

Introduction: God's leading of His people Israel through the dangers of the desert and past their foes into the Promised Land became the stuff of wonder and late-night Bible stories, as Israelite parents passed down the generations the miraculous deeds God had done. May God inspire us also to "pass on" to our children the truths of God's redeeming work in our lives. Psalm 44, as the focus of this week's Bible notes, has as its theme God's helping His people in their desert trials and through great disappointment into a place of peace and faith. May we be reassured that God will also involve Himself in our wanderings, bringing us safely into our inheritance in Christ Jesus.

Monday: read Exodus 15:13-17 and Psalm 44:1-3. Who were these "Hebrews" whom God led through the Red Sea and eventually into their inheritance of Canaan in Exodus 15:16-17? Well, according to Psalm 44:3, they were God's "beloved" people, who were victorious in claiming the Promised Land *not* because of the strength of their arms or their weaponry, but because God Himself fought for them and "planted" them, (Psalm 44:2) in that land, just as He promised to do in Exodus 15:17: *You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance.* Just as the Lord was *gracious* to choose His people despite their stiff-necked nature, (Deuteronomy 9:6), so He was lovingly *protective* of them despite their weakness and fears of their foes. Wherever weakness, doubt and sin threaten to disqualify God's people from their inheritance, God has the loving ability to make up for their short-comings, and to save them time and again.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God that, though we are beset with so many weaknesses and doubts, God is a determined gardener! When He plants the seed of the Holy Spirit's new life within us, nothing can uproot His work of grace begun in our lives. To change the metaphor: that spark of living flame within us, which is the principle of holiness by which we live with and serve our God, is constantly threatened by the floods of wickedness which threaten to inundate our lives. How great that God can stop the floods, and preserve the flame, whether we wander with Moses in the desert or wander in the midst of evil in our day. The light of God will not be snuffed out but will lead us to God's tabernacle, and our Heavenly home. As John Owen put it, in volume 3, pg. 397 of his works:

Among all the glorious works of God, next unto that of redemption by Jesus Christ, my soul doth most admire this of the Spirit in preserving the seed and principle of holiness in us, as a spark of living fire in the midst of the ocean, against all corruptions and temptations wherewith it is impugned. May breaches are made in and upon our course of obedience by the incursions of actual sins; these he cures and makes up, healing our backslidings and repairing our decays.

Tues/Weds: read Psalm 44:1-3; Numbers 16:1-3 and 16:23-32. This Psalm was sung by the choirs of the Old Testament, by "the sons of Korah", who used it in their worship. See the title of this Psalm where the "sons of Korah" are identified as the Psalm's authors. Who were they? Well, they are named for Korah, called a son of Kohath and Levi in Num. 16:1, who was an infamous rebel whom the ground "swallowed up", Numbers 26:10. But Numbers 26:11 tells us that Korah's line "did not die out", which must mean that some of Korah's family obeyed Moses command to separate from their father Korah in Numbers 16:26, and thus were spared. Even in the midst of judgment, God's irresistible grace was able *to take sinners by the hand* and pluck them to safety: Think of it! Some of the very children who stood with their rebellious fathers at the doors of their tents in Numbers 16:27: saved even at the door of Hell! Is that not the exact kind of grace which we so desperately need in our day, as we see loved ones around us sinking down under judgment?

Meditate and Pray: Make hymn # 381 in our Red Trinity hymnal your prayer for lost loved ones and neighbors, desperately in need of rescue from soul-destroying sins and Divine judgment:

*Brethren, we have met to worship and adore the Lord our God;
Will you pray with all your power, while we try to preach the Word?
All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down;
Brethren, pray, and holy manna will be showered all around.*

*Brethren, see poor sinners round you slumbering on the brink of woe;
Death is coming, hell is moving, can you bear to let them go?
See our fathers and our mothers, and our children sinking down;
Brethren, pray and holy manna will be showered all around.*

*Sisters, will you join and help us? Moses' sister aided him;
Will you help the trembling mourners who are struggling hard with sin?
Tell them all about the Savior, tell them that He will be found;
Sisters, pray, and holy manna will be showered all around.*

*Is there here a trembling jailer, seeking grace, and with tears?
Is there here a weeping Mary, pouring forth a flood of tears?
Brethren, join your cries to help them; sisters, let your prayers abound;
Pray, Oh pray that holy manna may be scattered all around.*

Thursday: read Psalm 44:1-3 and Romans 9:19-22. How wonderful to see God's arm of salvation snatch these sons of Korah from the doom of their father, turning his shameful uprising into their monument of grace. Behold the wonder of election for these "sons of Korah": numbered among those who entered the Promised Land, and then called by David to serve as his official singers. This is all the more remarkable, I say again, considering that their father, Korah, turned out to be a "vessel of wrath", prepared for destruction", (Rom. 9:22). How is it that God can bring such pure, electing grace out of the unclean rebellion of Korah, and bring a "monument to grace" out of what was meant to be a, "warning sign", (Num. 26:10)? Well, that is the glory – and the mystery - of God's particular grace, which all believers are to confess with humble gratitude. As Hymn # 469, verses 3 & 4 put it:

*Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"*

*'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly drew us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin.*

Friday: read Exodus 15:18-24 and Psalm 44:4-24. God's people did not perform well under their many trials faced in the desert. Whether it was hunger or thirst, they continually tested God's patience. Even as early as Exodus 15:22-24, they resorted to complaining against not just Moses, but even against the Lord, (See also Ex. 17:2). Sadly, the sons of Korah fell into the same trap in their recitation of their trials in Psalm 44. For example, while justly mourning over their rough treatment at the hands of unbelievers in verses 15-16 and 22, and even humbly acknowledging that it was God's hand which handed them over to their enemies in verses 9-16, there is nevertheless a most unworthy accusatory tone – as if God's permitting of such sufferings was unjust, since they, the "sons of Korah" were in their own eyes "true to God's covenant" (See verses 17-19)! The Psalm continues with critical language towards God: even accusing Him of being "asleep" in verse 23 and needing to be "roused"!

Meditate and Pray: It is shocking to see how legitimate mourning can become prejudiced against God's promises, calling into question His compassion and even against His blameless character. This is where believers can turn legitimate lamentation into the sin of bitter complaining. To be sure, as we will see in next week's notes concluding Psalm 44, God *does* reclaim us from bitter despair. Nevertheless, just as Asaph runs a dangerous course in his false accusations against God's care in Psalm 77:7-9, so these sons of Korah are a warning to us to take heed against presuming on God's kindness and patience by unfettered sulking and murmuring against His ways. May God grant us to put a hand over our mouths as Job did whenever such unworthy complaints against God begin to express themselves in our words. Let's conclude this week's notes with several hymns that well express the sweet spirit of repentance which should follow our mistreatment of the Lord by our complaining spirits. Hymn # 31 describes our overcoming by faith in order to rest in God's unfailing love:

*Have you not known, have you not heard
That firm remains on high
The everlasting throne of Him
Who formed the earth and sky?*

*Are you afraid His power shall fail
When comes your evil day?
And can an all creating arm
Grow weary or decay?*

*Supreme in wisdom as in power
The Rock of Ages stands,
Though Him you cannot see, nor trace
The working of His hands.*

*He gives the conquest to the weak,
Supports the fainting heart;
And courage in the evil hour
His heavenly aids impart.*

*Mere human power shall fast decay,
And youthful vigor cease;
But they who wait upon the Lord
In strength shall still increase.*

*They with unwearied feet shall tread
The path of life divine;
With growing ardor onward move,
With growing brightness shine.*

*On eagles' wings they mount, they soar,
Their wings are faith and love;
Till, past the cloudy regions here,
They rise to Heav'n above.*