

# Bible Challenge 2017

## Week 10: March 5-11

### *Prayers (Psalms 32-34)*

Psalms 32 and 33 flow from one right into the other. They are psalms that celebrate the greatness of God and the majesty of His name. Much of the language of these psalms can be used for the purpose of readings in the worship of God's people — for example, Psalm 33:4-5 — "For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD."

Psalm 34 contains an expanded superscript that once again tells us the background of its writing. This account can be found in 1 Samuel 21:10-15, while David is in Gath. In addition to the familiar language of "Taste and see that the Lord is good," we should also note verse 20, which is quoted in John 19:36 as a prophesy of the crucifixion of Christ where none of the Messiah's bones were broken (recall that the legs of the two insurgents were broken to hasten their deaths).

One of the dangers of the modern trend to give Bibles language that is "gender inclusive" is that passages like this are obscured. In most cases, changing "Brothers" to "Brothers and Sisters" is pretty benign and does not affect the reading or meaning of the text. But when "He" or "She" is changed to "They" in passages like this where the pronoun is used of an indefinite person, you lose that which the passage anticipates — in this case, the death of Christ without having his bones broken (an uncommon event in Roman times).

### *Gospel (Matthew 13-14)*

Matthew 13 contains a series of parables, mostly revolving around the context of the Kingdom of Heaven. Most of these parables are ones that people are fairly familiar with, but two unique things are contained here that are worth highlighting. The first is that Jesus explains two of the parables: the parable of the *Sower and the Seed* and the parable of the *Wheat and the Tares*. Rarely does Jesus explain his parables, but here we have two that he gives an explanation of.

The second item of particular note is that Jesus explains why he teaches in parables. Sadly, this is a lesson from Jesus that is often overlooked by the church. Growing up, for example, I was always taught that Parables are "Earthly stories with heavenly meanings," which is mostly true, but I was also taught that Jesus taught in parables so that everyone could understand the lesson. Yet, according to Jesus, this is exactly opposite of what I was taught. Jesus teaches that he speaks in parables precisely so that people will not understand unless the Holy Spirit reveals it to them. Then he quotes Isaiah 6, saying that the parable is to keep the spiritually blind, blinded and those who are spiritually deaf, deaf. This is also a reminder to us that the parables aren't really for those who are children in the faith and more designed for those who are spiritually mature. Funny how often we miss that in church life.

Chapter 14 contains two of the most familiar miracles worked by Jesus as well as the death of John the Baptist. We have the record of Jesus feeding 5,000 men (while the men are counted, there were also women and children present, so the real number of people Jesus fed is significantly larger), which is both a miracle of creation and a reprise of a miracle performed by Elisha (2 Kings 4:42-44), just to a much greater degree.

These greater repetitions of Elisha's miracles are significant for two reasons. First, next to Moses, Elisha worked more miracles than any prophet in the Old Testament and thus he was seen in Jewish culture as the paradigm for the miracle-working that the Messiah would do. By repeating Elisha's miracles, but with greater power, Jesus was proving himself to be the greater Elisha. In addition, the scriptures speak of the Messiah having a forerunner in Elijah (Micah 3:1; 4:5). Jesus has already taught that John the Baptist was the greater Elijah (Matthew 11:14). As Elijah was the forerunner to Elisha, the parallel between Jesus and Elisha is established. Further, Jesus' second familiar miracle recorded in this passage is his walking on water. Elisha made an axe-head float (2 Kings 6:1-7); Jesus made himself and Peter do the same.

### *Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 1-3)*

Ecclesiastes, or *Koheleth* in Hebrew, takes its title from the author of this book, typically referred to as "the Preacher" (see Ecclesiastes 1:1). In Greek and Hebrew, respectively, this refers to someone with authority to teach in the church — a clergyman in essence. Who is this clergyman? The only reasonable answer is that it is Solomon. He describes himself as a son of David and "King over Israel in Jerusalem." There are only three people who can lay claim to this description: Solomon, Absalom (who usurped his father's throne for a short period), and Rehoboam (who only ruled the United Monarchy for a very short period before his rash actions lost the ten northern tribes that would make up the nation of Israel, rule

from Samaria, in opposition to the nation of Judah, ruled from Jerusalem). Since the last two can hardly lay claim to this description, Solomon is our only logical candidate.

Vanity: This theme is a recurring theme throughout the book. For many, they find the theme off-putting for a book in the Bible, but when you realize that this is an older Solomon who is writing and looking back on his failures in life, it begins to make sense. Here, then, we find practice after practice and idea after idea that Solomon chased after to find meaning in life and all of these things are empty — vain — and can amount to nothing apart from Christ. In many ways, this book contains an apologetic that today's, very jaded, society needs to hear. It seems that we pursue meaning in lots of different areas, but to borrow an old song, "I was lookin' for love in all the wrong places, lookin' for love in too many faces, searchin' their eyes, looking for traces of what I'm dreaming of..." Our problem is that we won't find satisfaction if we search out what we are dreaming of; we will only find satisfaction if we search out what God has established as good.

Chapter 3 contains arguably the most familiar words in this whole book, thanks to the Byrds' popular rendition of it in 1965. It is a reminder that God is sovereign over the events of our lives and that "this too shall pass..." words that I have often spoken to people who are struggling through difficult times in their lives. Yet, verse 14 contains perhaps the heart of this book: "I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor can anything be done to take away from it." Man constantly is trying to make an indelible mark on this world: that honor belongs to God alone.

### *History (Exodus 24-31)*

Exodus 24 begins with a renewal of the covenant and the people's affirmation that "all that the LORD has spoken we will do and we will be obedient." Such is the common self-condemnation of God's people, a trap that we often fall into today. How often do we take vows at church that deep in our heart we have no intention of keeping? There are promises of church membership, promises of submission to the Bible, promises to help families raise their kids in the church if help is needed, and simple promises to pray for those around us that are suffering. Often we, just like these Israelites did, affirm a promise or take a vow with no intention of following through. And we do it because it seems like the right thing to do at the time. Israel gets in trouble with God for this...but so do we.

What follows is a series of instructions around the construction of the Ark, the Tabernacle, and all of the items that will be placed in or used with each. While all of this detail might sometimes make dry reading (unless perhaps you are an artist looking to depict what these things looked like), but these chapters should stand as an ever-present reminder of how seriously God takes worship. These chapters close, actually, just on that point, for God states that our practice of the Sabbath Day is part of our testimony to the world as to how important our God is to us...Ouch, sadly I fear we fall short of making a compelling testimony.

### *Prophets (Isaiah 46-50)*

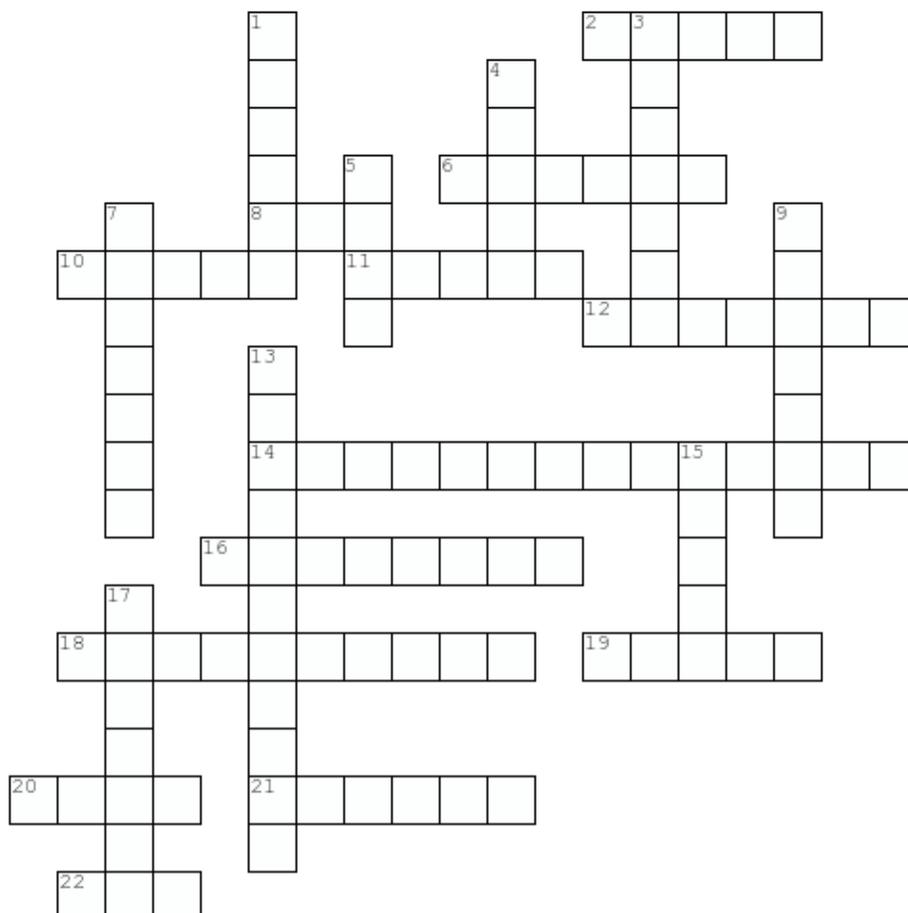
In our reading today, I would suggest that one of the most important verses is found in Isaiah 48:18 — "Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river and your righteousness like the waves of the sea." Amen and Amen. How far short we fall and how we rob ourselves of God's blessings and mercies by choosing disobedience over humble obedience. How well we would do were we to go back to this idea and seek to live this out.

Chapters 49-50 point us to Christ as the suffering servant, but we will delve more deeply into that idea in next week's reading.

### *Epistles (1 Corinthians 7-8)*

Paul continues his instructions in these chapters, about living a life that is holy...working out what it means to glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:20). Here he addresses one's sexuality within marriage and whether one ought to marry in the first place. We also find, in 1 Corinthians 7:15 what is typically referred to as "The Abandonment Clause" in the context of divorce. Simply explained, it refers to a case where one spouse comes to faith within the marriage relationship and the other refuses to remain in a context where their spouse is a Christian. Essentially, this is an application of the teaching of Jesus on adultery. Paul closes with a reference to food ways, applying a principle that we should not use our liberty to be a stumbling block for others.

# Week 10



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## **Across**

- 2.** Seed thrown on this kind of ground represents the Word given to those who fall away due to persecution.
- 6.** It is good to remain this way unless it would lead toward immorality.
- 8.** This is how many cubits long the table of shewbread was.
- 10.** Moses was on the mountain with God renewing the Covenant this many days.
- 11.** If we obeyed the commandments, our peace would be like this.
- 12.** A possible, but very unlikely, author of Ecclesiastes.
- 14.** We are not to be this toward weaker believers.
- 16.** God commands his people to keep these as part of our testimony.
- 18.** Parables reveal what has been hidden since the \_\_\_\_\_ of the world.
- 19.** 'Our Redeemer, the Lord of \_\_\_\_\_ is his name...'
- 20.** 'Come, children, listen to me; I will teach you the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord.'
- 21.** This Old Testament prophet was known as a miracle-worker.
- 22.** The Kingdom of Heaven is like this, thrown into the sea.

## **Down**

- 1.** This is like striving after the wind.
- 3.** One of the craftsmen in charge making items for the Tabernacle.
- 4.** What kind of oil was used for the lamps in the Tabernacle?
- 5.** 'By the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord the heavens were made.'
- 7.** This is what we can add to the work that God has done.
- 9.** The author of Ecclesiastes.
- 13.** The Kingdom of Heaven is like a \_\_\_\_\_ (2 words).
- 15.** The psalmist prophesies that the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Messiah will not be broken.
- 17.** 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you \_\_\_\_\_.'