

Which are you? Sheep or Goat

Amanuwal tells us that at his return, he will separate the "sheep" from the "goats."

The sheep will inherit the kingdom of Yahuwah; the goats will ultimately depart "into gehenna fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew **25:31-41**).

You and I will one day stand before the judgment seat of Amanuwal, says Romans 14: 10. We will answer for all aspects of our lives (11 Corinthians 5: 10). In this supremely important parable, Amanuwal explains the basis for his judgment. So let's see why Amanuwal separates sheep from goats.

Look similar- behave Differently

"In most Western countries, the problem of dividing sheep from goats . . . would never arise, for flocks are unlikely to mix and the two species are not easily confused. This is not so, however, in many lands around Palestine, where they often run together and native breeds may be alike in size, color, and shape" ("Goat," *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, page 741). Goats and sheep can be considered cousins. They are, so to speak, members of the same "tribe." "There is a difference of only six in the number of chromosomes between domestic sheep and goats. If you think goats have short hair, and sheep have long fleece, then the Angora goats, which produce mohair, and the hair sheep, which have no wool, are bound to confuse you While the size and skeletal structure of these cousins often appear to be similar, their behavior could hardly be more unlike" ("The Exemplary, Admirable Goat," *Smithsonian*, December 1982, page 115).

The Bible mentions sheep many times. The sheep represents gentleness and loyalty (11 Samuel 12:3), patience (Psalm 44:22) and meekness (Isaiah 53:7). Sheep and shepherd enjoy a close and intimate relationship of trust, dependence and submission. Notice how

Amanuwal describes the special relationship between sheep and shepherd in John 10:3-4: "And the sheep hear his [the shepherd's] voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out . . . and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."

Now let's look at the goats. Jeremiah describes the behavior of the he-goats in the flock in his prophecy regarding the nation of Judah coming out of Babylonian captivity: "Flee out of Babylon . . . and be like the goats that lead the flock" (Jeremiah 50:8, New International Version). Goats don't follow. They push their way to the front of the flock as they are being led out to graze. There are advantages in being at the head of the flock. You get to the best pasture first! Ezekiel pictures the goats' behavior once they're out in the pasture: "As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Yahuwah says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? . . . Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? . . . You shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away" (Ezekiel 34:17-21, NIV).

The "goats" take the best for themselves, ignoring the needs of the weaker members of the flock.

Down through history selfish people have done this, using strength or cunning or other advantages to get the best of the less fortunate, and justifying their behavior because they feel they are "better." They "deserve" it.

"Goats" in the synagogue

In Amanuwal's time, some people who claimed to be part of Yahuwah's flock displayed behavior similar to that of the goats mentioned back in Ezekiel 34. These were the Pharisees. They considered themselves better than others (Luke 18:9). Therefore they thought they

deserved "better" treatment than others. They loved money (Luke 16: 14) and even evicted widows for financial gain (Matthew 23:14). They used their position to get the most comfortable seats in the synagogue and the best food at banquets (verse 6).

They also observed the Sabbath, tithed, prayed in public, gave alms and followed biblical dietary laws! But these actions, while some were good and right in and of themselves, did not proceed from a love of Yahuwah (John 5:42). The Pharisees' works were done merely to be "seen by men" (Matthew 6:1-2, 5, 16). Theirs was a self-serving, "goat-like" religion - a vehicle to material wealth, gain and personal prestige. "They have their reward," Amanuwal said (verses 2, 5, 16). And Amanuwal told his disciples, "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

Serving or self-serving?

Amanuwal shows that his sheep follow a different path - a path of selfless serving and giving. "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14: 12- 14, NIV).

If we give only to be rewarded now, we will not be rewarded in the kingdom of Yahuwah. If our motives for religious service are the same as those of the Pharisees, we will not be in the kingdom of Yahuwah. Those of THE WAY serve Yahuwah and neighbor with no thought of personal gain in this life. Paul was even willing to give up eternal life if that would have benefited others (Romans 9: 1-3).

Notice what Amanuwal says about his sheep in Matthew 25:35-36, 40 (NIV): "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. . . . Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." And to the goats: "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" (verse 45, NIV). Then the goats will say, "We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets" (Luke 13:26). They heard the message. They may have conformed to certain external religious requirements, but there was no inner change, no righteous character. They lived only for themselves. Amanuwal's answer to them will be, "I do not know you, where you are from" (verse 27). Sobering words indeed!

But to those who have learned to "follow the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4) and to serve without seeking gain, Amanuwal will say, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).