

# Protecting Love

John 10:1-10

SS Lesson for 04/30/2017

**Devotional Scripture:** Ps 23

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# Introduction

## Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews the truth that Jesus is the Shepherd who always provides **Protecting Love**. The **study's aim** is to contemplate the goodness of our Lord Jesus in all areas, especially as our Shepherd. The **study's application** is to meditate this week on the goodness of the Lord Jesus in His role as our Shepherd.

*(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)*

### Key Verse: John 10:14-15

*14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.*

### Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

The discourse on the Good Shepherd continues the same setting as in chapter 9. Comparing people to a shepherd and his sheep was common in the Middle East. Kings and priests called themselves shepherds and their subjects sheep. The Bible makes frequent use of this analogy. Many of the great men of the Old Testament were shepherds (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David). As national leaders, Moses and David were both “shepherds” over Israel. Some of the most famous passages in the Bible employ this motif (cf. Ps. 23; Isa. 53:6; Luke 15:1-7). Jesus developed this analogy in several ways. The connection with the preceding chapter is seen in Jesus’ contrast of the Pharisees with the man born blind. The Pharisees—spiritually blind while claiming insight (John 9:41)—were false shepherds. As the True Shepherd, Jesus came to seek and to heal. His sheep hear and respond to His voice.

**10:1-2.** Verses 1-5 describe a morning shepherding scene. A **shepherd** enters through a **gate** into a walled enclosure which has several flocks in one **sheep pen**. The enclosure, with stone walls, is guarded at night by a doorkeeper to prevent thieves and beasts of prey from entering. Anyone who would climb the wall would do it for no good purpose.

**10:3-4.** By contrast, the shepherd has a right to enter the sheep pen. **The watchman opens the gate**, and the shepherd comes in to call **his own sheep by name** (out from the other flocks). Shepherds knew their sheep well and gave them names. As **sheep** hear the sound of their owner’s familiar **voice**, they go to him. He **leads them out** of the pen till his flock is formed. Then he goes **out** toward the fields with **the sheep** following **him**.

**10:5-6.** If a **stranger** enters the pen, the sheep **run away from him because** his **voice** is not familiar. The point of **this figure of speech** consists in how a shepherd forms his flock. People come to God because He calls them (cf. vv. 16, 27; Rom. 8:28, 30). Their proper response to His call is to follow Him (cf. John 1:43; 8:12; 12:26; 21:19, 22). But this spiritual lesson was missed by those who heard Jesus, even though they certainly understood the local shepherd/sheep relationship. In their blindness, they could not see Jesus as the Lord who is the Shepherd (cf. Ps. 23).

**10:7-9.** Jesus then developed the shepherd/sheep figure of speech in another way. After a shepherd’s flock has been separated from the other **sheep**, he takes them to pasture. Near the pasture is an enclosure for the sheep. The shepherd takes his place in the doorway or entrance and functions as a door or **gate**. The sheep can go out to the pasture in front of the enclosure, or if afraid, they can retreat into the security of the enclosure. The spiritual meaning is that Jesus is **the only Gate** by which people can enter into God’s provision for them. When Jesus said, **All who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers**, He referred to those leaders of the nation who cared not for the spiritual good of the people but only for themselves. Jesus the Shepherd provides security for His flock from enemies (**whoever enters through Me will be saved**, or “kept safe”). He also provides for their daily needs (the sheep **come in and go out, and find pasture**).

**10:10.** **The thief**, that is, a false shepherd, cares only about feeding himself, not building up the flock. He steals sheep in order to **kill** them, thus destroying part of the flock. But Christ has **come** to benefit the sheep. He gives life which is not constricted but overflowing. The thief takes life; Christ gives **it to the full**.

**10:11.** Jesus then developed the sheep/shepherd figure in a third way. When evening settled over the land of Palestine, danger lurked. In Bible times lions, wolves, jackals, panthers, leopards, bears, and hyenas were common in the countryside. The life of a shepherd could be dangerous as illustrated by David’s fights with at least one lion and one bear (1 Sam. 17:34-35, 37). Jacob also experienced the labor and toil of being

a faithful shepherd (Gen. 31:38-40). Jesus said, **I am the Good Shepherd** (cf. John 10:14). In the Old Testament, God is called the Shepherd of His people (Pss. 23:1; 80:1-2; Ecc. 12:11; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:10). Jesus is this to His people, and He came to give **His life for** their benefit (cf. John 10:14, 17-18; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 5:2, 25; Heb. 9:14). He is also the “Great Shepherd” (Heb. 13:20-21) and “the Chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4).

**10:12-13.** In contrast with **the Good Shepherd, who owns**, cares, feeds, protects, and dies for His **sheep**, the one who works for wages—**the hired hand**—does not have the same commitment. He is interested in making money and in self-preservation. If a **wolf attacks** (*harpazei*, lit., “snatches away”; cf. this same verb in v. 28), he **runs away** and his selfishness causes **the flock** to be scattered. Obviously he **cares nothing for the sheep**. Israel had many false prophets, selfish kings, and imitation messiahs. The flock of God suffered constantly from their abuse (Jer. 10:21-22; 12:10; Zech. 11:4-17).

**10:14-15.** In contrast with a hired workman, **the Good Shepherd** has an intimacy with and personal interest in the sheep (cf. vv. 3, 27). **I know My sheep** stresses His ownership and watchful oversight. **My sheep know Me** stresses their reciprocal knowledge of and intimacy with Him. This intimacy is modeled on the loving and trusting mutual relationship of **the Father** and the Son. Jesus’ care and concern is evidenced by His prediction of His coming death for the flock. Some shepherds have willingly died while protecting their sheep from danger. Jesus willingly gave His **life for His sheep** (vv. 11, 15, 17-18)—on their behalf as their Substitute (Rom. 5:8, 10; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). His death gives them life.

**10:16.** The **other sheep... not of this flock** refers to Gentiles who would believe. His coming death would **bring them also** to the Father. **They too will listen to My voice**. Jesus continues to save people as they hear His voice in the Scriptures. Acts 18:9-11 illustrates how this works out in the history of the church. “I have many people in this city” (i.e., Corinth), the Lord told Paul. **One flock and one Shepherd** speaks of the church with believers from Jewish and Gentile “sheep pens” in one body with Christ as Head (cf. Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6).

**10:17-18.** Again Jesus predicted His death, saying four times that He would voluntarily **lay down His life** (vv. 11, 14, 17-18). The **Father** has a special love for Jesus because of His sacrificial obedience to the will of God. Jesus predicted His resurrection twice (He would **take... up His life again** [vv. 17-18]) and His sovereignty (**authority**) over His own destiny. His death was wholly voluntary: **No one takes it from Me**. Jesus was not a helpless pawn on history’s chessboard.

**10:19-21.** For the third time Jesus’ teaching **divided** the people (cf. 7:43; 9:16). **Many** in this hostile crowd judged Him to be **demon-possessed and raving mad** (cf. 7:20; 8:48, 52). **But others** figured that He was not demon-possessed, for how could **a demon open the eyes of the blind?** (cf. 9:16)

### **Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

The life of a Jewish shepherd was far from easy. It was one of toil. Shepherds braved fierce storms, wild predators, disease, and thieves trying to break into the flock. It left little room for error. Along with that, being a shepherd was a lonely job. This was not an occupation in which you worked your shift and left. Instead of spending time with family and friends, a shepherd was stuck in the field with stinking, stubborn beasts. Added to that was the thanklessness of it. In Jewish society, shepherds were among the lowest in status. They were not allowed to attend worship and were barely tolerated. They were second-class citizens, and their pay was small. This job had little to recommend it. So why, in this passage, would Jesus equate Himself with shepherds? The answer lies in what He was trying to teach about God’s love. To do this, Jesus described the difference between a good and a bad shepherd. There was a lot of temptation in a shepherd’s life. They were barely able to make a living. It hardly seemed worth the effort. It would be easy to abandon one’s post, not to put full effort into the job. What makes a good shepherd? He has a uniquely personal relationship with each individual sheep in the flock. The good shepherd values each one, from the oldest ewe to the newest lamb. There is a special bond that is worth more than a paycheck. You might say, “But I am not a sheep!” In fact, you are. Every believer is a member of His flock. Just as sheep stink, there are times when our behavior stinks. Like sheep, we can be stubborn and refuse to listen. And, like sheep, we are vulnerable and in need of guidance. As our Good Shepherd, Jesus is ever diligent (Ps. 121:4). His attention never wavers. He knows each of us intimately (139:1-4). He knows our strengths and weaknesses. Under His guidance, we experience protection and abundant life (John 10:9-10). He is the Shepherd who seeks each of us individually and does not give up until He finds that one lost sheep (Luke 15:4-6). The bad shepherd does not care about the sheep and will not protect them (John 10:12-13). As a result, the sheep fall prey to thieves and predators. They are left vulnerable, without guidance. Left without protection, they are destroyed (vs. 10). As believers, we sometimes take for granted the protection and provision we receive

from our Good Shepherd. We cry out to Him when we have a need, knowing that He will answer. Our Shepherd will never let us down. However, there are many other people not in the Good Shepherd's fold who are suffering. They do not belong to His flock, and they are trapped in the fold of Satan. We know that these people will find rest only when they come to Jesus. Until then, they will find themselves robbed of life. It is our responsibility to beckon people to join Christ's flock. Our Shepherd's desire is for people to become part of His flock. We were never intended to keep Christ to ourselves but to work with our Shepherd to bring others to Him. So, how many people do you know who need to change flocks today?

## **Lesson Introduction and Background**

### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

Most of us have experienced the embarrassment of mistaken identity. We see someone across the room whom we think we recognize. We wave. That person waves back, but with a puzzled expression. We speak to someone standing behind us, thinking that person is a friend or family member. He or she responds uncertainly, if at all. Cases of mistaken identity cause confusion; those people are not who we think they are. Today's text is about removing confusion regarding the identity of the one who leads, protects, and provides for God's people. Many claim to be God's designate for that role. But our text says that only one such claim is genuine. Only one individual can make us God's people and give us the life that God offers.

Our text, from the middle of John's Gospel, records part of a series of conflict episodes between Jesus and his opponents. Important for context is the account of Jesus' healing of a man born blind (John 9), which occurs just before today's text. The healed man was confronted by religious leaders who were opposed to Jesus. But their opposition made the healed man all the more certain that Jesus had been sent by God (9:13-33). The infuriated leaders threw the man out, effectively claiming that they had cut him off from fellowship with God's people (John 9:34). Subsequently, Jesus identified himself to the man as the one God had sent (9:35-38). The story closes with further confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders (9:40, 41). In providing the backdrop for today's text, that account addresses this question: Who truly governs God's people? In other words, do the religious leaders of Jesus' day decide who belongs in God's people and who is excluded, or does that authority lie elsewhere? The conflict between Jesus and his opponents concerning who Jesus is and what that means for God's people was accelerating. Jesus' use of the phrase "I am the" occurs four times in today's text (John 10:7, 9, 11, 14). These form part of the larger picture of Jesus' use of the phrase on other occasions in this Gospel (see John 6:35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5). The phrases serve as Jesus' claims regarding his unique role in God's plan to be the one who fulfills God's promises in finality. But more than that, the phrase "I am" echoes God's statement to Moses that Moses should tell Israel that "I am" was the one sending him (Exodus 3:14; compare John 8:58). As Jesus used this expression, he was saying something about himself that implied that he was divine, God himself in human flesh. Jesus' opponents certainly didn't miss this implication, given their immediate attempts to stone him (John 8:59). Our text focuses on shepherd imagery in regard to "I am the" statements. Keeping flocks of sheep and goats was a vital part of the economy of the biblical world. Shepherds often spent day and night with their animals to keep them nourished and safe (compare Luke 2:8). The Old Testament frequently draws on these practices in depicting God as shepherd and his people as sheep (examples: Psalm 23:1; 80:1; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10). His faithful shepherding is contrasted with the harmful shepherding by others (Ezekiel 34; etc.). This history, familiar to Jesus' audience, is what he draws on as he delivers this discourse.

## **Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### ***The Shepherd's Relationship (John 10:1-5)***

- 1 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.
- 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.
- 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
- 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.
- 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

## **Jesus' relationship is exclusive (1-2)**

*Jesus is the only way*

### ***The way, truth, and life (John 14:6)***

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

### ***The way of holiness (Isa 35:8)***

8 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.

### ***The way of salvation (Acts 4:12)***

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

### ***The way of reconciliation (Eph 2:14-18)***

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

### ***The way of cleansing (Heb 10:19-23)***

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

*Jesus is the Shepherd through faith*

### ***Shepherd through faith because Jesus is the great Shepherd (Heb 13:20)***

20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,

### ***Shepherd through faith because Jesus is the Overseer of our souls (1 Peter 2:25)***

25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

### ***Shepherd through faith because Jesus satisfies (Ps 23:1)***

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

### ***Shepherd through faith into righteousness (Rom 3:22)***

22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

### ***Shepherd through faith into peace (Rom 5:1)***

5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

***Shepherd through faith because Jesus is the author of our faith (Heb 12:2)***

2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus , the author and perfecter of our faith , who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

**Jesus' relationship is one of leadership (3-5)**

*A leader that leads beside still waters and in the path of righteousness (Ps 23:2-3)*

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

*A leader that leads out of the desert into safety (Ps 78:52-53)*

52 But he brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert. 53 He guided them safely, so they were unafraid; but the sea engulfed their enemies.

*A leader who tends and protects the flock (Isa 40:11)*

11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

*A leader who leads out of darkness into the light (Isa 42:16)*

16 I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.

*A leader who must be followed by denying self and taking up cross (Matt 16:24)*

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

*A leader whom disciples follow (Luke 14:27)*

27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

***The Shepherd's Identity (John 10:7-10)***

7 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

8 All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

**Jesus is the door (7-8)**

*The door of access to the Father (Eph 2:18)*

18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

*The door of judgment (James 5:9)*

9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

*The door that no one can open or close (Rev 3:8)*

8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

*The door of invitation (Rev 3:20)*

20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

## **Jesus is Savior (9)**

*A Savior appointed by God (1 Thess 5:9)*

9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

*A Savior through faith (2 Tim 3:15)*

15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

*A Savior who brings the completion of salvation at His second coming (Heb 9:28)*

28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

*A Savior who reconciled us (Rom 5:10)*

10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

*A Savior planned before the beginning of time (2 Tim 1:9)*

9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

## **Jesus is the giver of eternal life (10)**

*Eternal life given through grace (Rom 5:21)*

21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Eternal life given as a gift of God (Rom 6:23)*

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Eternal life given to display unlimited patience (1 Tim 1:16)*

16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

*Eternal life given through truth and understanding (1 John 5:20)*

20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true — even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

*Eternal life given through mercy (Jude 1:21)*

21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

## **The Shepherd's Sacrifice (John 10:11-15)**

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.

13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.

15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.



## **Jesus sacrificed His life (11)**

*Laying Down One's Life (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

On January 23, 1943, more than 900 men sailed from New York on the USAT *Dorchester*, a former luxury liner, now a troop ship bound for Greenland. Most of the travelers were young Army enlistees, plus some officers and Merchant Marine sailors. There were also four chaplains: George L. Fox, a Methodist minister; Clark V. Poling, a Dutch Reformed minister; John P. Washington, a Roman Catholic priest; and Alexander D. Goode, a Jewish rabbi. About 150 miles from Greenland, at about 1:00am on February 3, German submarine U-223 torpedoed the aging transport. The attack killed about 100 men immediately. The rest groped for the openings in the darkness that would lead to the deck. The four chaplains helped where they could, lending some sense of calm to the fear-crazed young men. Lifeboats were readied, and the chaplains went to the lockers to hand out life jackets. Unfortunately, there were not enough jackets for everyone. The four chaplains had theirs on, but all four removed their jackets and handed them to young men and directed them to the boats. The *Dorchester* sank in less than 30 minutes. As it went down the survivors noticed the four chaplains standing at the railing, arms linked together, singing and praying, giving strength to others. About 75 percent of the men aboard perished in the sinking, including the four chaplains. Those four had laid down their lives for the men of their "flock." We marvel at their sacrifice, even after more than 60 years. Do we marvel as much about Jesus? He also laid down his life, but in a much more profound way. His sacrifice made it possible for us to live eternally. That's something that even the selfless sacrifice of the four chaplains could not accomplish.

*Jesus sacrificed His body once for all (Heb 10:10)*

10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

*Jesus sacrificed Himself to make people holy (Heb 13:12)*

12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

*Jesus sacrificed Himself to do away with sin (Heb 9:23-26)*

23 It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

*Jesus sacrificed Himself to make us perfect and holy (Heb 10:14)*

14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

## **Jesus sacrificed Himself because He cares for us (12-15)**

*Jesus cared for us by being pierced for our transgressions and by His wounds we are healed (Isa 53:4-5)*

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

*Jesus cared for us by coming to serve and give His life as a ransom (Matt 20:28)*

28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

*Jesus cared for us by laying down His life for us, His friends (John 15:13)*

13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

*Jesus cared for us by loving us so much He gave His life as an offering (Eph 5:2)*

2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

# Conclusion and Other Thoughts

## Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

### *The Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18)*

#### Introduction

Our text in John chapter 10 is best introduced by this Old Testament text in (Ezekiel 34:1-31).

Here, through the prophet Ezekiel, God rebukes the evil shepherds (or leaders) of the nation Israel. He speaks of a coming day when they will be judged, and when God Himself will gather His scattered flock in the person of Messiah (“**My servant David**,” verse 24). In our text in John 10, Jesus boldly claims to be the promised “**Good Shepherd**,” and in contrast to His shepherding, He exposes and indicts the Jewish religious leaders (especially the Pharisees) as wicked shepherds, who care not for the hurting and troubled sheep and who use and abuse the sheep of God’s flock for their own personal gain.

This is the first time in the Gospel of John that the topic of shepherding has been addressed as such, though it is not the last (see John 21:15-17). It is a very common theme in the Old Testament, and it also appears in the Synoptic Gospels, not to mention the rest of the New Testament. While the subject of shepherds and shepherding unifies all of chapter 10, the teaching of our Lord recorded in this chapter seems not to have taken place all at one time. The teaching referred to in verses 22-42 appears to have occurred several months later than that of verses 1-21. The feast of Tabernacles took place in the Fall; the feast of Dedication was observed in the winter. We cannot be sure where Jesus was or what He did during these few intervening months.

The teaching of Jesus in our text (verses 1-21) appears to closely follow the healing of the man born blind and related events, which are recorded in chapter 9. This appears to be a safe conclusion, based upon three observations. *First*, there is no indication of a change of time or setting in the first verse of chapter 10. *Second*, the expression, “**Verily, verily ...**” is never used to introduce a new section in the Gospel of John:

The opening ‘**Verily, verily**’ ... never begins a discourse. It always follows up some previous teaching. It indicates that the following statement is important, but also that it has a connection with the preceding. This passage then must be understood in the closest of connections with the story of the blind man.

*Third*, in verse 21 of our text, reference is made to the healing of the man born blind: “Others said, ‘These are not the words of someone possessed by a demon. A demon cannot cause the blind to see, can it?’” The healing of the man born blind is very fresh in the minds of those who are divided as to who Jesus is. I therefore conclude that the events of John 10:1-21 follow immediately upon the healing of the man born blind and his “interrogation” by the Pharisees. The events of verses 22 and following take place a few months later, though the sheep/shepherding theme continues throughout the rest of the chapter.

In John chapter 10, our Lord identifies Himself as the “**Good Shepherd**,” contrasting Himself with those shepherds of Israel who are rebuked by the Lord in Ezekiel. Ezekiel indicts the wicked “**shepherds of Israel**” who care for themselves at the expense of the flock. They prey upon the sheep rather than protecting them from predators. They feed and clothe themselves at the expense of the flock, yet they do nothing to minister to the needs of the sickly or injured among the flock (Ezekiel 34:3-4). It is not difficult to see that Jesus looks upon the Pharisees before Him as the kind of shepherds Ezekiel condemned. The paralytic man in John chapter 5 had spent years unable to walk, and thus was forced to support himself by begging. Yet when Jesus healed him on a Sabbath day, the Jews were incensed. It is clear they would have preferred that this man not be healed at all than for him to be healed on the Sabbath. They most certainly had no compassion on the woman caught in the act of adultery (John 7:53–8:11). They were more than willing, however, to “use” her in their efforts to accuse Jesus of contradicting the law of Moses.

In the immediately preceding context (John chapter 9), the Pharisees were greatly distressed by the healing of the man born blind. These religious leaders did not think of the Israelites as sheep, but as an ignorant, disgusting, mob (John 7:49). The “fold” (of those destined to enter the kingdom of God) was considered to be a

kind of private club, of which they were the membership committee. Thus, they had no compassion on the man born blind. He was a write-off. And when this man refused to cooperate (and pointed out their inconsistency with their own teaching), they “put him out”—not just “out of the synagogue,” but, in truth and reality (so far as their thinking is concerned), out of the fold. Jesus, on the other hand, has just brought this man into His flock, by faith. No wonder Jesus turns to the subject of shepherding in John 10. Here, he contrasts Himself (the Good Shepherd) with the Pharisees and religious leaders of the Jews, who were evil shepherds.

This is truly one of the greatest passages in the Gospel of John and of the whole New Testament. We will only begin to plumb the depths of the truths contained here, but let us begin, looking to the Spirit of God to enlighten our hearts and minds concerning Him who is the Good Shepherd.

### **Jesus: The True Shepherd of Israel (10:1-5)**

1 “I tell you the solemn truth, the one who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The doorkeeper opens the door for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought all his own sheep out, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. 5 They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not recognize the stranger’s voice.”

Our Lord describes a typical pastoral scene that is familiar to all in His audience. Many of the Israelites were sheep herders (see Genesis 46:31-34). In any city or village, there would be a number of flocks of sheep. For convenience, they would all be herded into a common sheepfold, a simple enclosure where the sheep could be contained, while thieves and predators would be forbidden access. There would be but one door, one access through which the sheep would enter and exit. Through this same door the various shepherds would enter to gather their flocks. Early in the morning, the shepherd arrives at the sheepfold and enters to lead his flock out to pasture. Then, at the end of the day, he (or she—I have seen many a girl or young woman herding sheep in the East) brings his sheep into the sheepfold for safekeeping through the night. One person is assigned as the doorkeeper. Perhaps this duty is shared among the shepherds on a rotating basis. The doorkeeper stations himself in the doorway, keeping the sheep safely inside and any danger to the sheep outside. In the morning, each shepherd reports to the doorkeeper, who recognizes him and lets him into the sheepfold. Once inside the fold, each shepherd calls out his own sheep and leads them outside the fold. Knowing the voice of their shepherd, the sheep of each flock go to their own shepherd when called by name, and then they follow him outside the sheepfold, only to be brought safely back to the fold in the evening.

Jesus uses this familiar scene to demonstrate how He is Israel’s true Shepherd, and how the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders are evil shepherds. Evil shepherds—to whom Jesus refers as “**thieves and robbers**”—do not dare present themselves to the doorkeeper, because he will know them for what they are, and will not grant them access to the sheep, since their intent is to steal sheep and to kill them. If they are to gain entrance into the sheepfold, they must enter by some other way than through the door. They must climb over the wall. The way these folks seek to get to the sheep makes it clear that they have no good in mind. The true shepherd enters the sheepfold in a way that demonstrates his claim to his sheep is legitimate. He comes to the doorkeeper, who recognizes him and grants him access through the door to the sheep.

Some will differ over the interpretation of some of the details, but the general meaning of this allegory is clear to the reader. Jesus is the true Shepherd, Israel’s Messiah. There are many who have claimed to be “shepherds” of God’s flock, but who most certainly were not. Included would be the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders who were currently opposing Jesus. Also in view are those false shepherds yet to appear (see Matthew 24:11, 22-28). Whether in the past, present, or future, all false shepherds are alike in that they use and abuse the sheep for their own selfish interests, and they attempt to gain access and leadership in a way that seeks to avoid the divinely prescribed boundaries. Simply put, they don’t meet the job description of a true shepherd, as described in Ezekiel 34 and elsewhere. And so far as any who would claim to be the Messiah, they do not fulfill the Old Testament prophecies pertaining to Messiah and His coming.

Jesus *is* the true Shepherd. He *is* the Messiah, the One who came in fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies concerning Him. If you would, these biblical qualifications are the “**door**” to which Jesus refers in verses 1-5, and through which He passed by meeting every one of them. While not all would agree with this, it seems to me that the “**doorkeeper**” must be John the Baptist. As David was designated the king of Israel by the prophet Samuel, so also Jesus, the Son of David, was designated Israel’s King by the prophet John the Baptist.

The sheep in the sheepfold are the Jews to whom our Lord came as the Messiah. His flock is but a portion of the sheep in the sheepfold. His sheep are the “**elect**,” the sheep whom God the Father has given to the Son (6:37, 39), and thus Jesus calls them “**His own sheep**” (verses 3, 4). Because they are His sheep, they “**know His voice**,” recognize Him as the Messiah, and trust in Him as their Shepherd. These sheep, who belong to the true Shepherd, also know better than to follow any false shepherd. Instead, they avoid such “shepherds” by fleeing from them.

### Jesus: The Good Shepherd (10:6-18)

This text is not actually a parable, as we might think of the (English) word here from its use in the Synoptic Gospels. The word for parable, used so often in the Synoptic Gospels (approximately 50 times) is not found in the Gospel of John. Conversely, the Greek word which is rendered “parable” above is not found in any of the Synoptic Gospels, but it is used four times in the Gospel of John. Hendriksen, Morris and Carson seem to agree that the word “parable” may not be the best translation for the term John has employed:

The discourse about the good shepherd is called a *paroimia*. In general a *paroimia* (literally, wayside saying) is a *figurative* saying (16:25, 29). Here in chapter 10 it is an *allegory* rather than a *parable*. The Gospel of John does not contain any parables. The very term *parable* occurs only in the Synoptics (and in Heb. 9:9; 11:19), while *paroimia* occurs only in the Fourth Gospel (and in II Pet. 2:22). In the N. T. there is some overlapping in the meaning of the terms *parable* and *paroimia*: each may refer to a *proverb* (II Pet. 2:22; cf. Luke 4:23), but this is the exception rather than the rule. Similarly the Hebrew *mashal* has a very wide connotation: proverb, parable, poem, riddle (veiled and pointed remark). . . . Essentially the difference in meaning between a *paroimia* in the sense of *allegory* (as here in chapter 10) and a *parable* amounts to this, that the former partakes of the nature of a *metaphor*; the latter is more like a *simile*. A metaphor is an *implied* comparison (‘Tell that fox,’ meaning Herod); a simile is an *expressed* comparison (‘his appearance was *as* lighting). An *allegory* may be defined as an *extended metaphor*; a *parable*, as an *extended simile*.

It is difficult to class this section exactly. It is called a *paroimia* in v. 6 . . . , which may indicate a proverb, or, more generally, a ‘dark saying’ of some sort. It differs from the Synoptic parables in that there is no connected story. Most people call it an allegory but Lagrange objects that in an allegory the one person can scarcely be represented by two figures, as here Jesus is both shepherd and door. He prefers to call it *un petit tableau parabolique*. The name we give it matters little, but in our interpretation we must bear in mind that it does not fit neatly into any of our usual categories. It is basically an allegory, but with distinctive features of its own.

The word rendered ‘figure of speech’ is *paroimia*, an expression that occurs again in 16:25, 29 but never in the Synoptic Gospels. The favoured term there is *parabole* (‘parable’), which never occurs in John. Both words render Hebrew *masal*, and all three words can refer to an extraordinarily wide variety of literary forms, including proverbs, parables, maxims, similes, allegories, fables, riddles, narratives embodying certain truths, taunts and more (cf. Carson, *Matt*, pp. 301-304). The common feature in these quite different genres is that there is something enigmatic or cryptic about them: hence NIV’s ‘figure of speech.’ Whatever the form (and Jesus used many forms), Jesus’ opponents *did not understand what he was telling them*.

It is little wonder that our Lord’s audience does not understand Him. How can they when they are not His sheep (10:26-27)? In verses 7-18, Jesus continues with the sheep/shepherd imagery, but with a somewhat different twist. First, He shifts from the more general third person (“**the one who**,” “**he**,” “**him**,” “**his**”) to the very specific first person singular (“**I**,” “**me**”). He makes it very clear from here on that He is speaking of Himself as “the True Shepherd” and “**the Good Shepherd**.” He now speaks of Himself as the “**door**,” and He drops any further reference to the “**doorkeeper**.” In verses 7-10, John continues to speak of those who are “**thieves and robbers**,” but in verses 11-18 Jesus contrasts Himself—“**the Good Shepherd**”—with hirelings. The Good Shepherd not only presents Himself in a way that is fitting, He also cares for the sheep by laying His life down for them.

The importance of our Lord’s teaching is indicated by the familiar expression, “**Truly, truly . . .**,” or as the NET Bible renders it, “**I tell you the solemn truth . . .**” Jesus is the “**door**” for the sheep. In verses 7-10, it is not “**the shepherd**” who passes through the door, but his sheep. Those sheep who pass through the door—who trust in Jesus as God’s Messiah, the Good Shepherd—are those who are saved, and who enter into the abundant life. In “sheep terms,” they enjoy the safety of the shepherd’s care and protection, and the abundance of the rich pastures and water to which he leads them. They couldn’t have it any better. In “people terms,” those who trust

in Jesus are forgiven their sins and enter into the abundant life, under the protection, guidance, and tender care of the Savior, who is their **“Good Shepherd.”**

In what appears to be a sweeping statement, Jesus says, **“All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them”** (verse 8). He most certainly is not referring to the godly prophets of old, men like Moses and Elijah, and Daniel. I believe we could paraphrase our Lord’s words in this way: “All who have come before me, claiming to be me—what I alone am as the Good Shepherd—are thieves and robbers.” In the immediate context, Jesus has just claimed to be **“the door.”** When He speaks of **“all who came before me,”** He is referring to all those pseudo-shepherds (past, present, and future) who seek to usurp His place and prominence as the One sent from heaven by the Father, the Messiah. The Pharisees certainly think of themselves as the “gatekeepers” of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ day: “But woe to you experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You keep locking people out of the kingdom of heaven! For you neither enter nor permit those trying to enter to go in” (Matthew 23:13).

These **“shepherds”** are nothing more than **“thieves and robbers.”** They do not come to do good to the sheep. They do not care *about* the sheep, nor do they care *for* the sheep. They come for personal gain, at the expense of the sheep. But the Lord’s sheep are not taken in. They know the voice of their Shepherd, and they know a stranger when he comes as their shepherd, so they do not listen to them. In contrast, the Good Shepherd has come to benefit the sheep, at His own expense.

Evangelistic efforts in my generation have placed John 10:10b in the spotlight: **“I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.”** It is a great text and worthy of our attention. My only concern is that in taking this half-verse out of its context, we lose some of its meaning. Jesus has **“come so that His sheep may have life, and have it abundantly,”** but He has done so in contrast to the evil shepherds, who have come **“only to steal and kill and destroy”** (verse 10a). Pseudo-shepherds promise sheep “the good life,” but they most certainly do not provide it. It is our Lord who is the Good Shepherd, and as such He alone gives salvation, safety, and the abundant life. There is not only an abundance for the sheep here, but a freedom. They can **“come in and go out, and find pasture.”** This does not mean that they can go their own way, but the Good Shepherd goes before His flock, and His sheep willingly follow Him. He does not, as some sheep herders are inclined to do, drive them (sometimes using a sheepdog, which nips away at their feet).

Now we come to the really amazing part. Pseudo-shepherds do not care about the flock; they care about themselves. Thus, they use and abuse the flock, but they do not tenderly care for the flock. They come **“to steal and kill and destroy.”** The Good Shepherd intimately knows and tenderly cares for His flock, but He does far more. He places the interests of the flock above His own, and thus in order to save the flock, He lays down His life for His sheep. The hireling is interested in his wages more than the sheep he is paid to care for. If a wolf attacks the sheep under his care, he would be risking personal injury were he to seek to save the sheep. The hireling therefore forsakes the sheep to save his own skin. He runs from danger, rather than endanger himself by seeking to save the flock.

The Good Shepherd does much more than simply put himself in harm’s way to save the sheep; He deliberately lays down His life in order to save the sheep. The sacrificial death of the Good Shepherd described here is not for “sheep” in general (all the sheep in the sheepfold of verses 1-5); it is for *His sheep*, the sheep in His flock, the elect whom the Father has given Him, whom He Himself has chosen:

It is *for the sheep—only* for the sheep—that the good shepherd lays down his life. The design of the atonement is definitely restricted. Jesus dies for those who had been given to him by the Father, for the children of God, for true believers. This is the teaching of the Fourth Gospel throughout (3:16; 6:37, 39, 40, 44, 65; 10:11, 15, 29; 17:6, 9, 20, 21, 24). It is also the doctrine of the rest of Scripture. With his precious blood Christ purchased his church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27); his people (Matt. 1:21); the elect (Rom. 8:32-35).

However clearly this Gospel portrays Jesus as the Saviour of the world (4:42), the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29, 36), it insists no less emphatically that Jesus has a peculiar relation with those the Father has given him (6:37ff.), with those he has chosen out of the world (15:16, 19). So here: Jesus’ death is peculiarly for his sheep, just as we elsewhere read that ‘Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her’ (Ephesians 5:25).

In verses 1-5, the sheepfold into which the true Shepherd enters contains many flocks. Only some of these sheep “belong” to the true Shepherd. Out of the sheepfold of Israel, the true Shepherd calls *His own sheep by name.*

His sheep know His voice and follow Him out of the fold. Verses 7-18 leave the sheepfold (Israel) and focus on the flock of the Good Shepherd. It is for this flock that Jesus laid down His life. His sacrificial atoning death was no accident, and the Shepherd was no helpless victim (in the popular sense of that term today), overcome by His adversaries. His death was by His own will and purpose, and in obedience to the Father's will. His death was purposed by Him to save all those the Father had given to Him. He laid down His life so that He could take it up again. It was a sacrificial death, sovereignly purposed and sovereignly played out. Our Lord was never more "in control" (that is what sovereignty is about) than when He was hanging on the cross of Calvary. You will remember that it was He who "**gave up His spirit**" (John 19:30).

So far, the focus has been upon the relationship between Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and His Jewish sheep. He is, after all, the Jewish Messiah, who came to save His people. But "His people" does not include every Israelite (verses 1-5; see Romans 9:6); it does include many from among the Gentiles: "I have other sheep that do not come from this sheepfold. I must bring them too, and they will listen to my voice, so that there will be one flock and one shepherd" (verse 16).

Jesus does not say that He *will have* other sheep, but rather that He *does have* them. These are surely elect "**sheep**" from among the Gentiles. While these "**sheep**" have not yet become a part of our Lord's flock, they most certainly will. Our Lord can therefore speak of these "**sheep**" as those "**sheep**" He already *has*, because salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is God's work. Men are called to respond, and respond they will if they are *His sheep*. They will hear His voice, and they will follow Him. These sheep will become a part of our Lord's one flock. They are not an inferior flock, nor are they a separate flock. Believing Jews and Gentiles make up one flock (Ephesians 2:11-22).

*(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/23-good-shepherd-john-101-18>)*

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

Today's text is both disturbing and reassuring. It is disturbing because we prefer to think that there are many ways to find God. Yet Jesus says that he is the one who is the shepherd, the gate to the sheep pen. Apart from him, there is no abundant life. But that message is also reassuring. We do not need to discover our own path to God. We do not need to work a plan by which we find real life for ourselves. We need merely to listen to the true shepherd and follow him. He leads, provides, and protects. We follow, receive, and trust. That is the way of abundant life, the way for true sheep of the good shepherd.

### ***Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary***

1. In a world of imitators, we find true love in Christ alone (John 10:1-2)
2. Believers can be confident of Jesus and His love for them, so they can approach Him without fear or hesitation (vss. 3-5)
3. Jesus meets us in the midst of confusion to reveal Himself, giving peace and clarity (vs. 6)
4. Only as we examine God's truth can we recognize Satan's lies for what they are (vss. 7-9)
5. Satan aims to destroy the blessed lives we have in Christ (vs. 10)
6. Jesus faithfully protects His beloved flock; false shepherds will forsake them to protect themselves (vss. 11-13)
7. Jesus' love holds nothing back-commit to Him (vss. 14-15)