

SHEEP

Their Cultural Importance

HISTORY'S FIRST FAMILY HAD sheep; Abel was "a shepherd of flocks" (Gen. 4:2, CSB). Sheep played a significant role throughout Israel's history. Jacob gained much of his wealth when he divided his sheep from those in his uncle Laban's herd (30:25-43). When God restored his fortunes, Job had 14,000 sheep and goats (Job 42:12). The Israelites offered sheep as sacrifices at both the tabernacle and in the Jerusalem Temple. In fact, at the dedication of Solomon's Temple, 120,000 sheep and goats were sacrificed, along with 22,000 cattle (1 Kings 8:62-63).

In the New Testament, lowly shepherds were the first to hear the angelic announcement of the Messiah's birth (Luke 2:8-20). Jesus identified Himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10), following the tradition of the Old Testament, which identified God as the Shepherd and Israel as His flock (Ps. 23:1; Ezek. 34). After His resurrection, Jesus told Peter to "feed my sheep" (John 21:17, CSB).



SHEEP BREEDS IN ISRAEL



The Awassi (top) is Israel's native sheep breed. In 1955, farmers began to crossbreed it with the German East Friesian (above), which is known for both high milk production and high fertility. It, though, is not well-suited to conditions in Israel. Israeli farmers found the ideal combination for optimized vitality, milk production, and birth rate. The new cross-bred sheep is called the Assaf sheep.

Below: Stone sheepfold at the ancient Amorite city of Heshbon.

Upper right: Greco-Roman iron shears from Egypt. When the blades

are separated, one of them is so slotted as to be readily removable.

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**SHEEP WERE
RAISED FOR:**

SACRIFICE

Gen. 4:4

WOOL

Prov. 31:13

MILK

Deut. 32:14

MEAT

Deut. 14:4



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COREL PHOTO

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” — JOHN 10:11, CSB.

Above from left to right: Nubian slaughtering a sheep.

Woman from Turkey weaving

wool beside her loom.

Samaritan slaughter pit on Mount Gerizim where sacrifices are still given.

Right: Statuette of the Good Shepherd

Left: “Jacob Sheep” are found today in Great Britain and North America; they originally roamed the Middle East and ancient Israel. Their spotted and speckled coats match the description of Jacob’s flock (Gen. 30:35-43). They may have 2 to 6 horns, but most have 4. An average ewe weighs between 80-120 pounds and a ram, 120-180. They currently are being reintroduced in Israel.

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PAGAN USES FOR SHEEP



Left: Clay replica of a sheep’s liver that was used for hepatoscopy, liver divination. The original was found at Hazor.

Right: Two ankle bones of sheep or goats decorated with holes apparently representing a human face. These possibly

are crude idols placed in tombs at Jericho. They date from 3200–2400 BC.

FAST FACTS

- A sheep’s average natural lifespan is 12 years.
- Rectangular pupils give sheep about 270-320 degrees of peripheral vision; humans average about 155 degrees.
- Sheep can’t right themselves if they’re on their back.
- One pound of wool can make up to 10 miles of yarn.