

CAPRICULTURALISTS FOR CHRIST

GOATS HAVE A SPECIAL PLACE IN GOD'S HEART

The Bible helps us understand a fascination with goats because goats really do have a special place in God's heart. There are over 120 Biblical references to goats—depending on the translation—some of which lump sheep and goats together or use the word cattle to mean all livestock. Some are well known, like:

Leviticus 16:5-27, which tells about the **scape goat** and

Jesus' reference to **dividing the nations** as a shepherd divides his flocks with the **sheep on the right and the goats on the left** in Mathew 25:32-33.

King Solomon seemed to like goats quite well. He listed the buck with the lion, horse, and king as being **stately monarchs** in Proverbs 30:29-31, and he told his love that her **hair was "as a flock of goats that appear from Mt. Gilead"** in Song of Solomon 4:1 and 6:5.

Bucks are compared with great leaders in Jeremiah 50:8.

Goats had some **unusual uses** in the Bible. In Genesis 15:9-11, God used three three-year-olds—a doe, a heifer, and a ram—to help Abram **understand the future**. Jacob used the meat and hair from two kids in Genesis 27:9-16 to **trick his father**. Genesis 30 and 31 tells us that Laban paid Jacob with spotted and striped sheep and goats, so God caused all the kids born to be spotted or striped. God also protected Jacobs herds from abortion and neo-natal death when Laban's herds were suffering. Joseph's brothers killed a goat in Genesis 37:31 and spread its blood on Joseph's coat to convince their father he was dead. In Genesis 38:17, Tamar posed as a prostitute to trick her father-in-law and was paid for her services with a goat kid. Michal saved David's life by putting an idol in his bed with a goat-hair pillow for a head (I Sam.19:13 & 16.)

Goats are used as gifts, as in Ezekiel 27:21. Jacob gave Esau 20 bucks and 200 does in Genesis 32:14. The Arabs gave King Jehoshaphat 7700 rams and 7700 bucks in II Chronicles 17:11—no wonder the area became an over-grazed desert.

Wealth was measured in herds, and Nabal, a very rich man owned 3000 sheep and 1000 goats.

Goats were used for clothing. Exodus refers to cashmere as a gift to God (25:4, 35:6 & 23), goat hair was used to make Tabernacle curtains, and women of special skill and wisdom spun goat hair dyed red, blue, and purple. (26:1, 36:14, 35:26), and Hebrews 11:37 tells of people wearing goat skins.

Goats were used for food. In Exodus 12:5, the Passover Feast featured the meat of yearling bucks and rams, but no fat was to be eaten (Leviticus 7:23). In Deuteronomy 14:4-5, the goat is listed among those animals fit to eat, and Moses praised God for the blessings of meat, milk, and goats (Deut. 32:14). In Judges 6:19, Gideon baked a young goat for a visiting angel. Proverbs 27:26-27 praise goats by saying, "**The goats are the price of the field, and you shall have goat milk enough for the food of your household and for the maintenance of your maidens.**" Considering that Solomon's household had 1000 women....

There were some special considerations of goats. Exodus 22:1 says that a stolen sheep or goat must be replaced with four. In Leviticus 17:3 says that a man who kills an animal without

offering it in the Tabernacle will be excommunicated. During purification rites in Numbers 31:20, everything made of goat hair was to be purified. Of the goats taken as booty during war, Numbers 31:28 and 30, one of every 500 was to be given to God through the priest, and one of every 50 was to be given to the Levites in charge of the Tabernacle. In Judges 6:4, Israel was impoverished when the Midianites destroyed all the crops and stole all the flocks and herds. In Psalm 50:9 Asaph told Israel that God would rather have their thanks than their sacrifices. Since all the animals belong to God anyway, He said he would take no bulls or bucks from Israel's herds.

Goats were used in common conversation and prophecy as examples. Saul searched for David among the rocks of the wild goats in I Samuel 24:2. God asked Job if he knew how or when the wild goats kid (Job 39:1). The Psalmist (50:3) asked, "Will I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? He also said the high hills are a refuge for the wild goats (104:18). Ezekiel said (34:17) that God will judge between the rams and the "Great He Goats." Daniel (8: 5, 8, and 21) had a vision in which a buck (probably Greece) beat a ram (probably Medea/Persia). Micah (5:8) compared Jacob among the gentiles with a lion among the goats. God is quoted in Zechariah 10:3 as saying, "Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the (male) goats." It sounds as if the shepherds had neglected the flocks, so the goats were leading them.

Isaiah 1:11 warns us that God does not delight in sacrifices like **the blood of the great he-goats** if there is no remorse or repentance. Isaiah also predicts (11:6) that in the final days of Jesus' peace on Earth, the leopard shall lie down with the kid.

Of course, dozens of references are made to the use of **goats as sacrifices and sin offerings**. These sacrifices to God covered the sins of His people so He could fellowship with them. Some VERY specific guidelines were given:

Only the best animals should be sacrificed to God. (Gen. 4:4, Lev. 22:9-22, Deut. 17:1)

No animals with any missing or extra parts may be sacrificed. (Lev. 22:22-25)

Kids must be at least a week old before they are sacrificed. (Lev. 22:17-18)

Kids must not be sacrificed the same day as their dams. (Lev. 22:17-18)

Rulers use **fine, yearly bucks** for their sacrifices, and commoners use **does**. (Lev. 1:10, 3:12, 4:23-24, 4:28, 5:6, 8:3, and 15).

Other references to **goats as sacrifices** are found in books from Genesis to Ezekiel. Numbers 18:17 says that **firstborn kids must always be sacrificed and cannot be redeemed because firstborn are holy and belong to God**. Firstborn humans and donkeys can be redeemed.

How fortunate we are to be under the New Testament where "**Christ** sprinkled His perfect blood on the mercy seat, but it was not the blood of goats and calves. No, He took His own blood, and with it He, by Himself, made sure of our eternal salvation. And if...the blood of bulls and **goats**...could cleanse men's bodies from sin, just think how much more surely the blood of Christ will transform our lives and hearts." (Hebrews 9:12, 13, 19 and 10:4 TLB)