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Benediction and Final Greetings

13: 20-25

Benediction and final greetings DIG: How would your sum up the writers prayer for them? Would an obedient assembly pray for its leaders? Or would a praying congregation obey its leaders? How does this benediction talk to the Hebrews who were tempted to give up on Messiah?

REFLECT: How does the writer recommend you use the benediction in your life. As this study comes to an end, what new truths have you learned about God? About yourself? What is ADONAI working in you that is pleasing to Him through Jesus Christ?

As Stuart Sacks relates in his book, *Hebrews Through a Hebrew's Eyes*, no image of **the Messiah** is more precious to the believer than that with which the letter to the **Hebrews** concludes. For generations David's psalm of comfort and encouragement that begins with **HYHV Ro'i (ADONAI is my shepherd)** had ministered to the deepest needs of untold numbers of **God's** fearful or hurting flock.

In the *midrash* to Exodus, a story is told about Moshe searching for a lost goat, a circumstance that God used to tell His temporarily disenfranchised shepherd that He would soon lead the people of Isra'el. That **God** would raise up **shepherds** for **Isra'el** was one thing. It was, however, quite another that **God Himself** would actually **shepherd His** people.

The revelation of **God's** intention to do so helped sustain **Ezeki'el** as **he** looked around **him** and saw only false prophets and self-seeking rulers. **His** reaction to their corruption brought a stern rebuke: **Woe to you shepherds of Isra'el who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally (Ezeki'el 34:2-4).**

Then follows **God's** litany of promises: **I will rescue My flock . . . I Myself will search for My sheep and look after them . . . I will pasture them on the mountains of Isra'el . . . I Myself tend My sheep and have them lie down . . . I will search for the lost . . . I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak (Ezeki'el 34:10-16).**

That was then. By the first century AD, only a vague, romanticized conception of the shepherd in the TaNaKh remained. While the rabbis still maintained some reverence for that past image - many cherishing the hope that **ADONAI** would raise up a shepherd-**King** to deliver them from their Roman overlords - there was much disdain for shepherds in general.

But when **Yeshua** arrived on the scene **He** said: **I am the good Shepherd . . . I lay down My life for the sheep (John 10:14-15).** The heart of the letter to the **Hebrews** dwells upon the infinite value of **Messiah's** death for all who rely on it exclusively. Because of mankind's tendency to rely on work's-righteousness, we need to join the **Hebrews** in being on guard, lest we ever think of ourselves as somehow deserving **God's** favor.

In **Yeshua's** parable of the lost **sheep** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click [Hs](#) - The Parable of the Lost Sheep**), the redeemed lamb's only contribution to its salvation was, being found. **The rabbis used to debate whether YHVH loved more the person who had never sinned** (they made the false presumption that there could be such a person) **or the person who sinned but genuinely repented.** Although the majority decided in favor of the former, **Jesus** made it clear that there was no rejoicing over those **persons who do not need to repent** (surely **He** was speaking ironically inasmuch as all **ninety-nine** of them were still in the wilderness).

Isaiah tells us: **We all like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6). Rabbinic logic, however, teaches that *kharatah* (remorse) and *teshuvah* (repentance) are the beginning stages of salvation.** In **Messiah's** parable above, **to repent** is synonymous with being **found** - the shepherd looks for the **sheep** until he finds it and carries it home. So it must always be, for even the most obedient among us must ultimately confess with the psalmist: **I have strayed like a lost sheep (Psalm 119:176).** What does it mean to be carried home by **Yeshua**? Its meaning must surely be bound up with our **Shepherd's** declaration: **I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10b).**⁴⁰⁸



Now the writer prays for those to whom he addresses this letter, saying: **May the God of shalom, who through the blood of the of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Yeshua, the great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will. And may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen (13:20-21).** What you are able to do, God wants you to do. You are the only person on earth who can use your abilities. No one else can play your role, because they don't have the unique shape that **God** has given you. The Bible says that **God** has **equipped you with everything good for doing His will.** To discover **God's** will for your life, you should seriously examine what you are good at doing and what you're not good at.⁴⁰⁹

What a difference it would make in our lives if we would turn **Hebrews 13:20-21** into a personal prayer each day, "**Lord**, make me perfect in every good work to do **Your** will. Work in me that which is well pleasing in **Your** sight. Do it through **Jesus Christ** and may **He** receive the **glory**. Amen."

Then in an almost apologetic manner, the writer encourages the readers to **bear with** (Greek: *anecho*) what he had written, to receive it with open minds and warm hearts what he had said - in contrast to those in **Second Timothy 4:3** (whom Rabbi Sha'ul describes using the same Greek verb, *anecho*) who do **not endure [bear with] sound doctrine. Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my message of encouragement, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly (13:22).** The letter has been straightforward, confrontive, uncompromising, somewhat complex and taxing to the mind, emotion and will. Yet, even so, it is **written quite briefly.** The whole letter is shorter than Romans and First Corinthians and can be read in under an hour. If the writer had dealt fully with the great themes he discusses, the letter could have been incredibly long. But it is

amazingly short in comparison to the eternal and infinite truths it contains.

I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you (13:23). They needed to know that one of God's servants, **our brother Timothy** (who must have been well known to them) **has been released**, probably from prison. The historical detail of **Timothy's** imprisonment is unknown. But we are not surprised that he, like his teacher Paul, was put in jail for preaching about **Jesus. Timothy** seemed to be faltering in **his** faithfulness when Paul wrote his second letter to **him**. So in **2 Timothy 1:6-2:12** and **3:12-14**, the apostle encouraged **him** to endure persecution and not to fear it. It is likely that **Hebrews** was written soon after **Second Timothy**, and we see that this man of **God** had responded well to Paul's previous encouragement.

Greet all your leaders and all of God's people. The readers had already been encouraged to **obey** their **leaders (13:17)**, and now they were asked to convey greeting to them **and to all God's people** who were part of the Messianic community. **Those from Italy send you their greetings (13:24).** This may indicate that the group to which he wrote was in **Italy**, or simply that some **Italian** believers were with him and **sent their greetings**.

Grace be with you all (13:25). The letter ends with a simple, yet lovely conclusion in the form of a plea for **ADONAI** to grant **grace** to the readers (**Titus 3:15**), as **God** does for all **His** children through **the One** who alone can give **grace** - **Yeshua ha-Mashiach**.⁴¹⁰

The letter to the **Hebrews** was written to people who were enduring persecution and questioning if **Yeshua** was really their **great Shepherd**. At that point in time, there were some in that Messianic community who began to think that the Temple and its accompanying Levitical sacrificial system looked awfully good to them by comparison.

At times we are tempted to doubt goodness of our **great Shepherd**; we may even question - somewhere deep within our souls - **His** sovereign care. But as **Simon Peter** said: **Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God (John 6:67-69).** Amidst the hard realities of life we see in an anonymous medieval prayer the yearnings of our own hearts:



*A stranger here, as all my fathers were,
that went before, I wander to and fro.*

*From earth to heaven is my pilgrimage,
a tedious way for flesh and blood to go.*

*O **Lord, You** are the way, pity the blind,
And teach me how I may **Your** dwelling find.⁴¹¹*