

As we journey through the Old Testament, we come upon unwelcome strangers who return to stay for a time. For example, in this week's notes we see Joseph's brothers *revisited* by the guilt of their misdeeds of the past. As soon as their father is dead, the old fears of condemnation haunt them. Thoughts of how mighty Joseph is, and how kind he has been to them, combined with how *undeserving* they feel because of their betrayal of their brother long ago when they sold him as a slave, make them fear new punishment. May this week's meditation on the reopening of the old wounds of sin and guilt in Joseph's brethren cause us to appreciate in a new way the blessing of sins removed and guilt washed away by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Monday: Read Genesis 50:7-14 and Proverbs 21:1**The Hand that Rules the River**

The Egyptians mourn for Jacob with Joseph and all his family. This is proof of the high regard the Egyptians had for Joseph; this mighty nation still recognized the presence of Joseph among them as a God-send. Moreover, their tears for Joseph's dead father were real. Had not Jacob lived among the Egyptians for 17 years (Gen. 47:28)? Had not Jacob himself blessed Pharaoh (Gen. 47:10), proving that even Pharaoh honored Jacob's exalted position? Remember that in the Bible, it is always the greater who blesses the lesser (Hebrews 7:7) Truly God moves the whole nation of Egypt to recognize His Hand on the life of these men of faith, Jacob and Joseph.

Meditate and Pray: Ask God to give you increasing discernment of His Hand at work, controlling the nations.

Lord, when the chaos and violence of men in this world tempt us to fear the future, reassure us that if you could control the heart of mighty Pharaoh, then you can certainly control the power and the plans of the leaders of our day. Thank you that the heart of even the mightiest king "is in the hand of the Lord; He directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases" (Proverbs 21:1). Amen.

Tuesday: Read Ge 50:10-14, Rom. 1:21-25 and 2 Cor 6:1-2**Favor Available Now**

Not all surrounding nations responded with recognition of God's blessing on the life and death of Jacob. The Canaanites, though they memorialized the spectacular mourning of so many Egyptians in their neighborhood, never sought to inquire of Jacob's God – even though Jacob himself, like Abraham and Isaac before him, had lived among them for most of his life! Throughout their land, Jacob and his ancestors before him had named holy places and altars after the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All through the Canaanite homeland, the testimony of the faith of Jacob's family still stood firm. Their tombs bore witness to the resurrection and eternal life! Yet, none of these Canaanites sought to inquire into the hope Joseph shared with his father in the face of death. This nation of Canaanites had been "given over" by God to their own hardness of heart and blind refusal to believe in the one true God (Rom. 1:24-25).

Meditate and Pray: Do you find yourself drawn closer to God as you read the Bible every day? Do you find the testimony of the faith of men like Jacob in the Bible to ring true in your heart? Then, do not rest until you have made sure that you, like Jacob, know where you are going when you die. The Apostle Paul tells you, "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Ask God to help you never to be a mere observer of God's people, as the Canaanites were. You are invited to believe, along with Jacob, and thus become a "son of Abraham, the man of faith" (Galatians 3:9).

Wednesday: Read Genesis 50:12-15 & Galatians 4:11**Full, Free, Boundless, Bottomless**

How did the king of Egypt see so clearly the Hand of God in Jacob's and Joseph's life, when most nations reacted with blind unbelief? Pharaoh testified of Joseph (Gen. 41:38) "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God?" What discernment God gave this king!

But now we turn to Jacob's sons. Reunited with their long-lost brother in Egypt, they enjoyed years of kindness and care under Joseph as the Prince of that land. We would expect the family unity evident as they buried their father in Gen. 50:12-14 to continue after their return. We would hope that mutual trust in God and each other would mark the lives of Jacob's sons as they lived with Joseph in Egypt. If pagan kings could see God's Spirit in Joseph, surely his own family would trust in Joseph as the "savior" of God's people!

But no. Once home, old wounds are reopened (Genesis 50:15) as his brothers assume the worst in Joseph's character – alleging that all the kindness which he had shown them was only to impress their father while he was alive. How can they distrust their kind, and gracious brother? Surely here we must recognize *the tendency of even God's people* to distrust God's purpose and God's plan. Like Paul (Galatians 4:11), Joseph must have feared that he had "wasted his efforts" on his brothers! Here they were, again fearing Joseph's rule over them, just as they had done when Joseph was just 17 years old (Gen. 37:8).

Meditate and Pray: Lord, we confess that, because of long years of enslavement to the law and our guilty consciences, we find it easier to believe in *every other religious duty* than the one of first importance – believing in your desire to forgive us. We rob you of your crowning attribute of Grace by viewing your will to forgive in *human terms*. We devalue your forgiveness by making it as narrow and cold as ours. Thank you that your forgiveness is not like ours. It is "full, free, boundless, bottomless, absolute and never-changing" (John Owen Vol. 6, p. 499). Help us to believe that your forgiveness is free and abundant because "your ways are not our ways" (Isaiah 55:7-8). Give us the joy of loving you much, because we have been forgiven much. Amen.

Thursday: Read Genesis 50:15-21**Wideness Like the Sea**

We are not surprised to see Joseph's heart broken by his brothers' distrust. He weeps. Yet, God *is* at work. Once they hear of his tears, his brothers come and throw themselves upon Joseph's mercy. We could have expected that, in hardness of heart, they would have stayed away. That is what faith does when it can do nothing else: it casts itself in all its weakness upon the mercy of the only One who can save. Is their faith all it should be? Sadly, no. They speak of God (verse 17) as "the God of their father Jacob," instead of their own. They offer themselves as slaves (verse 18), unable to believe that Joseph, the Prince of Egypt, would still claim them as brothers. But such imperfect faith is enough to move Joseph in Gen. 50:19-21 to give his brothers reassuring words of comfort: "Don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children" (Gen. 50:21).

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God that *His* desire to abundantly pardon and then bless us is far stronger than *our* desire to experience the joy of our salvation. Let us confess our tendency to doubt our Savior's constancy of affection towards us, often times breaking His heart with our murmuring and ungodly reasoning. To quote a William Still sermon, God often breaks into our homes to declare His ardor towards us: "I love you! I love you! I love you," He says. And our response? "You shouldn't! You shouldn't! You shouldn't!" No wonder some of the greatest hymns plumb the depths of our abiding distrust of God's goodness and grace towards us, urging us to greater assurance - such as Frederick William Faber's words:

*Souls of men, why will ye scatter
Like a crowd of frightened sheep?
Foolish hearts, why will ye wander
From a love so true and deep?*

*Was there ever kinder shepherd
Half so gentle, half so sweet,
As the Savior Who would have us
Come and gather round His feet?*

*There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.*

*There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in Heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given.*

*Pining souls! come nearer Jesus,
And oh! come not doubting thus,
But with faith that trusts more bravely
His huge tenderness for us.*

Friday: Read Ge 50:19-23, Deut 33:16 and 1 Cor 10:4

The Angel who lives in Frail and Feeble Bushes

Joseph persuasively allays his brothers' fears and they lived together as the household of faith for generations, Joseph keeping his word to lovingly care for his reconciled brothers and their families. But was it really *Joseph's* persuasiveness which reassured his brothers of God's gracious plan of salvation for their lives? Can we attribute the profound change in these violent, lying, distrustful sons of Jacob to Joseph's words alone? Surely not! For, in earlier days, not even Joseph's dreams, sent from Heaven, could stop these brothers from trying to kill their brother! No, without the Spirit of God, men may speak with the "tongues of angels" - or with the royal authority of Joseph - and produce no lasting faith on the part of their needy and sin-sick brethren! No, the effectiveness of Joseph's words lies elsewhere.

Moses shows us where. In Deut. 33:16, Moses speaks of the Presence of the very Angel of the Lord who dwelt in the burning bush as abiding with Joseph. This was indeed Joseph's experience even from his youth, and even in his lowest times. Time and again, even Egyptians realized that the "Lord was with Joseph" in a special way (Gen. 39:2; 39:5 and 39:21). Surely it was the Presence of the Lord which explains Joseph's effectiveness with his brothers, the Same Spirit who is promised to everyone who belongs to Christ!

Meditate and Pray: Thank God the Father that just as He sent His Son to accompany His people in the desert of the Old Testament to be their "Rock" of refuge and life-giving water (1 Cor. 10:4), so He sent His Spirit to finish the work of salvation in lost families like Joseph's. God shone the light of salvation into the cold hearts of Jacob's sons by the very same Spirit who claims us to belong to Christ today. Ask the Holy Spirit today to finish the work which God has begun in your life – even as He brought full reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers, erasing the painful memories of all the harm which they had done to their brother – with the words of this hymn (#340) by Isaac Watts:

*Come, dearest Lord, descend and dwell By
faith and love in every breast;
Then shall we know, and taste, and feel
The joys that cannot be expressed.*

*Come, fill our hearts with inward strength,
Make our enlargèd souls possess,*

*Now to the God Whose power can do
More than our thoughts or wishes know,
Be everlasting honors done
By all the church, through Christ His Son*

*And learn the height, and breadth, and length
Of Thine unmeasurable grace.*

