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GOD'S ABUNDANT PROVISION

Genesis 45:16-28

by

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Genesis Lesson 75

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Genesis 45:16-28

It has been rightly observed that heresy is often truth out of balance. A person can take a legitimate biblical truth and emphasize it so much that he ignores other biblical truths that balance it. For example, a popular author and Bible teacher emphasizes the truth that we are saints, but he takes it to the extreme of saying that we are not to see ourselves as sinners, not even as sinners saved by grace, but only as saints who occasionally sin. That's truth out of balance.

Another doctrine that has been pushed out of balance is the truth that God provides abundantly for His people. It is a precious truth, taught throughout the Bible. But certain men have taken that teaching and combined it with greed and materialism so that they teach that wealth is the God-given right of every believer. This has been called the "health and wealth" teaching, because they also teach that it is *always* God's will to heal. It is also referred to as the "name it and claim it" teaching, because they say that all we must do is name what we want and claim it by faith and it's ours. If we lack some material blessing or if we suffer from sickness, it's because we have not claimed it by faith. All you have to do is read your Bible to see that this teaching is in error. Some of God's greatest men of faith were destitute and suffered from sickness (Heb. 11:35-38; Phil. 2:25-27; 2 Tim. 4:20). They all died, as do those who teach this false doctrine.

But the pendulum can swing to the other extreme. Whenever there is a false teaching, there is the danger that we will overreact by neglecting the true doctrine which has been carried to an extreme. For example, when heretics emphasize the humanity of Jesus to the point of denying His deity, there is the danger that we won't teach about His humanity at all, for fear of falling into their error. When false teachers say that health and prosperity are the divine right of

every Christian, there is the danger that we will neglect the comforting truth that God does provide, not just the minimum, but as Paul expresses it, "exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

Genesis 45:16-28 shows us God's abundant provision for His people. God provides for Jacob and his sons far beyond what they had ever dreamed. Jacob had reluctantly sent his sons down to Egypt to buy more grain so that their families could survive the famine. He hoped that his beloved son Benjamin would return safely to him and that his son Simeon would be released by the stern Egyptian governor. He hoped that this man would accept the returned money which his sons brought back from their first trip and the extra money they took, and sell them more grain. That was the limit of his hopes. He would have been a happy man if these things had happened.

So the old man sent his sons off with the sigh, "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved" (43:14). A week went by, and Jacob thought, "They should be in Egypt by today. Two weeks, and he thought, "They should have completed their business and be headed home by now." A few more days went by, and he sent one of his grandsons to watch from the hilltop nearby for any sign of them on the horizon. Nothing yet. And then one day, the boy came running out of breath with the news, "Grandpa, I think they're coming!"

The old man rose to his feet and took his staff in one hand, leaning on his grandson with his other, and hobbled to the dusty road. In the distance, he could see the cloud of dust, but he couldn't see well enough to count how many were in the party. "Can you count them, son? How many are there?" "I can count eleven, Grandpa." "Eleven! Then Benjamin and Simeon must be with them!" "And there are a bunch of carts, Grandpa, and a herd of donkeys besides." Jacob's face fell. "Oh, then it must not be them, because they didn't leave with any carts or with extra donkeys."

But it was them! Benjamin and Simeon were there. They had come

back with all their original money, with not just a little grain, but with carts full of provisions. As they came closer, Jacob could see that each of them was wearing fine new clothes. And then came the most stunning news of all, which Jacob couldn't even believe at first: "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." It shows how

God graciously provides exceeding abundantly
beyond all that we ask or think.

There are four lessons here about how God provides:

1. God provides abundantly for all our needs.

As our loving Heavenly Father, God knows and abundantly provides for all our needs--material, emotional, and spiritual.

A. God provides abundantly for our material needs.

To get the flavor of this story, you need to put yourself into the Canaanite culture of Jacob's day. When you think of a wagon or cart, you probably associate it with poverty. You may imagine some poor peasant farmer taking his produce to market on a rickety old wooden wagon, drawn by a donkey. But that's the wrong image.

In Jacob's day, no one in Canaan had carts. You traveled by loading your donkey or camel and walking beside it. And these weren't just common old carts. These carts were provided by Pharaoh. They were the top of the line, right off the showroom floor. They were probably elaborately carved and painted, fit for a king. For Jacob's sons to arrive back in Canaan with all these carts loaded with provisions would be like driving into a poor Mexican village in a fleet of limousines. Jacob's first thought must have been that his sons had knocked off another village.

But there weren't just all these wagons. There were the

clothes. These guys had left in poor shepherds' clothing. They returned in the latest Egyptian designer apparel. Each brother had at least two changes of clothes, and Benjamin had five, plus 300 pieces of silver (45:22). In addition there were ten male donkeys for Jacob, loaded with the best things of Egypt, plus ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance. Remember, this was in a time of famine! The neighbors' eyes must have bulged out as they saw these brothers pull in.

We do not have a "divine right" to prosperity, as some have falsely taught. But neither do we need to feel guilty about the material things God provides for us. We should hold these things lightly, remembering that they belong to God, not to us. We're just managers for Him, not owners. To whom much is given, much shall be required (Luke 12:48). We need to be careful "not to be conceited or to fix [our] hopes on the uncertainty of riches," and, "to be generous and ready to share," storing up treasure in heaven. But when God blesses us materially we can thankfully enjoy the things He has richly supplied (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

B. God provides abundantly for our emotional needs.

Jacob was emotionally needy. He had lost his favorite son, or so he thought. For over 20 years he had grieved for Joseph. Now he feared that he might lose his other sons, especially Rachel's other son, Benjamin. His beloved Rachel had died in childbirth with Benjamin, leaving a gaping hole in Jacob's life. Jacob and the other sons didn't have a close relationship. A number of things between them over the years had caused tension. He had always suspected that they knew more than they had told about Joseph's disappearance.

But now they came back as different men. God had broken them through their dealings with Joseph. They

had confessed their sin before God and had been reconciled to their brother. And now, in explaining that Joseph was still alive and the ruler of Egypt, they would have to admit their sin to their father. The truth had to come out. And so, although the text does not report it, there must have been a healing of the relationship between Jacob and his formerly treacherous sons. And what emotional healing must have come when Jacob heard and finally believed the news that Joseph was really alive! To see his son once more became his only goal before he died (45:28).

Just as God provided for Jacob's emotional needs, so He provides for us. He wants us to be emotionally whole. He doesn't always do it instantly or when we think He should. He often does it by bringing healing to relationships with family members and others who have hurt us. But even if they never respond, the Lord teaches us how to forgive and to have our emotional needs met in Him. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) describes an emotionally whole person. Fruit takes time to grow, but every believer who walks in the Spirit is promised that fruit of emotional wholeness.

C. God provides abundantly for our spiritual needs.

God's ultimate goal is always spiritual. He always has a spiritual reason behind any material blessings He supplies or withholds. In this case, His chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, who were to be His channel for blessing all nations, were in danger of being polluted by the corrupt Canaanites. God had even prophesied to Abraham that his descendants would become strangers and slaves for 400 years in a land that was not theirs, until the iniquity of the Amorite was complete (15:13-16). So this famine and the move to Egypt--seemingly ordinary circumstances--worked out God's spiritual purposes for His people which He had

spoken of almost 200 years before.

Things don't just "happen" to you. God is shaping you to be His channel to convey His blessings to lost people. To do that, He has provided abundantly in Christ for all of your spiritual needs, even when you're not aware of them. I'm sure that neither Jacob nor his sons could see God's reasons for removing them from Canaan at this time. Israel as a nation in slavery in Egypt for the next 400 years probably often wondered why God was allowing that trial if they were His chosen people. But God knew that they needed it to be shaped into a people for His own possession, a light to the Gentiles. In the same way, God works through trials to mature us spiritually.

God provides abundantly for all our needs--material, emotional, and spiritual. But some of you may be thinking, "That's a nice sermon, to say that God provides abundantly for all my needs. But to be honest, He hasn't done that for me. I'm in need of more income. I'm emotionally needy. Spiritually, I don't feel close to God. So how can you say that God provides abundantly for all our needs?" That leads to a second lesson about His provision:

2. God provides for our needs in His timing, not ours.

The day before Jacob's sons returned from Egypt with their wagons loaded with provisions, with a new walk with God, and with the great news about Joseph, Jacob had been a lonely, grieving, almost destitute old man. He had seen his sons off thinking, "I may never see them again." Jacob wondered if those who remained behind might starve. He was at a point of despair when his sons returned with their good news. The word "revived," used to describe Jacob when he finally accepted the good news about Joseph (45:27), is translated in the Greek Old Testament by a word that is used

elsewhere of stirring up dying embers which have almost been extinguished under the ashes. Jacob's spirit was almost extinguished when his sons came back with their message of hope.

That's how God often works. He lets us come to the point of lowest despair, where we are beginning to wonder, "What happened to God?" Then He comes through. Right at the time Jacob was complaining, "All these things are against me" (42:36), God was working all these things together for good for him.

Shortly after Dallas Seminary was founded in 1924, it came to the brink of bankruptcy. The creditors were going to foreclose at noon on a certain day. That morning the founders of the school met in the president's office to pray that God would provide. One of the men present at that meeting was the well-known Bible teacher, Harry Ironside. When it was his turn to pray, he prayed, "Lord, we know that the cattle on a thousand hills are Thine. Please sell some of them and send us the money."

While they were praying, a Texas rancher strode into the business office and said, "I just sold two carloads of cattle in Fort Worth. I've been trying to make a business deal go through, but it won't work. I feel that God is compelling me to give this money to the seminary. I don't know if you need it or not, but here's the check." The secretary knew how critical the need was, so she took the check and knocked on the door of the president's office. Dr. Chafer took the check and saw that it was for the exact amount of the debt. When he looked at the signature on the check, he recognized the name of the Fort Worth cattleman. Turning to Dr. Ironside, he said, "Harry, God just sold the cattle." (Told by Howard Hendricks, *Elijah* [Moody Press], pp. 19, 20).

Why does God so often take us right to the brink? One reason is that we often don't recognize our total need for Him until we are in such desperate straights. At that point, we

know that if He doesn't come through, we're doomed. So we trust Him more than we do when we've got our own resources to fall back on. The apostle Paul tells the Corinthians of a time when he was burdened excessively, beyond his strength, so that he despaired even of life. Why did God let Paul get so low? Paul explains, "Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:8, 9). God abundantly provides for our every need, but He doesn't necessarily do it just when we think He should. He does it in His timing, often letting us come to the very edge, so that we will learn to trust in Him.

There's a third lesson about God's provision:

3. God provides in ways we would never expect.

For Jacob's sons to return with these fancy wagons, loaded to the hilt with all the finest things of Egypt, and then to be provided for by this foreign king, given the best of his land--it was beyond imagination! But the last thing in the world Jacob expected to hear was that Joseph was alive, let alone that he was the ruler of all Egypt. Never in his wildest dreams did Jacob expect that. But as a loving Father, God delights to surprise His children in ways they never would expect.

The best gifts are usually the unexpected ones, aren't they? At Christmas, I like to wrap the gifts I buy for Marla and the kids in boxes that don't fit the gift, so that they can't guess what it is. Sometimes I add something heavy to the package to throw off their guesses. I write mysterious clues on the label. It's more fun when they are surprised and, hopefully, delighted by the gift.

I'm just an earthly father, and my resources and creativity are limited. But Our Heavenly Father has infinite resources and unlimited creativity. You can't usually guess how God is going to work, because He delights to provide in ways we

never would expect, so that we will revel in His abundant goodness. God provides abundantly, in His timing, in ways we never would expect. The final lesson is,

4. God provides for us through grace, not through merit.

Why did Pharaoh provide so abundantly for Jacob and his eleven sons? It certainly wasn't because they were wonderful guys. If Pharaoh knew anything about them, he knew that they had sold their brother into slavery. Joseph may have protected them by not telling Pharaoh exactly what had happened to him. But even so, Pharaoh knew that these men were a bunch of Hebrews from the sticks. There was nothing in them which commended Pharaoh's favor.

So why did he treat them with such abundant kindness? It was for Joseph's sake. Pharaoh knew and appreciated Joseph, so he poured out these blessings on Joseph's family for his sake. If anything, Jacob should not have been blessed because of his doubting, negative attitude. Jacob's sons should not have been blessed because of the way they had treated their brother and their father. But they were blessed anyway, apart from any merit on their part, because of their relationship with Joseph. God even took their act of sin, selling their own brother into slavery, and made it the means of their deliverance from the famine.

You can see the parallel, can't you? God doesn't bless us because we're such deserving people. He blesses us because of His Son, Jesus. If we're in Him, then we've got connections in high places! He provides blessings for us often when we haven't been trusting Him as we should. He blesses us sometimes even when we haven't obeyed Him as we should. Why? Because of our relationship with Jesus. God even took our sin, which sent Jesus to the cross, and used it as the means of our salvation. Where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more (Rom. 5:20)!

CONCLUSION

A few years ago some tourists from a remote, undeveloped Middle Eastern desert country visited a large American city. One thing that impressed them in their hotel was the seemingly endless supply of good water that flowed from the faucets. Where they came from, water was scarce and expensive, so to be able to turn on a tap and have all you wanted was quite a luxury. When it came time for them to go, they were found with wrenches in their hands, prepared to remove the taps and take them back to the desert with them. They thought that if they could just get those faucets back to the desert, all their water problems would be solved. They didn't realize that faucets are useless unless they are connected to an abundant source of water.

In Jesus Christ, God has provided all that we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Just as Joseph went into the dungeon and was then raised up to Pharaoh's right hand to save his brothers, so Jesus went into the grave itself, but was raised up and seated at the Father's right hand to save you from God's judgment. Jesus is God's greatest gift to you: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). All the promises of God are yes in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). If you'll trust Jesus as Savior and Lord, you'll find that He is the way to God's abundant supply for your every need.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it wrong to enjoy the material things God gives us when there are such great needs in the world?
2. Is it too simplistic to say that a Christian can have deep emotional needs met in Christ apart from psychological counseling?
3. Benjamin received more than his brothers. Must God deal equally with His children? If not, is He unfair? Why not?
4. How do we explain His abundant provision to a person who seemingly didn't receive it when he needed it?

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