

Jesus the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-30)
Kids Lesson | The Seven I Ams of Jesus | Perfect Love Kids 2019

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Text of John 10:11-30 (NKJV)

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. ¹⁶ And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

¹⁷ “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

¹⁹ Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. ²⁰ And many of them said, “He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?”

²¹ Others said, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

²² Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. ²³ And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch. ²⁴ Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, “How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. ²⁶ But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and My Father are one.”

Background Information

“Shepherd” in the Bible

SHEPHERD. Biblical shepherds may be literal or metaphorical: those in charge of sheep; those also, divine or mortal, in charge of men. ... Care exercised over fellow-mortals may be political or spiritual. Homer and other secular writers frequently called kings and governors shepherds (*Iliad* 1. 263; 2. 243, *etc.*), a usage reflected, in deeper metaphors, in Ezk. 34.

The literal shepherd pursued, and still pursues, an exacting calling, one as old as Abel (Gn. 4:2). He must find grass and water in a dry and stony land (Ps. 23:2), protect his charges from weather and from fiercer creatures (*cf.* Am. 3:12), and retrieve any strayed animal (Ezk. 34:8; Mt. 18:12, *etc.*). When his duties carried him far from human haunts, a bag held his immediate necessities (1 Sa. 17:40, 49), and a tent might be his dwelling (Ct. 1:8). He might use dogs to assist him, like his modern counterpart (Jb. 30:1). ... Ideally the shepherd should be strong, devoted and selfless, as many of them were. But ruffians were sometimes found in an honourable profession (Ex. 2:17, 19), and some shepherds inevitably failed in their duty (*Zc.* 11, *passim*; Na. 3:18; Is. 56:11, *etc.*).

Such is the honour of the calling that the OT frequently delineates God as the Shepherd of Israel (Gn. 49:24; Pss. 23:1; 80:1), tender in his solicitude (Is. 40:11), yet able to scatter the flock in wrath, or gather it again in forgiveness (Je. 31:10). Sometimes the note is predominantly one of judgment, when human shepherd and sheep alike stand condemned and punished (Je. 50:6; 51:23; *Zc.* 13:7; and Gospel applications). These unfaithful shepherds may well tremble to stand before the Lord (Je. 49:19; 50:44). Sometimes there is a note of compassion when the sheep are deserted by those responsible for them (Nu. 27:17; 1 Ki. 22:17; Mk. 6:34, *etc.*). Two shepherds mentioned with special approval are Moses (Is. 63:11) and, surprisingly enough, that heathen executor of God’s purposes, Cyrus (Is. 44:28). Scripture earnestly stresses the serious responsibility of human leaders to those who follow them. One of the most solemn chapters in the OT is the denunciation of the faithless shepherds in Ezk. 34 (*cf.* Je. 23:1–4, and even more sternly Je. 25:32–38). These, for their belly’s sake, have fed themselves and not their sheep; they have killed and scattered their charges for their own profit; they have grievously neglected their proper pastoral care; therefore God will re-gather the sheep and judge the shepherds. He will in fact appoint one shepherd (Ezk. 34:23). This is critically interpreted as signifying the union of the N and S kingdoms, but it portrays much better the expected Christ.

In the NT it is Christ’s mission to be Shepherd, even Chief Shepherd (Heb. 13:20 and 1 Pet. 2:25; also 1 Pet. 5:4). This is worked out in detail in Jn. 10, which merits detailed comparison with Ezk. 34. John’s main points are: the iniquity of those who ‘creep, and intrude and climb into the fold’; the using of the door as a mark of the true shepherd; the familiarity of the sheep with the voice of their appointed leader (modern shepherds in the E use precisely the same methods); the teachings regarding the Person of Christ, ... likened to the good shepherd, but contrasted with the worthless hireling. John stresses also the relationship of Christ, his followers and God; the bringing into the ‘one flock’ of the ‘other sheep’ (v. 16); and the rejection of those who are not the true sheep of Christ. (*Cf.* Milton, *Lycidas*, esp. lines 113–131.)¹

Commentary on John 10:11-30

10:10–11. The thief (in the context, unfaithful leaders; *cf.* v. 5) acts for his own good, not that of the flock (hungry thieves might steal sheep to eat them); a shepherd risks his life to protect his flock from animals and thieves. Shepherds were known for intimate concern for their sheep, an image applicable to God (Ps

¹ R. A. Stewart, “Shepherd,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1092–1093.

23:1; Ezek 34:2–6, 11–16). Pharisees considered shepherds members of an unclean profession, and aristocrats despised them as vulgar lower-class workers; thus Jesus’ opponents would not readily identify with the protagonist of the story, but in Scripture God was Israel’s chief shepherd (see the introduction to 10:1–18). Sheep were completely dependent on shepherds, who provided shelter and guidance and helped them when they gave birth or were sick or injured. “Life” was short for “*eternal life,” the life of the world to come, in Jewish parlance; Jesus provides this relationship with himself in the present. See comment on 3:16.

10:12–13. A hired helper was not responsible for attacks from wild animals (cf. Ex 22:13) and worked for pay, not because the sheep were his own. Ancient sources sometimes complain about hirelings who did not protect the animals the way they should. Biblical prophets condemned religious leaders who let God’s sheep be scattered, not concerned with what concerns God (Jer 23:1; Ezek 34:6). Commonly ancient sources (including fables) contrasted sheep with wolves, regularly portraying wolves as predators of sheep. The image was used both literally and figuratively.

10:14–15. The Old Testament often described Israel’s covenant relationship with God as “knowing” him, which meant having an intimate and obedient relationship with him (e.g., Jer 31:34; Hos 6:6). The intimacy anticipated here appears to exceed even the intimacy that earlier biblical prophets had with God. See John 10:3–4 and 16:13–15. As a perfect reflection of God, Wisdom was expected to provide people intimacy with God like prophets (Wisdom of Solomon 7:26–27); probably more important, all of God’s people would “know” him in the time of the new covenant (Jer 31:33–34).

10:16–18. The image of gathering the folds together into one flock in Old Testament language meant gathering the dispersed sheep of Israel, scattered among the nations (cf. Ezek 37:21–24; Mic 2:12); the “one shepherd” in Ezek 37:24 is the Davidic king (cf. Ezek 34:23). The regathering of Israel in the end was one of the basic hopes of ancient Judaism, reflected in writings and prayers. But Jesus may include *Gentiles; *proselytes, or converts to Judaism, became part of God’s people.

10:19–21. The Jewish community again experiences schism over Jesus’ identity (cf. also 7:43; 9:16), as it was also experiencing in John’s day. On charges of demonization, see comment on 7:20.

10:22. Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication, was not a required pilgrimage festival, but the eight-day celebration of lights in the temple was beautiful, and many pious Jews from nearby Galilee would come to Jerusalem. It was the next festival after those immediately connected to the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1–10:21).

10:23. The vast outer part of the temple had porches on all four sides; the Royal Porch, on the south, had four rows of pillars. Solomon’s Porch was on the east side of the temple, with two rows of pillars (as on the west and north sides). The south portico was called Solomon’s because people thought that its pre-Herodian masonry had survived from Solomon’s temple (*Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.184–85; *Jewish Antiquities* 15.397–400; 20.221). Greek public buildings often included such porches, and they had long been a popular place for public lectures and discussions. Even as early as Hanukkah (10:22), it could be cool in Jerusalem in winter, so people would be especially inclined to walk under the colonnades, as here. (On avoiding travel in winter, see comment on Acts 27:9.)

10:24. These Jews would have either misunderstood his claim or used it to charge him with sedition (cf. 18:29–35).

10:25–29. A shepherd who would protect his sheep against any thief or predator would have to be ready to pay a great price (10:12, 15), but this is the price of faithfulness (Jer 23:4). On no one snatching from his hand, compare also Psalm 95:7, where Israel is “the sheep of his hand”; this allusion would fit the

mention of hearing Jesus' voice (10:27), since the same verse in the psalm exhorts his people to hear God's voice.

10:30. His hearers might think of the relation between Israel and God, but Jesus' wording about his unity with the Father is too explicit for that: instead he echoes the basic confession of Judaism that God is one (Deut 6:4). For Jesus to be one with the Father (albeit distinct from him) is tantamount to a claim to deity. (He has probably already applied earlier texts about God to himself in this context; see comment on 10:28–29.)²

Notes and Thoughts

Shepherding is one of the oldest professions, going back to Abel, a son of Adam and Eve (Gen 4:2). In ancient times, political and spiritual leaders were sometimes compared to shepherds because of their position of authority over the lives of people. There are two kinds of shepherds: hirelings, who shepherd other people's sheep for pay, and true shepherds, who shepherd their own sheep (and others') with their lives.

The Bible compares God to a shepherd (Pss. 23:1, 80:1), as well as Moses (Isa 63:11) and the Persian king Cyrus (Isa 44:28). The Bible also promises punishment for the bad shepherds of Israel (bad spiritual leaders) and that God, the Good Shepherd, will one day bring his flock Israel back to the land inheritance he promised them (Ezek 34).

When Jesus referred to himself as the Good Shepherd, the Jews who heard him were reminded about God's promises of punishment on Israel's bad shepherds and God's promise to be the Good Shepherd to Israel. And when Jesus explains later how he gives his sheep eternal life and how he is one with God the Father, it was clear that Jesus was revealing his own identity as God the Son Incarnate while predicting his own blood sacrifice on the cross that would provide final atonement for sin.

Psalm 23 provides a beautifully detailed picture about how God, the Good Shepherd, cares for us, His sheep. In light of Jesus' self-revelation that he is the Good Shepherd, we can see how Psalm 23 isn't merely a wonderful song of comfort, but a clear declaration about the greatness of Jesus' love for us. His love toward us is immeasurable and unending, so great that he gave his own life as a perfect sacrifice to save sinners, to everyone willing to receive the invitation to believe in him.

Videos and Craft Ideas

Live action clip: <https://youtu.be/d3ynG4QEPag>

Animated clip (Psalm 23): https://youtu.be/viBQE_scYbE

Shepherd (Bethel Music): <https://youtu.be/bVjedGudN8w>

Clothespin sheep: <https://www.catholicicing.com/catholic-craft-we-are-his-sheep/>

Shepherd plate: <https://www.orientaltrading.com/the-good-shepherd-ornament-craft-kit-a2-13733051.fltr>

- Ideas: with some construction paper stencils or cutouts, kids could color and glue these

Snack: <http://everydaydishes.com/holiday/how-to-make-cheerios-sheep-snacks-for-your-next-party/>

² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Second Edition. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2014), 280–281.