

JOHN 10

John 10:1–6. The Shepherd Contrasted with the Robber

The connection of this chapter with the previous one is unclear; the speech is not introduced at all until verse 6. Perhaps Jesus is still speaking to the same Pharisees from chapter 9. Although this is perhaps the most famous of the pastoral images in the Gospels, this discourse is virtually the only reference to sheep and shepherding in the Gospel of John (with the exception of 21:15–17; such images are far more common in Matthew, Mark, and Luke). The care and protection shown by a shepherd for his flock is a natural metaphor for the care shown by God and His ministers for His people.

The first verses center on proper access to God’s flock. Only through the door—through valid, authorized means—can one minister in the prescribed manner. Anyone who approaches the kingdom of God in any other way, no matter how enticing or charming the approach, should not be trusted. Moreover, God’s people can recognize the voice of their true Master. He knows them intimately, calls them by name, and leads them.

John 10:7–10. Jesus is the Door

Jesus makes the application of His metaphor clear by explaining, “I am the door.” Anyone who seeks to approach God’s people must do so in His name. We should not take Jesus’s remark about His predecessors (verse 8) to be a condemnation of the prophets who came before Jesus but rather as a round dismissal of all messianic claimants who preceded Him. Many would-be saviors have risen and fallen, but only Jesus has exercised this authority justly. We may be reminded of Jacob’s comment: “The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate” (2 Nephi 9:41).

John 10:11–13. The Shepherd Contrasted with the Hireling

Jesus now transforms the metaphor: not only is He the gate but He is also the shepherd. Most would agree that the sacrifice of one's life goes beyond the normal expectations for a shepherd, and it is in this exceptionalism that we can understand why Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is special. No hired servant would risk his life for such a purpose. Perhaps we should avoid criticizing such a lack of commitment—no more should be reasonably expected from a hired servant. But the point of this illustration is that only someone who is totally committed and fully capable, as only Jesus is, can offer a suitable self-sacrifice for the sheep.

John 10:14–18. Jesus to Lay Down His Life

Because Jesus knows and loves His sheep—and knows, is known, loves, and is loved by the Father—He is willing and able to lay down His life for them. Other Christian commentators have connected verse 16 with the Gentiles, but as sheep are often employed as an image for the house of Israel, this explanation is unsatisfactory. We are justified, then, in connecting this statement with the lost tribes of Israel, both in the Old and New Worlds. Jesus will make this connection explicit in 3 Nephi 15:21 and 16:1.

Jesus's remarks in John 10:17 and 18 are significant in light of what will follow. Jesus will soon suffer and die for all humankind, and the Evangelist wants it to be clear that this is part of the divine plan. Jesus's death and subsequent Resurrection are not a mistake quickly corrected but are the order of salvation decreed from the foundation of the world. When Jesus dies, He does so willingly. No power on heaven and earth can overcome Him without His approval, and this makes His self-sacrifice more complete.

John 10:19–21. Controversy

Once again, those who listen do not fully comprehend Jesus's words (John 10:6), and a controversy erupts. By now, Jesus's miracles are well known, and it seems that everybody has formed an opinion of Him. No one disputes the fact that He is capable of miracles; however, based on the warning of Deuteronomy 13:1–5, some are rightly hesitant to accept such as proof of divinity. Note the rejoinder of those that believe in Him: "These are not the words of him that hath a devil." Shows of power can be deceptive; words even more so. But the combination of Jesus's mighty works and words points toward His divine origins.

John 10:22–30. Jesus Is Confronted about His Identity

The scene shifts abruptly forward to the Feast of Dedication, more commonly referred to as Hanukkah. This is not a biblically prescribed festival; it commemorates the Maccabean victory over Greek oppressors and the rededication of the temple following its desecration at pagan hands. In a somewhat unusual occurrence (per the pattern in the Gospel of John), Jesus does not provoke an outcry with His teaching but

rather is approached by a crowd demanding an answer. Jesus does not provide a straightforward answer, as is so often the case in John's Gospel. If His questioners were truly His sheep, they would have already recognized the answer in His previous teachings and actions. However, this crowd seems determined to dictate the terms of His messiahship to Him, and He has no time for such stubbornness.

Jesus's final remark, which will prompt another near stoning, is worth a closer look. Verse 30 is often used as a proof text for the doctrine of the trinity, but the matter is not so simple. As many other languages do, Greek assigns grammatical gender to nouns and adjectives. The gender of the word "one" (Greek *hen*) is neuter, not the masculine (Greek *heis*) we would expect if Jesus were claiming that He and the Father were the same person. Instead, the neuter seems to indicate a more abstract sort of unity, perhaps of essence, purpose, or nature.

John 10:31–42. Jesus Again Escapes Stoning

This is the second time in the Gospel of John that Jesus is nearly stoned for blasphemy. Jesus calmly responds to this development by claiming His innocence. The charge is predicated on the grounds that Jesus is claiming divinity for Himself. The irony is that this charge is correct, but that Jesus is still innocent because He alone has the right to do so. For any other man to make this claim would be blasphemy, but for Jesus it is not.

Jesus's citation of Psalm 82, which uses the term *gods* in a very different sense, may seem strange to modern sensibilities, but the logic of His argument is at home among ancient manners of scriptural interpretation. If scripture referred to those with human authority as *gods* (the standard understanding of Psalm 82), how much more appropriate is it, then, to apply the term to Jesus, the One "whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world"?

Once again, Jesus escapes an attempted execution. By doing so, He proves His statement given earlier in the chapter: "No man taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself." Jesus, firmly in control of His own destiny, will soon lay His life down—but not yet. Jesus takes refuge in Transjordan, and the next time that He enters Judea, He will set the events in motion that will lead to His execution (John 11:7–8).

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