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Final Exhortations

Hebrews 13:1-25

Introduction

The writer gives final instructions to believers, especially the Messianic Jews. These exhortations fall into three distinct categories. First, 13:1-6 presents moral and ethical encouragement. Second, 13:7-19 presents spiritual advice related to the conduct of Jewish believers. Third, the book closes with one of the most wonderful blessings and godly benedictions in the Bible in 13:20-25.

1. An Exhortation for Moral and Ethical Behavior Becoming a Believer, 13:1-6

If the evidence of our faith is to show in our conduct as 11:1-40 strongly suggests, then the conduct of a believer should be morally and ethically distinctive. The writer lays out six distinctives that should mark the life of every believer.

1. Believers should be known for brotherly love, 13:1.
2. Believers should be known for their hospitality, 13:2.
3. Believers should be known for their concern for those imprisoned, 13:3.
4. Believers should be known for their commitment to marriage, 13:4.
5. Believers should be known for their commitment to contentment, 13:5.
6. Believers should be known for their commitment to seeking God's help, 13:6.

2. An Exhortation for Spiritual Conduct Becoming of a Believer, 13:7-19

What are the hallmarks of Christian conduct? The writer identifies eleven characteristics suggestive of godly Christian conduct.

1. Believers should respect spiritual leaders in three ways: (a) remember the Word of God they taught you; (b) remember their godly example; and (c) imitate their faith, 13:7.
2. Believers should respect the reliability of Christ, 13:8.
3. Believers should respect sound doctrine, 13:9; Isa 40:8; 1 Pet 1:24-25.
4. Believers should respect the true "altar" of sacrifice, 13:10 - Christ "on the altar of man," (from "God hath provided a Lamb"). None but true believers have the right to this altar, 13:11.
5. Believers should respect the alienation Christ suffered on the Cross, 13:12.
6. Believers should respect and embrace his reproach, 13:13; 11:26.
7. Believers should seek the eternal city, 13:14.
8. Believers should offer the sacrifice of praise, 13:15.
9. Believers should seek to do good works, 13:16.

10. Believers should obey their spiritual leaders, 13:17.
11. Believers should pray for their spiritual leaders, 13:18-19.

3. **A Benediction and Exhortation to "Be Complete," Through the "Blood of the Everlasting Covenant," 13:20-21.**

This benediction brings up significant theological ideas that are an integral part of the Old Testament. The writer of Hebrews focuses here in 13:20-21 on the Blood of the "Everlasting Covenant" in the Old Testament. It was a significant reminder to the Jewish believers and Jews interested in Jesus, that the ideas of the kingdom were not new. These ideas were formative in laying the foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His teachings on the Kingdom. This passage serves as an encouragement for Jewish believers and would be believers to seriously consider the claims of Christ and the message of the Gospel based on its Old Testament roots. Becoming a believer is not a conversion from Judaism for a Jew.

Terminology. The term "everlasting covenant" appears once in the New Testament in Hebrews 13:20 as ἐν αἵμα αἰώνιος διαθήκη "in the blood of the everlasting covenant." 13:20-21 complete the entire thought which says:

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through **the blood of the everlasting covenant**, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.

It will become very clear in looking closely at this section of Ezekiel, 33:1-37:28 that the exile was ultimately about God's retribution for their breaking of the "everlasting covenant" that God had made with His people. This is an idea that even precedes God's covenant with Abraham. This phrase בְּרִית עוֹלָם is translated "everlasting covenant" and it appears fifteen times in the Old Testament from Noah to Ezekiel. This phrase was used once in reference to the covenants of Noah and Abraham. It also was used in 2 Samuel, Isaiah and Ezekiel in reference to the restoration of the kingdom of David. That restoration is presented as contingent upon the re-establishment of God's "everlasting covenant" also called the "covenant of peace," with His people Israel.

Covenant Roots. The Everlasting Covenant and Covenant of Peace have their roots in the Pentateuch but are found throughout the Old Testament. The "everlasting covenant," is the Hebrew, בְּרִית עוֹלָם *berith 'olam*, and it is used at significant points in the Old Testament. It is used with the covenant of Noah in

Genesis 9:16. It also is used in Genesis 17:19 in the third covenant with Abraham as a sign that the promise was an "everlasting covenant." In Leviticus 24:8 it refers to the Sabbath and all of its rites as a holy day of rest and worship, which was established by an "everlasting covenant" with Israel spelled out in Exodus 20:8-11. Both the "everlasting covenant" and the "covenant of peace" בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם *berith shalom*, appear in the account of judgment on the Israelites in Numbers 25. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron was given "My covenant of peace" and an "everlasting covenant" of priesthood because he turned back the wrath of God over the cohabitation with Moabite women in the pagan rites of the worship of Baal (Num 25:1-9) and the plague that killed 24,000 was halted.

David's Last Words. In David's last words in 2 Samuel 23:5, he refers to the covenant made with him by God and recorded in 2 Samuel 7:1-17 as an "everlasting covenant." Also, the Chronicler recalls the covenant made with Abraham and reconfirmed with Isaac and Jacob as an "everlasting covenant," 1 Chron 16:15-17; Ps 105:10. In the midst of the hymn of judgment Isaiah says in 24:5 that the earth is defiled because the inhabitants have broken the "everlasting covenant" of God and have invited the judgment of God in response (see e.g. Jer 31:32; Ezek 17:16, 19; 44:7). The prophet also refers to it as an "everlasting covenant" that is exemplified in the "sure mercies of David," Isa 55:3. The effects of the covenant of salvation is found in Isaiah 61:8 are eternal. The covenant, therefore, is called the "everlasting covenant." This is the passage Jesus employed at the beginning of his earthly ministry as recorded in Luke 4:18-19.

Jeremiah's Message of Restoration. In his marvelous prophetic message of restoration that includes Jeremiah 32:36-44, Jeremiah states in 32:40 that God will "make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from me." Ezekiel's long story of the orphan who became a queen and finally a harlot contains forthright words of judgment and condemnation in Ezekiel 16:31-59. But the story closes with a word of hope based on God's promise that even though Israel and Judah have broken the covenant, He intends to establish an "everlasting covenant," and "you shall know that I am Yahweh," 16:60-63. Also in Ezekiel 37:25-26, the restoration envisioned by Ezekiel holds out the promise of a new covenant implemented by "My Servant David" which will reestablish the covenantal relationship between God and Israel by making a "covenant of peace" that will be an "everlasting covenant" with God's sanctuary in their midst forever (v. 26).

These passages confirm that the "everlasting covenant" as presented in the Old Testament, looks forward to the reestablishment of the kingdom of David and his kingdom that will be based on an "everlasting covenant," also known as the "covenant of peace" (Ezek 37:26; Heb 13:20).

Covenant of Peace. The "covenant of peace" has its roots in the Pentateuch, Num 25:12, and beyond, Josh 9:15; Job 5:23; 1 Kin 3:15; Isa 54:10; Mal 2:5; and Ezek 37:26. Note the "I will" statements in this great promise of the "Shepherd" of Israel. God promises a "covenant of peace" cf. Heb 13:20 see Ezekiel 34:25-31. This passage contains promises never fulfilled in the first return from exile in Babylon. When the people returned beginning in 535 BC, they were still under the control of the Medo-Persians, then Greece, and finally Rome until AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the Hebrews among the nations in the Diaspora. The covenant of peace in Ezekiel 34:23-31 either was on an unrealistic and unfulfilled hope that never came to pass, or God's true promises of ultimate redemption for Israel. It is clear that they are promises that were only partially fulfilled upon the first return of Jews in 535 BC and that the final fulfillment awaits some time after the Diaspora of AD 70 and following. God is faithful and will bring every promise to fulfillment (Ps 31:24; 37:9; 42:11; Isa 40:8, 31; Lam 3:19-40; 2 Cor 3:12; Col 1:5; 1 Thess 1:3; 4:13; 5:8; Heb 6:19; 1 Jn 3:3).

"My Servant David." Ezekiel chapters 35-39 expand on the promises of this "covenant of peace," and the work of "My Servant David" introduced in 34:23-25 (cf. 37:24-25). This Servant is God's ideal Shepherd who was the antithesis of the corrupt leaders who were responsible for the downfall of the nation. Eight characteristics are presented of the future Shepherd who will be the new king of the restored kingdom in Ezekiel 34 (see Cooper, p. 305).

1. He will have a special relationship with Yahweh, vv. 11-16
2. He will feed His sheep and they will not want, vv. 13, 26-29
3. He will gather His sheep together, vv. 12-13
4. He will reestablish them peacefully in their land, vv. 14-15
5. He will rule with justice and compassion, v. 16
6. He will personally judge His flock, vv. 17, 20, 22
7. He will be the only true Shepherd v. 23
8. He will mediate a covenant of peace, v. 25

There is a close relationship between the Shepherd passage here in Ezekiel 34 with Psalm 23:1-6 and John 10:1-42. A comparative study of these passages reveals similar characteristics of God's ideal Shepherd. The promise of God's Shepherd caused the hope of Messiah to soar.

4. Use of the Covenant Responsibility in the Prayer of Hebrews 13:20-21.

With this rich background that we have seen in the previous section of the "everlasting covenant" note that the writer of Hebrews says in 13:20-21, that "the God of peace . . . make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen." This is the greatest challenge for especially for Jewish believers, but also for Gentile believers. We are to seek God's will in every sort of good work. Any work that we do must be for His glory and not our own so that God and Christ may be glorified and honored. The work in no way has any efficacious effect, but must be as a result of one's salvation and not to earn one's salvation. The God of peace will work in every believer to help them to accomplish good works that will bring glory to God.

It also is important to note that 13:20-21 is a prayer of benediction placed just before the final exhortation, which is a postscript. The emphasis of this prayer is that our daily walk will be centered in His will and its motive is to bring honor and glory to Him and not to us. The believer who perseveres, in spite of the circumstances, will find His grace sufficient to stand faithful in seeking to do God's will. This is accomplished by the twofold performance of faith and works. It is only possible to do works acceptable to God by faith. We lay our prayers and our works on the altar as a gift He has enabled in us by grace. While the focus of this section is on Jewish believers or would be believers, the passage also applies to Gentiles.

5. The Final Exhortation, 13:22-25.

The use of exhortation is one of the main characteristics of this letter to the Hebrews. Two words of exhortation are used in these verses. They are the Greek παρακαλεα *parakalea* which means "to exhort," or "to encourage," and παραινεο *paraineo* also "to exhort," or "to urge." They are used six times in Hebrews 3:13; 10:25; 12:5; 13:19, 22, and two of these in 13:22. This exhortation is an intense, personal, and practical appeal of encouragement to be diligent in our service to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The writer "urges" them to take heed to the "exhortations" of the letter, 13:22. The Book of Hebrews is a letter and not a theological treatise. Even though it is longer than other books in the New Testament it is not a long, book length theological treatise. In fact, it is relatively short given its deep theological contents. The writer's exhortations have included a call to "take heed," 2:1; "press on," and "consider Jesus" as the "author and finisher of our faith," 12:2.

Another word of encouragement is that Timothy has been released, 12:23. This normally referred to being released from custody or imprisonment. We have no

knowledge of Timothy having been in prison but it is not beyond reason that he could have been. The writer is pleased to report that Timothy will soon come to see the recipients of the letter and he hopes to come with him.

Greetings given to various people were normally at the conclusion of letters like it is here in Hebrews. These greetings are much like a postscript. It is a two-fold greeting that was first for all those who are leaders, and thus "have the rule" or authority over you. This is the third time the leaders are mentioned. In 13:7 they are to be remembered and followed as examples of true faith. In 13:17 they are to be obeyed because they are accountable to God for their leadership role. Finally in 13:24 greetings are sent to the leaders and also to all the believers that are with the recipient(s) of this letter. Final greetings come from the writer on behalf of those Italian believers who were with him, 13:24. The final word, "grace be with you all," 13:25, is typical and seen in letters from Paul in Rom 16:24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18, etc.

Let us continue to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and to share our faith in Him as our Messiah. It is He who is the "author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God," Heb 12:2.