

Last week we unfolded the prophetic blessing of Jacob on the tribe of Naphtali, focusing on their hero Barak from the book of Judges. We celebrated as we saw Barak advance on the battlefield (Judges 4:15-16) to rout the enemy. No wonder Barak is cited in the letter to the Hebrews, along with other heroes of faith, as “by faith conquering kingdoms, administering justice and gaining what was promised” (Hebrews 11:32-33). This week we will pursue further the theme of God's abundant mercy and power in the lives of men like Barak and Joseph.

Monday/Tuesday: Read Jdg. 10:10-16 & Eph. 3:20-21 Far more Abundantly than All we Ask or Think

Time and again, God remembered the words of blessing which Jacob had uttered on the tribes of Israel and moved with pity for these tribes in their miserable bondage to idols and to the cruel nations around them. He sent “saviors” or “judges.” When His people cried out to Him after repeatedly returning to apostasy, we are told that “God's soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel” (NKJV, Judges 10:16). In this way, where His people's sin abounded, God's grace abounded all the more. For every temptation, mistake, sin, misjudgment, excess, wrong relationship, misspoken word, ungodly alliance, error in false worship, lust conceived and acted on; in short, for every eruption of evil which sprang to life in His people because “they forsook Him” (Judges 10:13), God's mercy and desire to save proved more enduring, more war-like and more effective to save than any sin to tempt and destroy. This is part of what we celebrate in Ephesians 3:20-21 when we say with Paul that “God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine... in the church... throughout all generations!” *He was* doing more than Barak, Gideon, Samson or any other of the tribes of Israel imagined He could do in their dark day. Not even all the books in the world can describe the countless purposes of grace which the Lord has in store for each age of His church's existence – all in order that, in His name, “kingdoms are conquered; justice finally administered and promises gained by faith (Hebrews 11: 32-33).”

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God that all His “omnis” are always at work in even His smallest provisions of grace for His own. As Matthew Henry puts it: “There is an inexhaustible fulness of grace and mercy in God, which the prayers of all the saints can never draw dry. Whatever we may ask, or think to ask, still God is still able to do more, abundantly more, exceedingly abundantly more. Open thy mouth ever so wide, still He hath wherewithal to fill it.”

Let us rejoice in the knowledge that every day of history *is indeed* a day which the Lord has made in which His people can rejoice. God has not only “ordained works for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10), He has ordained His *own* ongoing work of salvation to be carried forward. Let us celebrate this fact with the great words of hymn # 74 from our Trinity Hymnal:

*God is working His purpose out
As year succeeds to year;
God is working his purpose out,
And the time is drawing near;
Nearer and nearer draws the time,
The time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled
With the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.*

*All we can do is nothing worth
Unless God blesses the deed;
Vainly we hope for the harvest-tide
Till God gives life to the seed;
Yet near and nearer draws the time,
The time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled
With the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.*

Wednesday/Thursday/Friday: Read Eph, 3:20-21 and Heb. 11:32-34**I Do Not Have Time to Tell**

God is able to bless *every epoch* of the church age with abundant blessings and miracles of deliverance, thereby fulfilling the words of blessing from the lips of Jacob. The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the abundant nature of what God did in the dark days of Judges with words that clearly imply abundance in Hebrews 11:32: “And what more shall I say? *I do not have time to tell* about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah and David...” What? How easily a quite different commentary on the days of apostasy in Judges might come to our minds! We would expect the description of any periods of evil such as Judges, or even our own day, to be something along these lines: “There isn’t much to say from those dark days...” (or) “It would not be worth the time to tell of the days of Gideon, Barak, etc.” But to declare on the pages of Scripture that there are *too many* Divine provisions of mercy and power to recount? To imply that “all the books of the world” would not be enough to contain all that the Lord did in those dark days? That is amazing! How full the assurance of blessing which God gives us for *our* day by citing the *worst days* of Bible history and drawing the sweet water of Divine goodness from them! *IF* God can fill *those* days with His saving power and mercy, can He not also do the same in ours?

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for the prudence and power of His written word, which summons *so many* witnesses to fully demonstrate the truth that faith does indeed gain the victory in every dark day of history! Barak, Samson, Gideon, Jephthah, Samuel and even dear, heart-broken David: they all surround us and say, “The half hasn’t been told...”; “Time would fail us to tell you all that God did in our day... more than we asked or imagined!”

Do we have such a big view of what God is doing in our day? The reason heaven must be an eternal dialogue between saints before God's throne is because it will *require* eternity for us to tell each other all that the Lord has done for us and in us? What a prospect: To spend millions of years doing precisely what Psalm 145:11 describes and which hymn # 5 by Richard Mant, in our hymn books, predicts!

*God, my King, Thy might confessing,
Ever will I bless Thy Name;
Day by day Thy throne addressing,
Still will I Thy praise proclaim.*

*Honor great our God befitteth;
Who His majesty can reach?
Age to age His works transmitteth,
Age to age His power shall teach.*

*They shall talk of all Thy glory,
On Thy might and greatness dwell,
Speak of Thy dread acts the story,
And Thy deeds of wonder tell.*

*Nor shall fail from memory's treasure
Works by love and mercy wrought;
Works of love surpassing measure,
Works of mercy passing thought.*

*Full of kindness and compassion,
Slow to anger, vast in love,
God is good to all creation;
All His works His goodness prove.*

*All Thy works, O Lord, shall bless Thee;
Thee shall all Thy saints adore:
King supreme shall they confess Thee,
And proclaim Thy sovereign power.*

Sat/Sun: Read Gen. 49:22-24 and Rom. 5:1-10**Blessings Overflow to the Brothers**

As we turn now to study the life of Joseph, we note that Jacob never lets us forget the one whose suffering resulted in abounding blessings on tribes like Dan, Asher and Naphtali. To put it bluntly, the reason failures like Asher, Naphtali, Dan and all the other sinful sons of Jacob were able to receive overflowing blessings from Jacob, and the reason why cowards like Gideon, Barak, and even compromised heroes, like Samson, are honored as men of faith is because there is a "Joseph" who bore the penalty for all their misdeeds. Joseph provided peace and security for his whole family only after enduring the hostility of "the archers who bitterly grieved him, who shot and him and hated him" (Gen. 49:23). In the same way, our "Joseph," Jesus Christ, "sent ahead" to Egypt, endured all the bondage and cruelty of sinful men at the Cross in order to set us free to enjoy the fruit of Romans 5:1-5: peace, access to God by faith, hope, perseverance and character, and love. "And," Paul continues, "none of these fruits disappoint us..." Jacob's sons could not possibly have been disappointed with Egypt, when their kindly, gracious brother was on the throne of that land! Truly the fruit of Joseph's vine (Gen. 49:22) was indeed sweet to the taste of his much-blessed brothers! May we in like manner enjoy all the "good things of God's land" since our elder brother, Jesus Christ, is on the throne for us with far more wealth and happiness to bestow than ever Joseph could provide for his brothers!

Meditate and Pray: God, please open our eyes to the abundant mercies which you have in store for us in Christ Jesus. Remove from us any fear of want, or distrust of your generosity towards us in our Beloved Savior Jesus Christ. Please help us to put increasing confidence in the rich Kingship of Jesus Christ. Help us to live by the logic of Romans 5:9-10: "*If we have been saved from Divine wrath through the **death** of the Son of God, will we not also be saved repeatedly and continuously from all other lasting evils of this world... **through His ongoing life lived for us in the presence of God?***" Please help us to realize that the enthroned Prince of life, Jesus Christ, is far more worthy of our trust than ever Joseph was on his brothers' behalf. Amen.

We could not do better than to conclude this week's Bible notes with these words by John Newton (hymn # 628):

*Come, my soul, thy suit prepare:
Jesus loves to answer prayer;
he himself has bid thee pray,
therefore will not say thee nay.*

*Lord, I come to thee for rest,
take possession of my breast;
there thy blood bought right maintain,
and without a rival reign.*

*Thou art coming to a King,
large petitions with thee bring;
for his grace and power are such,
none can ever ask too much.*

*While I am a pilgrim here,
let thy love my spirit cheer;
as my Guide, my Guard, my Friend,
lead me to my journey's end.*

*With my burden I begin:
Lord, remove this load of sin;
let thy blood, for sinners spilt,
set my conscience free from guilt.*

*Show me what I have to do,
every hour my strength renew:
let me live a life of faith,
let me die thy people's death.*