

Numbers 27:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd.

Analysis

Moses prays for a leader 'which may go out before them, and which may go in before them... that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd.' Despite God denying Moses entry into Canaan, Moses selflessly seeks Israel's future leadership. The shepherd metaphor emphasizes protective care and guidance - a leader who shares the people's experiences ('go out... go in before them'). This concern reflects Christ, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) who leads, feeds, and protects His flock. The phrase 'spirits of all flesh' acknowledges God alone knows hearts and can appoint the right leader. Every true shepherd serves under the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4).

Historical Context

This prayer occurred after God announced Moses wouldn't enter Canaan (v.12-14). Rather than bitterness, Moses demonstrates selfless leadership - concerned for Israel's welfare beyond his own tenure. God appointed Joshua (v.18-23), who had proven faithful as Moses' assistant for forty years. The public commissioning before Eleazar and the congregation ensured smooth leadership transition. This contrasts with pagan monarchies' succession crises and shows God's providential preparation of leaders. Joshua's military skills would prove essential for Canaan's conquest, while his spiritual character ensured covenant faithfulness.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. Do you pray for your church's future leadership, especially when you won't personally benefit from it?
2. Are you preparing successors in your areas of ministry, or hoarding responsibility out of pride or fear?

Interlinear Text

אֲשֶׁר H834	יוֹצִיא מִן H3318	לִפְנֵיהֶם H6440	וְאֲשֶׁר H834	יָבִיא מִן H935	וְאֲשֶׁר H834	יָבִיא מִן H935
Which may go out		before	and which may bring them in			
before H6440		Which may go out H3318	and which may bring them in H935			
וְלֹא H3808	תְּהִיָּה H1961	עַד תִּהְיֶה H5712	יְהוָה H3068	כֹּצֵא אֵין H6629	אֲשֶׁר H834	אֲשֶׁר H834
		that the congregation	of the LORD	be not as sheep		
אֵין H369	לֹא H0	רֹעֶה: H7462				
		which have no shepherd				

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 34:5 (Parallel theme): And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered.

Mark 6:34 (Parallel theme): And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.

1 Kings 22:17 (References Lord): And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.

Zechariah 10:2 (Parallel theme): For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd.

Matthew 9:36 (Parallel theme): But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Deuteronomy 31:2 (References Lord): And he said unto them, I am an hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

2 Chronicles 1:10 (Parallel theme): Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?

1 Kings 3:7 (References Lord): And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

1 Samuel 8:20 (Parallel theme): That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

1 Samuel 18:13 (Parallel theme): Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people.