

# I AM the Door

## Flocks and Folds

Sheep and shepherds, flocks and folds, leading and feeding. These themes litter the landscape of the Old Testament as both literal narrative and metaphor. From righteous Abel, a keeper of sheep slain by his brother, to the smitten Shepherd of Zechariah 13:7, our understanding of God and His character is enriched when these real people and events are combined with their intended analogies of spiritual truth. This essay deals with The Door of the sheep, with many of the shepherding references to be further developed in future articles.

The Scriptures use sheep and lambs in different, sometimes contrasting ways, as in Isaiah's applications in chapter 53. There, sinners are viewed as sheep going astray, but we also see the Lord Himself as a "Lamb to the slaughter and a Sheep before her shearers." In this, we learn that sheep in their weakness and need are apt pictures of people with their sinful tendency to stray, and a lamb in its meekness is a beautiful depiction of Christ in His character and sacrificial death.

Similarly, shepherds are sometimes seen in contrasting ways. The nation of Israel was shaped in the context of shepherding, with one particularly prominent shepherd helping to frame our understanding of the figurative application of the theme. God took David from the sheepfolds to feed the Lord's people (Ps 78:70–71), substantiating the metaphorical use of the concept as representing the nation's leaders. Contrasts are then highlighted between the faithful and the fraudulent leaders throughout Israel's history (cf. Ezek 34, Zech 11). This now forms the background of the shepherding discourse of John chapter ten.

While these articles are not Bible studies, with outlines and textual nuances explained, we would do well to consider the overall structure of John 10:1-18. Some see this as one continuous or two separate "parables" in the style of the synoptic gospels. This, however, is a misconception as the word translated parable in verse six differs from

the common term used in the first three gospels. While we are still dealing with earthly illustrations shedding light on spiritual teaching, this is more simply a figure of speech observing shepherding as a vehicle to get across the desired message in symbolic ways.<sup>1</sup>

While this may seem unimportant, it will help us avoid errors. Basically, instead of using one parable, providing consistent imagery and application, the Lord uses the everyday activities of sheep and shepherds to teach different lessons about His character and purpose. Remembering this keeps us from tying ourselves into interpretational knots. We won't have to assign unnecessary significance to the absence of the article before verse two's shepherd or try to reconcile why the shepherd leads out of the fold in verse three but is The Door into the fold in verse nine. Keeping these things in mind and remembering that the audience for this talk has shown their character by casting the blind man out of their gathering place and persecuting the Lord Jesus, we are now ready to move toward The Door.

In the first five verses, stinging the ears of those sin-blinded Pharisees, the Lord sets the table to rebuke their harshness and reveal His heart. The fold was familiar to all as a place where shepherds left their flock in an enclosure with other flocks to be manned by a porter responsible for keeping those sheep. The porter protected the sheep until allowing each shepherd access to their own flock upon their return.

So, without actually applying the analogy, the Lord implies that those Jewish leaders were the intruders, having no right to access the fold and not being recognized by the sheep. But He, as a Shepherd is given access by the porter, and being recognized by His own sheep; He leads them out. Dispensationally we can apply that the fold is Israel. Those within the nation who respond to His voice are His sheep and are led out of the confines of Judaism. Indeed more will be said on this "leading out" in our considerations of the Good Shepherd, but the point here is that the Pharisees are being reprovved as thieves and robbers.

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 380.

Verses seven through ten again present a fold but in a slightly different context. This fold could be out on the hillside, used by those who lead their sheep into pastures by day and seek walled protection at night. The pen would contain only one flock, and the shepherd does not commit their keeping to a porter but remains with them throughout the night, *even sleeping in the entrance for their safety*. In this way, the shepherd was also the door, with no sheep nor enemy crossing the threshold apart from passing through him.<sup>2</sup>

By declaring I AM the Door, the Lord emphasizes the contrast between one willing to guard the sheep with his life and those seeking to steal and destroy. The spiritual teaching then becomes apparent. Each one who responds to the Lord's voice by faith enters the fold of safety by Him and is saved—not just delivered from the perdition that their sins deserve, but entering into a state of salvation to be enjoyed from that moment forward! After entering, we now remember that the Shepherd is Himself guarding the entrance as “The Door,” forming our perfect security.

Some have difficulty with the phrase “and shall go in and out.” Far from hinting that a soul can enter in for safety and then for some reason be put out of that fold, this phrase was a common fixed expression even in the Old Testament and *“is suggestive both of security and liberty. The double expression is used frequently in the Old Testament for describing the free activity of daily life”*<sup>3</sup> (Deut 28:6, Jer 37:4). Eternal security is not in view here. Our enjoyment of the things of Christ is highlighted as we have been liberated from sin and the law, and He provides green pastures for us to safely enjoy.

The call goes out to all sinners for salvation; “I Am the Door, by me if any man enter in he shall be saved.” And the exhortation to believers? Enjoy the security of The Door in the liberty with which Christ has made

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<sup>2</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to John* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, n.d.), 177

<sup>3</sup> W. E. Vine, [\*Collected Writings of W.E. Vine\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996)

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