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~ **The Shepherds of Israel** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read John 8:12 through 9:41.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

**1. Read the text of the story.**

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**New Living Translation (NLT)** *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation

John 10:1-42 NASB	John 10:1-42 NLT
<p>“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup> This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.</p> <p><sup>7</sup> So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. <sup>9</sup> I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have <i>it</i> abundantly.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters <i>them</i>. <sup>13</sup> <i>He flees</i> because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, <sup>15</sup> even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock <i>with</i> one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. <sup>18</sup> No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”</p> <p><sup>19</sup> A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. <sup>20</sup> Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?” <sup>21</sup> Others</p>	<p>“I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! <sup>2</sup> But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They won’t follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don’t know his voice.”</p> <p><sup>6</sup> Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, <sup>7</sup> so he explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. <sup>10</sup> The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. <sup>13</sup> The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep.</p> <p><sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, <sup>15</sup> just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.</p> <p><sup>17</sup> “The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. <sup>18</sup> No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.”</p>

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were saying, “These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?”

<sup>22</sup> At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; <sup>23</sup> it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup> The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” <sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. <sup>26</sup> But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup> and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”

<sup>31</sup> The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. <sup>32</sup> Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” <sup>33</sup> The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out *to be* God.” <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, “Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I SAID, YOU ARE GODS’? <sup>35</sup> If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), <sup>36</sup> do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? <sup>37</sup> If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; <sup>38</sup> but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.” <sup>39</sup> Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.

<sup>40</sup> And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there. <sup>41</sup> Many came to Him and were saying, “While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true.” <sup>42</sup> Many believed in Him there.

<sup>19</sup> When he said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. <sup>20</sup> Some said, “He’s demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?” <sup>21</sup> Others said, “This doesn’t sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

<sup>22</sup> It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication. <sup>23</sup> He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon’s Colonnade. <sup>24</sup> The people surrounded him and asked, “How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

<sup>25</sup> Jesus replied, “I have already told you, and you don’t believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father’s name. <sup>26</sup> But you don’t believe me because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, <sup>29</sup> for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> The Father and I are one.”

<sup>31</sup> Once again the people picked up stones to kill him. <sup>32</sup> Jesus said, “At my Father’s direction I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?”

<sup>33</sup> They replied, “We’re stoning you not for any good work, but for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God.”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, “It is written in your own Scriptures that God said to certain leaders of the people, ‘I say, you are gods!’ <sup>35</sup> And you know that the Scriptures cannot be altered. So if those people who received God’s message were called ‘gods,’ <sup>36</sup> why do you call it blasphemy when I say, ‘I am the Son of God’? After all, the Father set me apart and sent me into the world. <sup>37</sup> Don’t believe me unless I carry out my Father’s work. <sup>38</sup> But if I do his work, believe in the evidence of the miraculous works I have done, even if you don’t believe me. Then you will know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.”

<sup>39</sup> Once again they tried to arrest him, but he got away and left them. <sup>40</sup> He went beyond the Jordan River near the place where John was first baptizing and stayed there awhile. <sup>41</sup> And many followed him. “John didn’t perform miraculous signs,” they remarked to one another, “but everything he said about this man has come true.” <sup>42</sup> And many who were there believed in Jesus.

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## 2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

The following insights are from *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* – Molina, Rohrbaugh

- In the OT, God is the Shepherd – Psa 23:1; 80:2; Isa 40:11; Jer. 31:9; God’s people are sheep – Psa 74:1; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3; David or the Davidic Messiah is a shepherd – Psa 78:70-72; Ezek 37:24; Mic 5:3, and some shepherds are faithless – Jer 2:8; 10:20; 12:110; Ezek 34; Zech 11:4-9.
- Egyptian, Babylonian, and Iranian gods were spoken of as shepherds.
- Babylonian kings and Greek heroes were called shepherds.
- During the time of Jesus, common shepherds were generally despised. They were ranked with donkey drivers, tanners, sailors, butchers, and camel drivers, all despised occupations.
- Because they were often away from home at night, they could not protect the honor of their women, and were therefore considered dishonorable men. They were sometimes considered thieves because they grazed their flocks on the property of others.
- Sheepfolds were sometimes attached to houses. They were areas enclosed by stones with briars on top.
- The word for thief is for a common robber. The word for bandit refers to an insurrectionist who stole from the elite. Shepherds would have to be highly skilled in handling sheep to protect them from robbers or from predators.
- A shepherd had four tools – a scrip, a sling, a club, and a rod.
- Shepherds from various owners could spend the night in larger sheep pens or caves. In the evening a shepherd would use his rod to single out injured or sick sheep as depicted in Lev. 27:32; Jer. 33:13; Ezek 20:37. In the morning, each shepherd would call out his sheep with his voice and lead them to pasture.
- The Feast of Hanukkah was a popular but not a required feast. It commemorated Israel’s cleansing of the Temple in 164 BC after the defiling actions of Antiochus Epiphanes IV from 167-164.
- Calling them “gods”. This referred to men who were doing “godlike” work in rendering decisions in councils. Here, Jesus notes, the word “God” was used for their role and work. If a person could use that term without blasphemy for mortals who were fallen and would die, why were they upset if he called himself the Son of God. How could that be blasphemy?

The following insights are from the *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*

- The context is the healing of the blind man in John 9. The story is continuing. The blind man is one of Jesus’ sheep. The Pharisees are the thieves and robbers.
- Shepherds could separate their sheep from others by their voice or by distinctive melodies on a flute. They sometimes named their sheep.
- In the OT, listening to the voice of God meant heeding the Law and the prophets calls to return to the Law.

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- Sheep would leave their pens in the morning to graze. They would take shelter from the noon and afternoon heat, would graze in the evening and take shelter at night.
- The Feast of Dedication lasted eight days.
- This feast was in the cooler, rainy season and people would often take shelter in the colonnades of Solomon. This was a long outside hallway framed by two rows of pillars that lay along the eastern end of the temple's outer court.
- It is interesting that the charge of blasphemy against Jesus occurred during this feast because Antiochus IV claimed to be "God manifest."
- The reference to Psalm 82:6 could have been a mockery of ancient near eastern rulers who saw themselves as "gods."
- Jesus said the Father "set him apart. The Feast of Dedication was to remember the temple being "set apart, sanctified." Jesus may have been claiming to be the new temple.

### **3. Answer these reflective questions.**

**In John 10:1-5, Jesus makes many comparisons between sheep herding and his relationship with his people. How will these lessons from sheep herding help your life?**

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**In John 10:7-10 Jesus said that he was the door or the gate of the sheepfold. What truths can we learn from this picture of Jesus being the door? How does it affect our lives?**

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**In John 10:11-17, Jesus said he is the good shepherd. In what ways is he your shepherd? How is he different from a hired worker? What did Jesus mean when he said he laid down his life of his own initiative and that he would take it back up? How does this affect your life?**

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**In John 10:29-30, Jesus said he and the Father were one. What was Jesus claiming for himself? How does this statement bring security to our lives?**

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