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Falling Short of God's Grace

12: 12-17

Falling short of God's grace DIG: Why do people, believers and unbelievers, fall short of God's grace? Where did this "falling short" begin? What do people blame YHVH for the chaos in their lives that is a result of their own sin? How do these admonitions relate to disciplining the weaker members where you worship? How important is peace in the congregations of God?

REFLECT: How are you doing in your race of faith? Do you need encouragement to endure, to be persist or care? How can you pray to Adonai ELOHIM this week to help you get back on the right track? When was the last time you fell short? How do you react? Do you beat yourself up? Or do you get up, get right with the Lord, and continue on the race? Which of these instructions is the most important for you today? Why? What in this passage comforts you? What makes you uneasy? Why?



The basic thrust of this passage is clearly to **encourage** the Messianic community. The purpose was not to teach, for they already had a good intellectual grasp of the gospel, but to **encourage** them to live up to the truth that they already knew - to believe it, to follow it, to trust it and obey it. Truth that is known, but not obeyed, becomes a judgment on us rather than a help to us. Teaching and encouraging are inseparable. Teaching sound doctrine that is not applied is worthless, and encouraging not based upon sound doctrine is quicksand. God's method of instruction is simple - explain spiritual principles and then illustrate and **encourage** their application. Hence, **Hebrews 12** also begins with words of

encouragement. After **faith** has been carefully explained, defined and illustrated, it is as if the writer is saying, "Now that you know what running the believer's marathon is all about, go out and run it!" It is not enough to know the B'rit Chadashah is better; we must accept it for ourselves. It is not enough to know that **Messiah** is superior and our **Perfect High Priest**; we must **trust** in **His** atoning sacrifice for us. It is not enough to know how we should live; we must actually live what we know.³⁷³

These verses give three **encouragements**: for **endurance**, for **persistence** and for **care**. They are addressed first of all to believers, although they apply to unbelievers as well. It is as if the author is saying, "On the basis that you should be in the believer's marathon to win the race of **faith**, and that your suffering is a part of **God's** loving discipline for your good, here are three things you should be concentrating on doing."

Endurance: These verses resume the race metaphor. The first thing that happens to runners when they start to get tired is that their **arms** drop. The second thing to go are the knees. But concentrating on **feeble arms** and **weak knees** only slows you down. The only way you can hope to continue is by focusing on the goal. Likewise, when we experience spiritual **feeble arms and weak knees**, our only hope is to **fix our eye on Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of our faith** (Hebrews 12:2c JKV quoting **Habakkuk 2:4**).

The writer of **Hebrews** got his metaphor from **Isaiah**. Therefore, "**strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees**" (**Hebrews 12:12** quoting **Isaiah 35:3**). The **faithful** of Isra'el had been through a lot. They had many evil kings, some false prophets, generally disobedient and stubborn fellow Israelites, powerful enemies who threatened them, and it seemed like there was no prospect of every living in their own Land in peace. They were discouraged and despondent, ready to give up. So the prophet reminded them of the coming messianic Kingdom, when **the desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the lily and they will see the glory of ADONAI, the splendor of our God (Isaiah 35:1-2)**. God directed them to help each other so that they would endure: **Strengthen the feeble arms and steady weak knees. Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to deliver you" (Isaiah 35:3-4)**. Then **He** gave Isra'el a way to recognize **the Kosher King** when **He** arrived (see the commentary on **Isaiah, to see link click G1 - The Three Messianic Miracles**). In was if **He** were saying, "Don't give up now. Endure. A better day is coming. Look to that and you will have the **encouragement** and strength you need. Victory is ahead." **Encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day of the Lord** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Kg - The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Bozrah**) **approaching (10:25)**.

Make level paths for your feet refers to staying in your own lane in the race. When you get out of your lane, you not only disqualify yourself but often interfere with other runners. A runner never intentionally gets out of his lane; he only does so when he is distracted or careless, when he loses concentration of the goal, or when fatigue robs him of the will to win. **Let your eyes look directly ahead, and fix your gaze straight in front of you. Clear a level path for your feet, so all your ways will be firm. Do not turn to the right or to the left. Divert your foot from evil (Proverbs 4:25-27 TLV).** When we set out in the race of **faith**, nothing should distract us or cause us to waver or change course. If we do, we will not only stumble ourselves but cause other to stumble as well.³⁷⁴

So that the lame, those unbelieving Jews who understood who **Messiah** was but had not stepped over the line from knowledge to **faith**, **may not be disabled, but rather, healed**, or saved (**Hebrews 12:13** quoting **Proverbs 4:26**). The word **lame** (Greek: *cholos*) is found only in **the synoptic gospels** and **Acts**, and is used mostly in a literal sense. However, it is used metaphorically here. In **First Kings 19:21** we read: **How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him.** But in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the TaNaKh, uses the same word (Greek: *cholos*) in **First Kings 18:21** that the writer uses in **Hebrews 12:13**. Therefore, the word here speaks of spiritual limping, in particular, to those who among the Messianic congregation were most seriously affected by the persecutions and who were on the verge of going back to the Temple and the Levitical sacrifices.

The **encouragement** was to the born-again Jews who had left the Temple to endure and to cling so tenaciously to their newfound **faith** that those hesitating would be **encouraged** to go on to **faith** in **Messiah** as their superior **High Priest**. The believing Jews were warned that limping along in the race of **faith** would cause those on the edge of salvation to stumble and veer out of their lane. Those unbelieving Jews had started the race towards salvation by leaving the Temple, but they needed the **encouraging** example and testimony of the saved Jews to endure and finish the race so they would not be spiritually **disabled, but rather, healed** (saved).³⁷⁵

Persistence: **Make every effort to keep pursuing shalom with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord (12:14).** The warning that will climax at **12:29**, for indeed, **"Our God is a consuming fire,"** begins here. Those who fail to pay attention, who suppose that mere intellectual acknowledgment of **God's** existence and **Yeshua's** Messiahship, will get them to heaven on the basis of their good deeds are in for a rude awakening because **anyone whose name is not found written in the book of life [will be] thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).**³⁷⁶

Care: See to it (12:15a), translates the Greek word *episkopeo*, which is closely related to *episkopas*, meaning *an overseer* and is synonymous with *elder*. We are to have oversight of each other, helping each other grow in holiness. We are also to look out for, oversee, those in our midst, especially with the messianic community or church, who may not be believers. We are not to judge, but to be sensitive and concerned for opportunities to present them with the claims of **Jesus Christ**. And since the letter of **Hebrews** speaks so often to such people in the Messianic community in the diaspora, this is a critical point.

See to it that no one falls short of the glory of God (12:15b). **Falls short** means to come to late, to be left out. If an unbeliever dies before trusting in **Yeshua Messiah**, he or she will be lost for all eternity, **short** of the grace of **ADONAI**. We are **encouraged to see to it**, to be on the lookout, that, in so far as we are able to influence them, that no one around us lives under the illusion of being a believer when they are not, or that no one exposed to the gospel turns away from it (**Matthew 7:21-23; First John 2:19**).³⁷⁷

And that no bitter root of bitterness (Hebrews 12:15c quoting Deuteronomy 29:18) grows up to cause trouble and defile many. When presenting the covenant to **all Isra'el (Deuteronomy 29:1)**, Moshe warned **make sure there is none among you [anyone] whose heart turns away from ADONAI . . . to serve other gods . . . a root producing poison and bitter fruit** (instead of **producing a harvest of righteousness and peace** as found in 12:11), **and when a person hears the words of this curse (Deuteronomy 28:15-69), and nevertheless invokes a blessing on themselves, thinking, "I will be safe even though I persist in going my own way," they will bring disaster on themselves** because **ADONAI will never be willing to forgive them; His wrath and zeal will burn against them. And all the curses written in this book will fall on them, and ADONAI will blot out their names from under heaven (Deuteronomy 29:17-20)**.³⁷⁸

See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his birthright as the firstborn (12:16). Perhaps the saddest and most **godless** person in the Bible outside of Judas is **Esau**. On the surface, their acts against **YHVH** do not seem as wicked as those of many brutal and heartless pagans. But the Scriptures strongly condemn them. They had great light. They had every possible opportunity, as much as any person in their times, of knowing and following **ADONAI**. They knew **His** word, they had heard **His** promises, they had seen **His** miracles, and they had fellowship with **His** people; yet with determined willfulness they turned their backs on **God** and the things of **God**.

Esau was not only immoral, but **he** was **godless**. **He** had no ethics or **faith**, no scruples or

reverence. **He** had no regard for the good, the truthful, or the divine. **He** was totally worldly, totally secular, and totally blasphemous. And as a result, **he** was totally unfit for the patriarchal blessing. That is why **ADONAI** told Rebekah that **the older will serve the younger (Genesis 25:23)**, and that is why she acted as she did (see the commentary on **Genesis Gn - Then Jacob Gave Esau Some Lentil Stew and Esau Despised His Birthright**). Believers are to be careful that no one such as **Esau** contaminates **Messiah's Body**. See to it that there be **no immoral or godless person like Esau**.³⁷⁹

Afterward, as you know, when Esau wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, Isaac could not change what he had done (12:17). Even though it appears that **Esau** had a **change** of heart between **Genesis 25:27-34** and **Genesis 27:30-41**, it did not persuade **his** father **Isaac** to **bless him** with **the blessing** reserved for the first born son, because once **the blessing** was given it could not be withdrawn. Even though **Esau** had a **change** of heart, there is no indication that **he** ever truly repented. **His tears** did not flow from the kind of **godly sorrow that brings repentance that leads to salvation (Second Corinthians 7:10a)**. Rather, **his** change of heart was only in valuing **his** rights as the firstborn (**Genesis 27**) instead of despising them (**Genesis 25**). **Esau** desperately wanted **God's** bless - but not on **God's** terms. However, there is no basis for inferring from this passage that it can be "too late to repent," too late for a person to turn from sin to **God**. Such an attitude is only an excuse for continuing to sin. Beloved, it is *never* too late! The arms of **ADONAI** are *always* open, it is *always* **His** desire that **no one should perish but all come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9)**.³⁸⁰