

Jesus the Door of the Sheep (John 10:1-10)  
*Kid's Lesson / The Seven I Ams of Jesus / Perfect Love Kids 2019*

**Table of Contents**

Text of John 10:1-10 (NKJV)..... 1

Background Information..... 1

    “Door” in the Bible..... 1

    Commentary on John 10:1-9 ..... 2

Notes and Thoughts ..... 4

Videos and Craft Ideas..... 4

**Text of John 10:1-10 (NKJV)**

*10 “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. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.*

*<sup>7</sup> Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. <sup>9</sup> I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> 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.*

**Background Information**

*“Door” in the Bible*

Doors and doorways are places of transition. We move through them to the outside or into another room to greet new people; we close doors and find quiet and solitude. The door is an important symbol for the biblical writers. The doorway, gate, portal or entryway is often associated with entrance into areas of great spiritual significance. The various courts in the temple area were marked by walls and portals, and the Holy of Holies in the temple was sealed off for all but one day of the year (*see Sacred Space*). Then the high priest, after appropriate ceremonies, would enter to represent the people before God.

The biblical writers use this almost primal association of doors and religious boundaries, but more often the imagery of door is connected quite closely to its literal work of opening and closing (*see Shut, Close*) and of hiding and revealing. The door is one of the most significant parts of a house, and at times biblical

writers use it as a synecdoche for an entire house (*see* Home, House). In the well-ordered, God-fearing Hebrew home, doors were to bear words testifying to God's truth (Deut 6:9). This figurative language speaks of a house oriented around God's law...

**The Door as Spiritual Entryway.** Jesus refers to himself as “the door” (Jn 10:9). In the context this certainly refers to being a door for the sheep and hence the gate or entryway to salvation. When the risen Christ stands at the door and knocks—“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” (Rev 3:20 NIV)—the door symbolizes the need for a decision and the potential exclusion of Christ.

The door imagery is also used to give a word of comfort to beleaguered Christians when Christ declares, “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” (Rev 3:8 NIV). Paul used the metaphor of God's opening the “door of faith” (Acts 14:27) as showing the exclusive way of faith as the portal through which people enter the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Commentary on John 10:1-9*

This passage continues Jesus' words to the \*Pharisees in 9:41. It is based on \*Old Testament images of God as the shepherd of Israel (Gen 48:15; 49:24; Ps 23:1; 28:9; 77:20; 78:72; Is 40:11; Ezek 34:11–31), of Israel as his flock (Ps 74:1; 78:52; 79:13; 100:3) and of abusive or unfaithful religious leaders as destroyers of his flock (Jer 23:1–2; Ezek 34). Faithful human shepherds (Jer 3:15) included Moses, David (2 Sam 5:2; Ps 78:71–72) and the Davidic \*Messiah (Mic 5:4), but God appears most often as Israel's chief shepherd. Although Moses and David were shepherds, urban people throughout the Roman Empire often looked down on shepherds as low-class and coarse. From the ancient Near East to Greek epic, however, shepherds were a common ancient figure for rulers.

In this context, the healed man who follows Jesus but is excluded from the \*synagogue is one of Jesus' sheep; Jesus is the divine shepherd of Israel; and those who excluded the man recall Israel's unfaithful leaders condemned in the prophets. Thus, although these leaders seek to exclude the man from God's people, God himself affirms that the man (and those like him) do belong to his people.

**10:1–2.** During the cool winter months, sheep were kept inside a pen at night; the pen often had a stone wall, which might have briars on top of it. (Winter was approaching at the time of this feast.) Ancient sources portray the pen as a protection from wolves (10:12) and other predators. Although in warmer parts of the Mediterranean sheep could ideally find pasture at any time of year, where this was not possible they might remain in the fold during winter (soon approaching, in view of 7:2 and 10:22).

One could build such pens at caves (1 Sam 24:3), a square on a hillside surrounded by stone walls, an enclosed yard in front of a house, and anything from a roofed enclosure to a temporary shelter using thornbushes instead of rocks, depending on the circumstances. The door here may suggest formal walls, perhaps of stones. One observer of Middle Eastern shepherding, Kenneth Bailey, suggests that because the thief must “go up” to surmount the wall in 10:1, it may be like some modern village family courtyards, with walls more than two meters high. (“Go up” does not always require such an interpretation, however; cf., e.g., Gen 38:12; 41:2.) Various families may share a courtyard for this purpose; this might be distinct from the setting in 10:7–9 (see comment there).

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<sup>1</sup> Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 215–216. Logos Bible Software.

When speaking technically, ancient law distinguished thieves from robbers: the former broke in, whereas the latter often lived in the wilderness and assaulted passersby. When linked figuratively, though, they can belong to the same semantic domain. Shepherds continually had to guard against losing sheep to either kind of enemy (or other predators, 10:12). People dreaded thieves and robbers, which were common (esp. at night) and could be harshly punished.

**10:3–4.** Sheep were considered among the most obedient of animals. In the Old Testament, Israel “heard God’s voice” when they obeyed the \*law and his message through his prophets. Those who were truly his sheep—in covenant relationship with God—knew him (see comment on 10:14–15). (John’s readers hear him through the \*Spirit, a practice that most of their contemporaries did not believe was possible in their own day; cf. 16:13–15.) Sheep could have names based on color, like “snowy” (white), or other characteristics. It is said that shepherds customarily knew each of their sheep by name. In the Old Testament, God called his special ones, his closest servants, “by name” (Ex 33:12, 17; cf. Is 43:1). (God knowing the names of all stars reveals his omniscience [Ps 147:4; Is 40:26]; likewise, he is able to know each person individually.) Flocks of various shepherds often mingled together, but shepherds could easily separate out their own sheep, for example to put them in or lead them from their pen, or lead sheep elsewhere. They could do this because the sheep knew their shepherd’s voice; it is said that some even trained sheep to respond to the signals of particular flute melodies.

**10:5.** Ancient sources do report (and modern experience confirms) sheep fleeing from strangers. In this context the strangers are the thieves and robbers (v. 1)—the Pharisees—who have sought to mislead the sheep (9:40–41). The synagogue leaders who expelled John’s Jewish Christian readers claim to be true shepherds, but when John’s audience hears this passage they will think of them quite differently.

**10:6.** Jesus’ preceding figure fits Jewish definitions for a \*parable; indeed, in the \*Septuagint, the present term translates the same Hebrew term that is translated “parable” in the \*Synoptic Gospels.

**10:7–8.** Although wolves (10:12) and other intruders were sometimes known to penetrate sheepfolds, often they feared to enter them, and even when ravenously hungry they sometimes assaulted the walls in vain. As opposed to the apparently walled enclosure in 10:1, some suggest that the sheep pen here might be a temporary enclosure topped with thorns, closer to pasture for seasonal grazing; lacking a separate door, it could depend on the shepherd to sleep across the gateway, a practice sometimes reported in modern times. Although shepherds in warmer regions could keep sheep in pasture areas all year (grazing in higher altitudes in summer and lower in winter), in cooler areas such as the Judean hills they spent part of the year in more formal pens and part of the year in the pastures, where temporary pens might be constructed. This explanation makes sense here (10:7, 9), but mixed metaphors were common and Jesus might simply alternate between shepherd and door images because he fulfills more than one role; like God in the Old Testament, he is Israel’s shepherd, but he is also the way to the Father. On sheep not hearing strangers, see comment on 10:5.

**10:9.** For the door, see comment on 10:6–8. Sheep were led “in” and “out” (cf. shepherd leaders in Num 27:17; 2 Sam 5:2) of the sheepfold to and from pasture. Coming and going offered a Semitic expression for freedom of movement and together sometimes meant “all the time” (cf. Deut 28:6, 19; 2 Kgs 19:27; Ps 121:8). In at least some regions of the ancient Mediterranean world, shepherds led sheep to begin grazing around sunrise, led them to drinking around 10 a.m., led them to shade, where possible, during midday heat, and then drinking and then grazing again until evening. In the evening they returned to the fold, whether the temporary or permanent variety.

## Notes and Thoughts

Doors function as barriers between whatever is inside a space and whatever is outside the space. Modern doors can range from very simple and providing only a temporary, symbolic barrier, to very complex and providing a permanent, physical obstruction. Also, a window and a door differ in at least one very important way: a door is a legitimate entryway for people to go through, but a window is not.

When Jesus says he is the door of the sheep, he is illustrating at least two important spiritual roles. First, Jesus is the doorkeeper to eternal life with the Father. In John 9, a blind man was healed. But the religious leaders (who should have rejoiced at the man's healing and glorified God) kicked the healed man out of the synagogue because they didn't like Jesus. (A synagogue is where the Jewish people in Jesus' time gathered weekly to worship God.) But religious leaders don't determine who gets into heaven. As Jesus explains more clearly in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." To get to heaven, we must "go through" the legitimate door—Jesus. And Jesus is the only way, there is no other.

A second important spiritual role of Jesus is how, as our shepherd, he protects us. A good shepherd protects his sheep from dangers, especially predators like wolves and bad people like thieves and robbers. One of the ways a shepherd does this is by taking the sheep into a sheep pen at night. But the sheep pens were very basic, with stones stacked for walls and just an opening for the door. So, often the shepherd would sit or lie down in the opening to keep dangers from coming in the sheep pen. Similarly, we may see or hear spiritual dangers from other people, as well as Satan and his spiritual forces, lurking around us. But when we believe in Jesus, he protects us spiritually from those dangers.

Jesus is a good shepherd, but he's not a universal shepherd. The invitation to be a member of Jesus' flock is universal, but membership is voluntary. If you want to be a sheep in Jesus' flock, there's a condition—you have to believe in Jesus—that he is God the Son and he died for your sins. And when you do trust in Jesus, he becomes your "heavenly door," protecting you spiritually from Satan, sin, and spiritual death and freely welcoming you into eternal life in heaven with the Father.

## Videos and Craft Ideas

Live action clip: <https://youtu.be/2E5ynybLBOI>

Animated clip: <https://youtu.be/oemNkZo750o>

Ancient sheep pens: <https://youtu.be/QOmphohQZws>

Shepherd and sheep: <https://www.catholicicing.com/good-shepherd-learning-activity-and/>

Craft stick door hanger: [https://angathomedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/img\\_7253.jpg](https://angathomedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/img_7253.jpg)

- Ideas: color with markers, add stickers, print verse on small cards to glue on one side

Easy sheep snack: <https://whosthefarris.com/2013/12/15/super-easy-sheep-snacks-taste-and-see-sunday/>

Sheep cookie snack: <https://chefindisguise.com/2015/09/15/sheep-cookies/>