

Post-Exile Prophets
THE SHEPHERD'S CARE

Saturday, September 6

Reading: John 10

John 10:27 *My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand.*

John 10 continues a conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees. The shepherd was a common image in the Old Testament. God is called the Shepherd of Israel and the people are His sheep. The leaders are the undershepherds who are responsible to care for God's people. By comparing Himself to a shepherd Jesus was again claiming His identity as God.

Instead of being shepherds, the Pharisees were like thieves and robbers who snuck over the wall of the sheepfold. Thieves do not have the best interest of the sheep in mind. They are only thinking of themselves. Jesus' words are reminiscent of God's judgment recorded in the Old Testament prophets (see Isaiah 56:11; Jeremiah 10:21; 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34:2-16).

In contrast, Jesus was the true Shepherd. The relationship between a shepherd and his sheep was very close. The shepherd knew each of his sheep by name and could identify them. The sheep in turn knew their shepherd. They recognized only his voice and would only follow him. The Pharisees had proven that they did not belong to God's flock because they did not accept Jesus. They refused to hear His voice and follow Him! They were like the hired hand who flees before the wolf to save his own life, leaving the sheep to be slaughtered. While the religious leader's purpose was to use the people for their own ends, Jesus' purpose is to give them abundant life. He would give them salvation, keep them safe, and provide for their needs by dying for them.

John 10:27-28 are very important verses. Sheep are not the smartest animals in the world! Sheep will only follow their own shepherd because they know his voice. They are listening for his call because they know he cares for them. Likewise, we are only Christ's sheep if we are listening to His voice. The Greek word translated "listen" (akoúō) carries the idea of paying attention, understanding, and obeying. So the question arises: Can we really be called Jesus' sheep if we do not listen to Him and do what He says?

The next part of the verse says that Jesus knows His sheep. Shepherds in Israel built a close relationship with their sheep over a long period of time. They knew their sheep by sight and named them after some characteristic (i.e. "black-ear" or "brown-leg"). Likewise, true believers are known by Jesus. He has promised eternal life and care for those who belong to Him.

The last part of John 10:27 says that Christ's sheep follow Him. They do not listen to the voice of the world. They do not wander off after their own way. They stay close to their Shepherd. Like sheep, we may go astray but our Shepherd will not let us stray far before His caring hand of discipline brings us back to His fold. The "life to the full" that Jesus wants to give us is not just for eternity, but right now! We experience this abundant life when we follow Christ and are led by the Spirit. How can you hear Jesus' voice today? What does it mean to follow Him?