

"I am the good shepherd"

The concept of a divine shepherd points to the Old Testament.

*Psalm 23:1 "The Lord is my shepherd"

*Psalm 79:13 "But we your people, the sheep of your pasture"

*Psalm 80:1 "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock."

*Psalm 95:7 "For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture..."

*Jer 23:1-3 Speaks of gathering the nation as a flock of sheep that has been scattered.

*Eze 34:12, 15 "As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them ... I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down"

*In light of this very extensive metaphor from the OT making God the only true shepherd of Israel, what is Jesus claiming about Himself?

"other sheep"

*Gentiles whom Christ would save and who together with the spiritual Israel (remnant) would compose the one flock of God.

*Gen 12:3 "...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

*Gal 3:8 "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith..."

*Isa 56:8 "The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, 'I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.'"

The connection with the preceding chapter is seen in Jesus' contrast of the Pharisees with the man born blind. The Pharisees—spiritually blind while claiming insight (John 9:41)—were false shepherds.

John 10:11-21 (ESV)

11 **I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

12 **He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.**

13 **He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.**

14 **I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,**

15 **just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.**

16 **And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.**

17 **For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.**

18 **No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."**

19 **There was again a division among the Jews because of these words.** <- "The Jews" = His spiritual opponents

20 **Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?"** <- "You're crazy!" (7:20; 8:48; Mt 11:18; Mk 5:5; Lk 9:39)

21 **Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"** <- It was believed that only God could overcome blindness (Ps 146:8)

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"lays down his life..."

"lay down my life"
(11, 15, 17, 18)

*This phrase is unique to John's writings and means a voluntary sacrificial death (Jn 13:37-38; 15:13; 1Jn 3:16)

*Evokes imagery of the young shepherd, David, risking his life to keep his sheep safe (see 1Sam 17:34-37).

*Jesus repeats this phrase 4 times, which shows that it is the main theme of His teaching.

*Rom 3:26 "He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

"I know my own..." (14)

*This means more than just understanding the facts; it implies a relationship of trust and intimacy.

*Jesus' relationship with the Father gives Him the authority to make the claims He does. Compare Mt 11:27.

*The union between the Father and Christ is like that between the Lord and his church

"of my own accord"

*His death is not like the shepherd's death while fighting against a robber or beast. The shepherd might indeed die, but not willingly.

*His death actually saves the sheep eternally, whereas the death of a shepherd might hasten the death and destruction of the sheep.

*He will lay down his life, but with a purpose of taking it up again, something no earthly shepherd could do.

Teacher's Notes

Context

John 9:35–41 (ESV)

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

Compare To

Psalm 23 (ESV)

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

forever.

Jeremiah 23:1–8 (ESV)

¹ "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD.

² Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended

to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. ³ Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴ I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.

⁵ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

⁷ "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' ⁸ but 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' Then they shall dwell in their own land."

Ezekiel 34 (ESV)

¹ The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; ⁶ they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

⁷ "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸ As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, ⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰ Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

¹¹ "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their

grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

¹⁷ "As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? ¹⁹ And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

²⁰ "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, ²² I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

²⁵ "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷ And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. ²⁹ And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. ³⁰ And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord GOD. ³¹ And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD."

"I am the good shepherd"

Psalms 23:1 (ESV)

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Psalms 79:13 (ESV)

¹³ But we your people, the sheep of your pasture,
will give thanks to you forever;
from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

Psalm 80:1 (ESV)

¹ Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.

Psalm 95:7 (ESV)

⁷ For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.
Today, if you hear his voice,

Jeremiah 23:1–3 (ESV)

¹ "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD.
² Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. ³ Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

Ezekiel 34:12 (ESV)

¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

Ezekiel 34:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD.

"lays down his life..." / "lay down my life"

John 13:37–38 (ESV)

³⁷ Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." ³⁸ Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

John 15:13 (ESV)

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

1 John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

1 Samuel 17:34–37 (ESV)

³⁴ But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. ³⁶ Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." ³⁷ And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"

Romans 3:26 (ESV)

²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

"I know my own..."

Matthew 11:27 (ESV)

²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

"other sheep"

Genesis 12:1–3 (ESV)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Galatians 3:7–9 (ESV)

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Isaiah 56:8 (ESV)

⁸ The Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,
"I will gather yet others to him
besides those already gathered."

Demon

John 7:20 (ESV)

²⁰ The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?"

John 8:48 (ESV)

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

Matthew 11:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'

Mark 5:5 (ESV)

⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.

Luke 9:39 (ESV)

³⁹ And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him.

Psalms 146:8 (ESV)

⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.

The Parable of the Good Shepherd

Throughout his Gospel, John aims to show that Jesus is the Messiah long promised by the prophets. In the Parable of the Good Shepherd in John 10:1–5, Jesus declares that He is God's shepherd, fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel 34.

Through the very simple parable in John 10:1–5, Jesus shows the difference between Himself and all the others who laid claim to religious leadership in Israel. There are two distinguishing characteristics of the Good Shepherd: He enters through the door and is recognized by His sheep, and He will lay down His life for the sheep.

In Ezekiel's day, the religious leaders were more like predators than shepherds. Ezekiel describes them as eating the sheep rather than feeding them; they were more akin to thieves than caretakers (Ezek 34:2–10). It is against the backdrop of Ezekiel's prophecy that Jesus declares Himself to be the Good Shepherd whose care for the sheep, including His sacrificial death on their behalf (John 10:11), distinguishes Him from all who have previously come (John 10:8).

The True Shepherd

In contrast to the thief, who must jump over the wall, the true shepherd uses the door to enter the fold (John 10:1). Each night, the shepherd guards the door (compare John 10:12–13). When he calls, his sheep respond because they know him, trust him, and follow him (John 10:3–4).

In Jesus' day, many shepherds shared the same pasture and even drove their flocks together into a sheepfold at night. In the morning, each shepherd would stand at the open gate and call for his sheep. The flock would recognize his voice and follow him out.

After hearing the parable, the Pharisees were confused. They knew all about sheep and shepherds, but they failed to see Jesus' point. It was often this way with the parables Jesus told, but on this occurrence He took time to explain it to them.

Jesus said that in addition to being the Good Shepherd, He also acts as the door to the sheepfold (John 10:7, 9). This aspect of the parable calls attention to the unique role Jesus plays in God's redemptive plan. While there may be other shepherds who care about the sheep, none of them can offer entrance into the fold of God. Jesus states this plainly in John 14:6, saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

As in Ezekiel's day, many in Israel at the time of Christ were taking unfair advantage of God's people. They were like thieves who sought to use religion for personal gain. Jesus described them as coming only to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:8, 10). They considered the people of Israel solely for their own use. The religious system of Jesus' day, practiced primarily on the basis of ritual rather than righteousness, placed heavy burdens on the people while ensuring that the religious leaders grew in wealth and power (e.g., Matt 23:2–4; Luke 11:46).

But Jesus—the promised Messiah—came to care for the sheep and lead them back to God. His great concern for the sheep was in His willingness to do what was best for them. Unlike the person merely hired for the job, the true shepherd would act in the best interests of the flock, despite the risks He might face. He came not to take their lives or profit from their lives, but rather so that they may have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

The Shepherd’s Sacrifice

Toward the end of Jesus’ explanation, we find the second distinguishing characteristic of the Good Shepherd: He is willing to lay down His life for the sheep. Jesus makes this astounding statement four times in John 10:15–18. This repetition, a common literary device in the ancient world, shows that this is the main theme of the parable.

That the shepherd would die to save the sheep may be an allusion to another Old Testament passage. In Isaiah 53:6, the prophet gives voice to every repentant sinner’s heart in confessing, “All of us have wandered about like sheep; we have each turned to his own way; and Yahweh let fall on him the iniquity of us all.”

Jesus makes it clear that His sacrificial death was not forced upon Him. Rather, Jesus chose to follow the will of God the Father all the way to the cross. He willingly took upon Himself the task of sin bearer and endured agonizing shame (compare Isa 53:10–12). Now, He has been given His rightful place at the right hand of the Father in heaven (see Heb 12:1–2).

Like sheep, every one of us has wandered away from our Creator, transgressed His law, and rebelled against His right to rule over us. We all deserve the full punishment God’s law requires for our waywardness—death. But God has desired to express His glory by rescuing those who neither deserve rescue nor have the ability to bring themselves to safety.

The Good Shepherd has come to bind up the broken, bring back the scattered, and return the lost to the flock of God. To lavish His love on us while satisfying His divine justice, the Good Shepherd took our punishment upon Himself so that we might eternally be part of His flock.

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¹ Hegg, D. W. (2012, 2016). [The Parable of the Good Shepherd](#). In *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.