

The story of God leading of His people through the dangers of the desert and past their terrified foes into the Promised Land is the stuff of wonder and late-night Bible stories. According to Psalm 44:1-3, God's people passed down the generations the miraculous deeds God had done. May God inspire us also to pass on to our children the truths of Psalm 44, the focus of this week's Bible notes. Our theme is God's "arising" to help His people in their desert trials, guiding them to Canaan in Exodus 15, guiding them through great disappointment and doubt in Psalm 44, and guiding them through all evil, even to our day.

In our recent children's camp, we celebrated the faithful shepherding care of our Savior in Psalm 23. How fitting now to focus on that same shepherding care when His flock faces real hardship. May we be reassured that God will involve Himself in our wanderings in order to bring us safely into our inheritance in Christ Jesus.

Monday: Read Exodus 15:13-17 and Psalm 44:1-3

God's Protective Shepherding

Who were these Hebrews whom God led through the Red Sea and eventually into their inheritance of Canaan? 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.

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. Many 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.

John Owen, *Works*, volume III, pg. 397

Tues/Weds: Read Psalm 44:1-3; Numbers 16:1-3 and 16:23-32

Saved at the Door of Hell

Psalm 44 was sung by the choirs of the Old Testament, by "the Sons of Korah," who used it in their worship. The title of this Psalm identifies the Psalm's authors. Korah, called a son of Kohath and Levi (Num. 16:1), 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 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, 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 9:19-24

A Warning Sign & a Monument to Grace

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 a 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 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)? That is the glory – and the mystery - of God's particular grace, which all believers are to confess with humble gratitude.

Meditate and Pray: Father, this story of the Sons of Korah is just one example of your saving ways through all generations. Thank you for intervening in my covenant family, turning us from your enemies into your people. Sing with TH Hymn # 469, verses 3 & 4:

*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 15:189-24 and Psalm 44:4-24**Complaining TO God**

God's people did not perform well under their many trials in the desert. In both hunger and thirst, they continually tested God's patience. Even as early as Exodus 15:22-24, God's people resorted to complaining against not just Moses, but even against the Lord (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, 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” (vs. 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 so easily become prejudiced against God's promises, against His compassion, and even against His blameless character. To be sure, as we will see in next week's notes concluding Psalm 44, God *does* reclaim the sons of Korah from bitter despair by the time the Psalm closes. 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. 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.

Lord, give us your Spirit to speak Job's words: “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10). May the Spirit of patience grant us superhuman strength to endure ills without complaining against You. Only may we complain to you freely, as our Father, without accusing Your motive. Lord, grant us that grace.