

John 10: The Shepherd and the Sheep Gate

*If they do not follow Jesus, it is not because he's not a shepherd, but because they're not sheep.
(John Chrysostom)*

- ❖ Chapters 9 and 10:1-21 come some time between *Tabernacles* (the Sep/Oct harvest festival) and the feast of *Dedication* or *Hanukkah* (a Dec festival commemorating the rededication or consecration of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus). This context would have called to mind the wicked high priests who betrayed their office by allowing the Syrian desecration of the Temple.
- ❖ The cycle of liturgical readings leading up to Dedication was filled with passages concerning sheep and shepherds. The single most important such passage was Ezek 34.
 1. *Read Ezekiel 34.* Ezekiel was prophesying from exile in Babylon sometime after 587. Who were the bad shepherds referred to in Ezek 34? What did they do wrong? What remedy did God promise? When, if at all, did it come to pass?
- ❖ Parables are simple illustrations having a single point, and analogies are expanded series of metaphors where the various details and persons involved all have a figurative meaning. The distinction between parable and analogy was part of Greek oratorical training. In contrast, the Hebrews had one word for both— the word *masal* covered all figurative illustrations: parable, allegory, proverb, maxim, simile, metaphor, etc.
 2. *Read John 10:1-3a, 6-10.* Who was Jesus calling the “thieves & robbers”? What would it have meant for them to enter by the gate? How does this parable apply to the healing of the man born blind in chapter 9?
 3. *Read John 10:3b-5, 11-18.* What makes the good shepherd good? Jesus later (esp. 15:13-15) will command his followers to love one another, as expressed in self-sacrifice, even to the point of martyrdom. In our culture, spirituality is often expressed in terms of a personal journey, and little emphasis is placed on self sacrifice. Ask yourself how your life entails sacrifice for others. How much of your time and resources are given to nurturing those sheep God has brought your way? How would you characterize RCRC in this respect?
 4. Why does John suggest that people followed Jesus? Why did you first believe Jesus was the Messiah? How comfortable would you feel testifying to an interested nonbeliever about Jesus based on his miracles?
 5. *Read 10:19-42.* Why doesn't Jesus give a direct answer in 24-26? What would have happened if he had?
- ❖ In 10:34+, Jesus uses a rabbinic hermeneutical principle called *qal wa-homer*, literally “light and heavy”, in which “what is true in an instance of lesser importance is surely true in one of more importance” (Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature*, IVP, 2002).
 6. In 10:34, Jesus quotes from Ps 82, which is a condemnation of unjust judges who, it reminds us, were traditionally referred to as “gods”. Read Ps 82. Bearing in mind John 9:39, what is the essence of Jesus' defense here against the charge of blasphemy? How would this parallel have been taken by the spiritual authorities?

