

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

John 10: 1-21

DIG: During **Christ's** lifetime, how did the shepherds protect their **sheep** at night? How far would he be willing to go to protect them? In this story, whom do **the sheep** represent? **The good Shepherd? The false shepherds? The stranger?** Why do you think **Jesus** used **the sheep** in **His** example? What is the relationship of **the shepherd** to his **sheep**? How do **the sheep** respond to **the shepherd**? How does this relate to the Pharisees' difficulty in understanding **Jesus**? What does **Yeshua** mean by likening **Himself** to the gate of the sheep-pen? How is **He** not like the **thieves and robbers**? How does **the Lord** identify **Himself** with **the good shepherd**? Why do **His** listeners respond as they do? What is the basic point of this story?

REFLECT: What turning point was significant for you in terms of hearing "**God's** voice?" How do you discern **His** voice from that of so many others that vie for your attention? What is the most reassuring thing about this section for you personally? If you did not have an earthly protector, can you let **God** be your heavenly **Protector**?

Later that afternoon, on **the eighth day** of the festival of Booths (Leviticus 23:36, 39; Numbers 29:35), **Christ** spoke to **the crowd** that witnessed the miracle of the healing of the man who was born blind in the Temple Compound. Going on from the teaching of the blindness of the Pharisees, who professed to be the teachers of the people, **Jesus** gave them an allegory about **true** and **false teachers**, contrasting **Himself** to them. **The eighth day** was considered a separate feast and was celebrated as a day of Sabbath rest.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a symbol is worth a thousand lectures. **Jesus** understood the power of a familiar image to unlock the mysteries of heaven. And no sight was more common in first-century Judea than that of a **shepherd** leading **his sheep** - no less common than seeing people riding in their cars today. **To the lost sheep of Isra'el, He** was **the living door** and **the good [true] Shepherd**.

Unlike many farmers in Europe who raise **sheep** for food, **shepherds** in first-century Judea tended **sheep** for wool. The animals grazed and grew thick coats that could be sheared off and sold for a tidy sum. Obviously, the more **sheep** one had the more money one could make, so **the shepherds** kept very careful watch over **their flock**. **He** sacrificed **his** own comfort to provide safe grazing during the day and risked **his** own safety to guard **the flock** against thieves and predators during the night. Therefore, it was not uncommon for a **shepherd** to know each of **his** animals individually and to call each one by name.

A good **shepherd** never allowed **his** flock to remain in the field as night fell; thieves and wild animals could take advantage of the darkness to steal and kill **his sheep**. If the pasture was close enough to the village, **the sheep** would be driven from the field to a communal **sheep-pen** for the night, guarded by a designated **gatekeeper**. In the morning, before driving **their** flocks into the wilderness to find adequate grazing, **the shepherds** could separate **the flocks** by merely calling to **them** from different directions. **The sheep**, knowing the voice of **their shepherd**, would follow. **The shepherds** always remained with **their sheep**, camping out under the stars for weeks at a time. As darkness fell each evening, **they** corralled **the flock** into a cave or some other natural enclosure and slept at the entrance, making themselves, as it were, a living **gate**.⁹⁷⁷

In relation to the sheep-pen of the Kingdom and the Church, Jesus is the gate. **Jesus** had just healed the man born blind and said: **For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind**. Some Pharisees who were with Him heard Him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too" (John 9:39-40)? So here, **Yeshua** responds with an allegory. **The Pharisees** were familiar with the general pastoral scene, but could not discern the spiritual meaning behind the words. In short, yes, they were **blind too!** **The Chief Shepherd** continued: **Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep-pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber**. The Pharisees, who had perverted the Torah by teaching that the Oral Law (see Ei - **The Oral Law**) was equal to, or even better than the Torah, had **stolen** the truth from **the people** and **robbed them** of its blessings. In contrast to the Pharisees, **the one who enters by the gate is seen to be the shepherd of the sheep** (Yochanan 10:1-2). **He** has the right to **enter** and this is recognized when **the gatekeeper opens the gate for him**.

The Near Eastern **shepherd** never drives **his flock** from behind, but always walks **ahead**, leading **them** along the roads and over hills to new pasture. As **he** goes, it is not uncommon for **him** to talk to **them** in a loud singsong voice. **The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice** (John 10:3-4).

But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, if a stranger enters the sheep-pen, the sheep will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice (John 10:5). The point of **Jesus** using this figure of speech emphasizes how **a shepherd** nurtures **his flock**. People come to **God** because **He** calls them (Romans 8:28-30). Their proper response to **Christ's** call is to follow **Him** (John 1:43, 8:12, 12:26, 21:19 and 22). **But this spiritual lesson was missed by the Pharisees who did not understand what Jesus was telling them** (Yochanan 10:6).

In relation to the flock, Jesus is the good [true] Shepherd. Therefore, **Jesus** said again: **Very truly I tell you, I AM the gate for the sheep** (John 10:7). This is the third of **Yeshua's** seven **I AM's** (John 6:35, 8:12, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1). John follows His first **very truly** in 10:1 with another here, which interprets the first. To the assembled crowd, **He** adds: **All who have come before me are thieves and robbers. Messiah's predecessors are the Pharisees, Torah-teachers, and the Sadducees** who were presently ruling over the Jews. By identifying **them** as **thieves and robbers**, **Christ** casts them in the role prophesied by **Jeremiah** (Jeremiah 23:1-2), **Ezekiel** (Ezekiel 34:1-10), and **Zechariah** (Zechariah 11:4-17). **The bazaar of the sons of Annas** (see **Bs - The First Cleansing of the Temple at the Passover**) had left the people physically and spiritually impoverished, but **Jesus** had come to bring genuine abundance. **Yeshua** has already pointed out that **the sheep** will not take notice of strangers. Now **He** says that **the sheep** did **not** hear **the thieves and robbers**. Those who are genuinely **His sheep** have spiritual discernment. **They** await the voice of **their [true] Shepherd** and **have not listened to the thieves** (**Yochanan 10:8**).⁹⁷⁸

I AM the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture (John 10:9). In Catholic Bishop Alphonse de Liguori's book, *The Glories of Mary*, he states "Mary is called . . . the gate of heaven because no one can enter that blessed Kingdom without passing through her" (page 160). Additionally, he writes, "the way of salvation is open to no one except through Mary," and since, "our salvation is in the hands of Mary . . . the person who is protected by Mary will be saved, and the one who is not will be lost" (pages 169-170). This is the official doctrine of the Catholic Church, and is an abomination that it would teach that faith in Mary will save, rather than faith in **Christ**.⁹⁷⁹

The thief, that is the false shepherd, comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10). This is no prosperity, "name-it-and-claim-it (or as I like to call it, "blab-it-and-grab-it") theology. **Jesus** had nothing against money, but He viewed it as morally neutral, having nothing to do with the kingdom of **God**. **Christ's** talmidim were not wealthy men, in fact several gave up prosperous occupations to follow **Messiah**. The abundance **Yeshua** offers is a spiritual abundance that transcends circumstances like income, health, living conditions, and even death.

The abundant life is life that never ends; yet we don't have to wait until the end of our physical life to receive this abundance and to enjoy it. Abundant life includes peace, purpose, destiny, a genuine purpose for living, the joy of facing any adversity - including the grave - without fear, and the ability to endure hardship with confident assurance.⁹⁸⁰

I AM the good [true] Shepherd (John 10:11a; also see Ezekiel 34:23, 37:24, Psalm 23; John 21:15-17; Hebrews 13:20; First Peter 5:4). **Jesus'** strong statement: **I AM** (Greek: *ego eimi*), paired with the phrase **good [true] Shepherd**, is especially emphatic in the original language. This is the fourth of **Jesus'** seven **I AM's** (Yochanan 6:35, 8:12, 10:7, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1). According to the Synoptic Gospels the parable was **Messiah's** primary way of presenting **His** teaching. In this regard, as in many others, there is a sharp and easily observable contrast between the Synoptics and **Yochanan's** Gospel. There are no parables in **John**. Instead of parables about **shepherds** we find: **I AM the good Shepherd**, and general statements about shepherding, but no story. What follows is a clear foreshadowing of the persecution **He** will suffer, emphasizing **His** substitutionary death on our behalf.

The good [true] Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11b). The life of a shepherd could be very dangerous as illustrated by David defending his flock against bears and lions (**First Samuel 17:34-35, 37**). Jacob also experienced the labor and toil of being a faithful shepherd (**Genesis 31:38-40**). **Jesus** said: **I AM the good [true] Shepherd**. In the TaNaKh **God** is called the Shepherd of His people (**Psalms 23:1, 80:1-2; Ecclesiastes 12:11; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10**). In the B'rit Chadashah, **Yeshua** is also called the **Great Shepherd** (**Hebrews 13:20-21**) and **The Chief Shepherd** (**First Peter 5:4**).

In contrast with **the good [true] Shepherd**, who **owns**, cares for, feeds, protects and dies for **His sheep**, the one who works for wages - **the hired hand** - does not have the same commitment because **he does not own the sheep**. **He** is only interested in making money and self-preservation. **So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks** (Greek: *harpazei*), literally *snatches away* (this is the same verb used in **Yochanan 10:28**) **the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep** (**John 10:12-13**). Isra'el had many false prophets, selfish kings, and imitation messiahs. **The flock** of **God** suffered constantly from **their** abuse (**Jeremiah 10:21-22, 12:10; Zechariah 11:4-17**).⁹⁸¹ This sets **Messiah** apart from **the false teachers, the thieves and robbers** of Isra'el who supposedly faithfully taught the people of **God**. Whereas **He** is selfless, they were selfish. Whereas **He** will lay down **His** life for **His sheep**, they will abandon all to save themselves. Whereas **Yeshua** lived in complete obedience to the Torah and **the Father**, **they** only obeyed **their** own lusts.

This is one of the strongest passages of security of the believer in the entire Bible (see **Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**). Again **Jesus** repeats **His** declaration: **I AM the good [true] Shepherd**. In contrast with **the hired hand**, **the true Shepherd** has an intimacy and a personal interest in **His sheep**. **Messiah** said: **I know My sheep and My sheep know Me - just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father - and I lay down My life for the sheep** (**Yochanan 10:14-15**). **Yeshua's** care and concern is seen by **His** prediction of **His** coming death for **the flock**.

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen, namely Gentiles. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd (John 10:16). Although at first **His** talmidim were sent only **to the lost sheep of the house of Isra'el (Mattityahu 10:6 CJB)**, and spoke of **His** own commission in the same way (**Matthew 8:5-13**), this limitation applied only to **His** life before the resurrection. Furthermore, **He** intimated the coming inclusion of the Gentiles when **He** healed the Roman centurion's servant (see **Ea - The Faith of the Centurion**), the demon-possessed daughter of the Canaanite woman (see **Ft - The Faith of the Canaanite Woman**), ministered to the Samaritan woman at the well (see **Ca - Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman**), prophesied that **many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 8:11)**, and that some Gentiles would be favorably judged (see **Jy - The Sheep and the Goats**).

This joining of Gentiles to **God's** people is alluded to again in **John 11:52** and is the major subject of the book of **Acts**, Rabbi Sha'ul's letters to the **Romans, Galatians, Ephesians** and the book of **Revelation** by **Yochanan**. The ingathering of Gentiles has begun but has not been completed. Portions of the Scriptures have been translated into more than 1,800 languages but there are some 5,000 languages spoken (depending on what is defined as a language). There are believers in **the Messiah** and in **God's** Word among multitudes of peoples, but multitudes of peoples are virtually unreached. The **other sheep** will continue to be added until the full number of the **Gentiles** has come in (**Romans 11:25**).

The TaNaKh often has the salvation of the Gentiles in view (see **Genesis 12:3, 22:18, 26:4; Isaiah 11:10, 19:18, 54:1-3, 60:1-3; Hosea 1:10; Amos 9-12; Malachi 1:11; Psalms 72 and 87. Isaiah 45:23** is quoted by Sha'ul in this connection). The strongest impact of this idea on the consciousness of observant Jews come from **Zechariah 14:9 CJB**, recited daily in the synagogue in the *Aleinu* prayer: **Then ADONAI will be king over the whole world. On that day ADONAI will be the only one, and His name will be the only name.** While **Zechariah 14:9 CJB** proves that eventually worship in the B'rit Chadashah will be far more Jewish in character than it is now, the present verse (**Yochanan 10:16**), and the New Testament verses I have cited above show that the final form of **God's** chosen people includes Gentiles who have not converted to Judaism.⁹⁸²

Again **Messiah** predicted **His** death, saying: **The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down my life - only to take it up again. His** death was entirely voluntary. **No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. Jesus** was not a helpless pawn on history's chessboard. **I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.** It is **the Father** who raised up **Yeshua (Romans 8:11)**, but according to this verse **Jesus** had the power, even in death to resurrect **Himself. This command I received from My**

Father (John 10:17-18). This tells us that **Christ** saw **His** whole life as an act of obedience to **God. ADONAI** had given **Him** a task to do, and **He** was prepared to carry it out to the end - even if it meant death. **He** has a unique relationship with **Ha'Shem**, which we can describe only by saying that **He** is **the Son of God**. But that relationship did not give **Him** the right to do as **He** pleased. It always depended on **Him** doing what pleased **His Father**. **Sonship** for **Him**, and for us as **His** children, can never be based on anything but obedience.⁹⁸³

The Jews who heard these words were again divided. For the third time, Yochanan tells us that **Jesus'** teaching divided the people (John 7:43 and 9:16). Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad (see Ek - **It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, That This Fellow Drives Out Demons**). Why listen to him?" But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind" (Yochanan 10:20-21)? **Messiah** had declared earlier that **His** sword of truth divides people and **His voice** calls to **His** own. Just as expected, the dividing of the religious officials that occurred in **John 7:43 and 9:16** continued here as a result of this discourse.

The eighth day after the festival of Booths was very important in **the life of Christ**. At dawn **He** sat down to teach as all the people gathered around **Him** at the Temple. But **He** was interrupted as the **Pharisees** and **Torah-teachers** tried to trap and discredit **Yeshua** publically by bringing **Him** a woman caught in adultery to judge. After that failed, **He** continued to teach that morning. Each evening for all seven days of **the festival of Booths**, multitudes of Israelites had gone to **the Court of the Women** to participate in the ceremony of the lighting of the lights. That ceremony pointed to **Him** and **He** declared: **I AM the light of the world**. Later that morning **the religious leaders** continued to challenge **Jesus'** authority, but **the Lord** claimed to be greater than **Abraham** when **He** said: **Before Abraham was born, I AM**. The conflict between **Yeshua** and **the Pharisees** apparently continued into the early afternoon over the miraculous healing of a man who had been blind from birth. Finally in the late afternoon, **Christ** concluded **His** busy day when **He** spoke to **the crowd** concerning **the false shepherds** who ruled over the nation at that time.

What a **day!** But **Jesus** did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (Yochanan 21:25). Whatever the wonders that we may have experienced, they are nothing to the wonders that we may yet experience. Our words are powerless to describe **the Messiah**, and human books are inadequate to hold **Him**.

Jesus told the Jews that **He, the good [true] Shepherd**, would freely **lay down His life** for us . . . **His sheep**. Later on, **He** would tell **the Twelve** that there is **no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends** (John 15:13). **The Prince of Life** perfectly demonstrated that love when **He** died on the cross, offering up **His** life for each one of us.

It is staggering to think that if you were the only person in the world, **Jesus** would still have freely given **His** life to save you. It was this realization that gave **Peter** the boldness to tell the members of the Great Sanhedrin (see Lg - **The Great Sanhedrin**) that **salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).**

We have a great cause for rejoicing! **God's** wisdom, foolish though it seems to the human mind, triumphs even in the darkest moments. Who but **ADONAI** could preordain that **Yeshua**, the beloved **Son**, would be rejected by **His** own people and abandoned by **His** talmidim? **Ha'Shem Himself** even turned **His** back on **His Son**, as **Yeshua** became sin on our behalf (see Lv - **Jesus' Second Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of God**). This, however, was the incomprehensible wisdom of **God**. **He** loved us so much that **He** willingly sacrificed **His** one and only **Son**, whom **He** loves above anyone or anything else, just to bring us back to **His** embrace. It is just as **Yochanan** declares: **See what love the Father has lavished on us in letting us be called God's children (First Yochanan 3:1a CJB)!**

During those times when things seem dark and hopeless, we must look to the loving provision of **the Lord of life**. Even in the unexpected tragedies of life, **He** is at work, inviting us to draw closer to **Himself**. There are times when **His** wisdom is so far beyond us that our only response can be faith and trust. In these moments, **God** asks us to pray, "**Yeshua**, I trust **You**." When troubles and darkness surround us, we can proclaim, "**Father**, hold me in **Your** arms." When life seems unbearable, we can look to the cross and say, "**Lord**, **You** died for me. Help my unbelief."

***Holy Spirit**, be my **Comforter**. Be my strength and reveal to me the truth of **Jesus Christ**. I abandon myself to **You** and trust **You** with all that I am and all that I have. Amen.⁹⁸⁴*