John 10

(A small-group Bible Study.)

1. Verse 1 begins with *Amēn, amēn, legō hymin*, … — "Truly, truly, I say to you, …"
   This phrase is found 25 times in John. In the synoptic gospels the equivalent always has a single *amēn*.
   The phrase means "I assure you" (HCSB), or "I tell you the solemn truth" (NET).
   It demands the reader's special attention.
   The statement that follows is quite often the key that unlocks the meaning of the passage.
   In view of the fact that Jesus never employs this phrase at the start of a discourse, what does this suggest about the first half of John 10?
   Who is Jesus talking to? Who is he talking about? Who are the "they" of verse 6?
   (John 9:35 to 10:21 is one uninterrupted scene, which concludes with 10:21 harking back to the events of chapter 9. Then, 10:22 begins a new section relating events that transpired perhaps two months later.[1])

2. Verses 2-5 give us a picture of Near Eastern shepherding practices. (See endnote 1.)
   First Image: **Jesus is the Door** (10:7, 9).
   Through him true shepherds access their sheep (10:1-2), AND through him the sheep themselves pass in and out (10:7, 9).
   What does Jesus mean by saying that he is the door (or gate) for true shepherds, and for the sheep?

   What do the sheep gain by entering through him and following him (10:9)?

3. In verse 10 Jesus contrasts his own concern for the sheep with the self-interest of thieves.
   Likewise, a "hired hand" (10:12-13) has no real interest in their welfare.
   In contrast, Jesus lays down his own life in order to save them (10:11, 15).
   The "wolf" in verse 12 may also represent false teachers (cf. Mt 7:15; Ac 20:29-30).
   Who are the "thieves and robbers" that sneak in (10:1) and to whom the sheep did not listen (10:8)?

4. Second Image: **Jesus is the Good Shepherd** (10:11, 14).
   The term "good" (*kalos*) means "inherently good, beautiful, noble, excellent, honorable".
   Jesus is *perfect* (as opposed to imperfect leaders), *true* (as opposed to false teachers and hypocrites), and *good* (as opposed to wicked, self-centered leaders).
   What are some of the characteristics of good shepherds?
   (Psalm 23:2; 1 Samuel 17:34-35; Jeremiah 3:15; Ezekiel 34:11-16; Matthew 18:12)

[1] John 7:2, 14 suggest that the events and discourses of John chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10 up to verse 21, all took place around or after the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles, which begins between the 19th September and 19th October in our calendar.

5. The likely OT background to Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees is Ezekiel 34:1-10.
   What did Israel's bad shepherds do (or fail to do) that made God angry?
   (See also Isaiah 56:9-12; Jeremiah 10:21; 23:1-2; 50:6-7; Zechariah 10:2.)

6. **How do the following anticipate Jesus the Good Shepherd, and his under-shepherds?**

   2 Samuel 7:8-16.

   Psalm 23.

   Isaiah 40:11.

   Jeremiah 3:15; 23:3-6.

   Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24; 37:24.

   Micah 5:2-5a.

   Zechariah 13:7 (cf. Mt 26:31).

7. **How should the work of church leaders reflect the work of the Good Shepherd?**
   (John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28-29; 1 Peter 5:1-4)[2]

8. **How, practically, do we listen to Jesus' "voice" (10:3-4, 27) and avoid the "stranger's voice" (10:5)?**
   (See also 1 John 2:26-27.)

9. Jesus has intimate knowledge of his sheep: each individual sheep he knows, calls, and leads by name; for each one he died; each and every one he preserves unto eternal life (Jn 10:3-4, 11, 14-15, 27-28).
   How might all this comfort us in times of personal trial?

10. Jesus has other sheep whom he must call to himself (10:16).
    Who might these be?
    (John 12:20-21, 32; cf. Acts 13:26; 16:14; 17:4)

    How can Jesus say these other sheep belong to him when they don't yet believe, and how can he be so sure that they WILL respond to the gospel and WILL listen to his voice?
    (John 6:37; Acts 18:10; Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:4-5)

[2] Note that the terms "elder" (presbyter), "overseer" (bishop), and "shepherd" (pastor) all refer to the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 2:25).

Verse 22 introduces a new section that took place sometime later.
The Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah is also called the Festival of Lights.
The temple and surrounding houses were lit up. This eight-day festival commemorated the cleansing and rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus on Kislev 25, 164 BC.[3]
Although Hanukkah was a man-made institution, Jesus did not hesitate to celebrate it.
"It was winter" is John's note for those readers unfamiliar with the Jewish calendar.
The cold (and possibly rainy) day explains why Jesus was walking about under the shelter of Solomon's Colonnade.[4]

11. A unity of purpose exists between the Father and the Son in relation to our salvation.
    See John 10:28-30; cf. 6:37-40; 17:2, 6, 9, 24.
    How might this encourage us in our Christian walk?

12. Jesus' claims to unity with the Father consistently angered the Jews (10:31-33; cf. 8:58-59).
    Jesus appealed to his good works and miracles in support (10:32, 38).
    John himself highlights seven of these remarkable miracles. (See endnote 5.)
    What function do these "signs" have in John's gospel?
    (John 2:11; 4:54; 11:47; 12:37; 20:30-31)

Endnotes

1. Near Eastern sheepfolds were commonly walled or palisaded, with one door or gate.
   Into one of these enclosures several shepherds would drive their flocks, leaving an under-shepherd or porter to look after them.
   He would fasten the door securely from the inside, and remain with the sheep all night.
   In the morning the shepherds would come to the door; the porter would open the door, and each shepherd would call away his own sheep.[5]
2. John 10:4: The word for "brought out" is the same as that used in John 9:34-35 of the Pharisees "casting out" the man born blind (*ekballō* = "to cast out, expel").
   This is undoubtedly intentional: the false shepherds cast out sheep to rid themselves of trouble; the true shepherds bring out their sheep to feed them.
3. John 10:6 seems to point back to John 9:41: the Pharisees' not understanding the allegory was evidence of their spiritual blindness. They had rejected the Healer who could heal them of their blindness.
   Chapter 10 is thus thematically connected with the events of chapter 9:
   The Pharisees by their conduct toward the blind man had proved themselves to be bad shepherds; but he has found the Good Shepherd. They had cast him out of doors, but he has found the Door.

[3] Kislev 25, when Hanukkah begins, varies between the 28th November and 27th December in our calendar.
[4] This porch, with rows of 8-meter-high stone columns and a cedar roof, also served as a meeting place for the first Christians (Acts 5:12).
[5] Endnotes 1 – 3 are adapted from the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, notes for John 10.
Via the Bible Hub website: https://biblehub.com/commentaries/cambridge/john/10.htm.

4. Synoptic parallels of the Good Shepherd allegory:
   Matthew 9:36 (BSB): *When He saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*
   Matthew 15:24 (BSB): *… "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*
   Luke 15:3-7: The parable of the Lost Sheep.
5. The seven miraculous "signs" in John are these:
   1. Water turned to wine (2:1-11).
   2. Healing of the royal official's son near death (4:46-54).
   3. Healing of the lame man at the pool (5:1-15).
   4. Feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15).
   5. Walking on the water (6:16-21).
   6. Healing of the man born blind (9:1-41).
   7. Raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-48).

Further notes

1. Good shepherds care for their sheep:
   They feed them, protect them from predators, care for the sick, and search for those wandering or lost.
   Bad shepherds care only for themselves. Rather than look after, they often abuse the sheep. The sheep suffer and waste away.
   In the Church context:
   Good shepherds are leaders who nurture their flock, protect them from false teaching, and help those weak in their faith. Bad shepherds often place burdens on the sheep.
2. Further NT references to Jesus as our Shepherd: Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; Revelation 7:17.
3. The sheep belong to Jesus. He has died for them (Jn 10:11; Ac 20:28). True under-shepherds look after the sheep on his behalf. They must themselves be "in Christ" — spiritually united to him by faith. For he is the Door not only for the sheep but for the shepherds as well (Jn 10:1-2).
4. Jesus holds on to his sheep. They are eternally secure. Both Father and Son work to guarantee their safety.
5. In the Psalms, God is Israel's Shepherd and they are his flock:
   Psalm 23:1-2; 28:9; 74:1; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3.
6. Israel's leaders were under-shepherds: Moses (Ps 77:20; Isa 63:11); kings and other rulers (2Sam 5:2; 7:7; Jer 2:8 [ESV]; 23:1-2; Eze 34:2); prophets and priests (Isa 56:10-11; Jer 17:16).
7. God sought to give his people shepherds after his own heart, who would lead them well (cf. Jer 3:15).
   David was just such a man (1Sam 13:14; Ac 13:22); his shepherd-training had prepared him well for the task of leading Israel (1Sam 17:34-35; 2Sam 7:8; Ps 78:70-72).
   God promised him a lasting dynasty (2Sam 7:11-16) — and that for the sake of his people Israel (2Sam 7:10).
8. God's promises for the nation's restoration after exile:
   All Israel will be gathered and will enjoy peace and safety in their land.
   The Lord himself will be their shepherd; he will set up "David" to be their shepherd-king along with other under-shepherds who will lead and care for the flock.
   See Jeremiah 23:3-6; Ezekiel 34:11-16, 22-24; 37:24.
9. A major theme in Micah is that of the Shepherd-King who delivers and gathers a remnant of the nation.
   The Lord himself will fulfill this role (Mic 2:12-13; 4:6-8; 7:14), but so too will a certain Man (Mic 5:2-5a).