover our sin.

And so, among those speckled sheep, each Israelite home would find one pure white lamb. In its rarity they would have found it precious. They would take it home and keep it for 2 weeks, so that they would feel its loss. The slaughter of the lamb was not to be a rote slaughter for a meal, but

an experience where they would feel remorse when the time came for the sacrifice.

At Christmas time, we celebrate the choosing of our lamb. We celebrate the beginning of the human life of Christ, reveling in His birth, His baby toes, His legendary serenity in the stable, in the shepherds leaving their own flocks to come and gawk at God in human form - all-the-while knowing how it will end. But what’s amazing is that we don’t have to care for our Lamb before the sacrifice, as the Israelites did. Instead, He – the Bread of Life - is laid in a manger, as if for HIS flock to feed on.

His body will be the grain for His flock to eat, and His blood the wine for us to drink. He is our spotless lamb in a flock of speckled animals, He is our Passover feast.

... you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ~ 1 Peter 1:19



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