

Bible Challenge 2017

Week 11: March 12-18

Prayers (Psalms 35-37)

We continue in Psalm 35 with words of David crying out to God for deliverance from his enemies. Notice a theme, though, that is of great importance. Though David does not see God's hand at work, he does not lose faith in God or in God's promises. How often we think that God ought to work on our timetables and we don't trust him to work in his own time and manner. How little things have changed from Adam and Eve; we still like to play at being gods when we are not.

Psalm 36 provides an interesting textual difficulty. Verse 1 reads: "Rebellion speaks to the wicked in the midst of *my* heart." Yet, the ESV and the NASB render the phrase, "*his* heart." There are different textual traditions and several variations that scholars debate over to determine which of the variations might be more accurate and here we see not only a point of difference, but a difference that changes the meaning of the text. Even more interesting, the difference in translation is simply a result of two letters...the suffix *y* would mean "my heart" and the suffix *w* would mean "his heart." What is even more curious is in ancient Hebrew, the *y* and the *w* were the same letter.

Should this shake us to the very core of our being? Certainly not. Should we worry about whether we can trust our Bibles to really be without error? No. So, which should we prefer? My preference is the traditional Hebrew reading, which is "my heart." Others would suggest that since the last part of the verse refers to "his eyes," that the "his heart" makes more sense contextually.

What I like about the traditional Hebrew rendering is that even though it looks forward to the sin of the people around David (the "he"), the "my heart" is a reminder that David himself recognizes his own sin also. When trials come, we can tend to want to blame everyone else...but we are sinners indeed.

A final note about our reading. As we read Psalm 37, ask yourself, does verse 9-11 remind you a bit of Matthew 5:5? I think that it ought to. The meek are the ones who wait on the command of their God...and it is the meek that shall inherit the earth.

Gospel (Matthew 15)

Often, Matthew tends to group together accounts that have similar themes. In this case, it becomes very apparent as we see several instances where Jesus addresses the hypocritical and false purity of the Jewish leaders. The theme then is that what makes us pure or impure is the nature of our heart with respect to God.

Thus, we don't merit favor from God because we give to the church. We don't earn favor by obeying all of the food rituals and we don't earn favor with God because of our nationality (the account of the Canaanite woman). We also do not become defiled by disease. It is all about our relationship to God through the person of Jesus Christ.

Finally, Jesus performs a second miraculous feeding, a reminder of his hospitality, power, and grace. But notice the context of both feedings is that Jesus is teaching the Word. Too many churches today think that they are doing God's work by just going out and providing food to the hungry and leaving it at that. As important as food is, any group can feed the poor. But as Christians, we have the living water to offer as well...the water of life which lasts eternally. This, Jesus always offers along with the physical food.

Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 4-6)

In chapters 4-6, Solomon is transitioning from his own follies to the follies of the philosophers and wise men of his day. At the end of chapter 3, he begins the first of six arguments that will be made in the book: why do the wicked appear to prosper and are we different from the animals? In chapter 4, we see the remaining 4 arguments: Why are the oppressed without comfort?, why does the sluggard have success and the hard worker labor without success?, why is there loneliness?, and why is honor and popularity fleeting?

In chapter 5 we see two answers to these questions. First, we are merely human and do not understand things fully and cannot understand things as God does. Second, even during a time of loss, one

must fear God. Finally, Solomon argues that we should be satisfied with God's plan for us because there will always be people over us and you cannot achieve things without the power of God.

What follows is a series of general reflections about the world. He talks about the nature of prosperity, that earthly wisdom does not bring satisfaction, and that no matter how hard we try, we cannot see the big picture as God sees it.

History (Exodus 31-39)

We now move into the episode around the golden calf. As inconceivable as it may seem, the Israelites began to panic when Moses spent "too long" on the mountain with God. Thus, they fell into idolatry. As bizarre an event as this may seem to us, it is not as far fetched as many of us would like to think. For example, there are sins in our lives that have often plagued us for a season. These sins, we will repent of and hate, but then over time, when things become "comfortable again," we fall back into them. This is what the Israelites were doing, going back to the vomit of their days in Egypt (2 Peter 2:22). In addition, we tend to be impetuous and don't like to wait either on God's timing or on the timing of our spiritual leaders who are spending time in prayer and worship. Indeed, when we begrudge someone time to pray and meditate on God's word, we are acting much like these Israelites.

Probably the most significant passage in our reading from the histories this week is found in Exodus 34, where God speaks about his own character. In a sense, God gives a mini-sermon on his name to Moses. He says, "Yahweh, Yahweh, a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in covenant faithfulness for thousands. Forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, but who by no means will clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation." Paul picks up on this idea, along with what is found in Exodus 33:19 when he talks about God's election in Romans 9.

What follows, then, is a series of offerings taken for the making of items in the Tabernacle. The people, humbled by God's deliverance, gave generously even to the point where Moses had to tell them to stop. Then the items for the Tabernacle were made.

Prophecy (Isaiah 51-55)

Isaiah 53 is arguably the most important chapter in the book of Isaiah. Arguably, it is one of the most important chapters in the whole of the Old Testament. Here, we find, about 700 years before the birth of Christ, the Gospel laid out in detail. Yet, those Jewish authorities that reject Jesus were still blind to it.

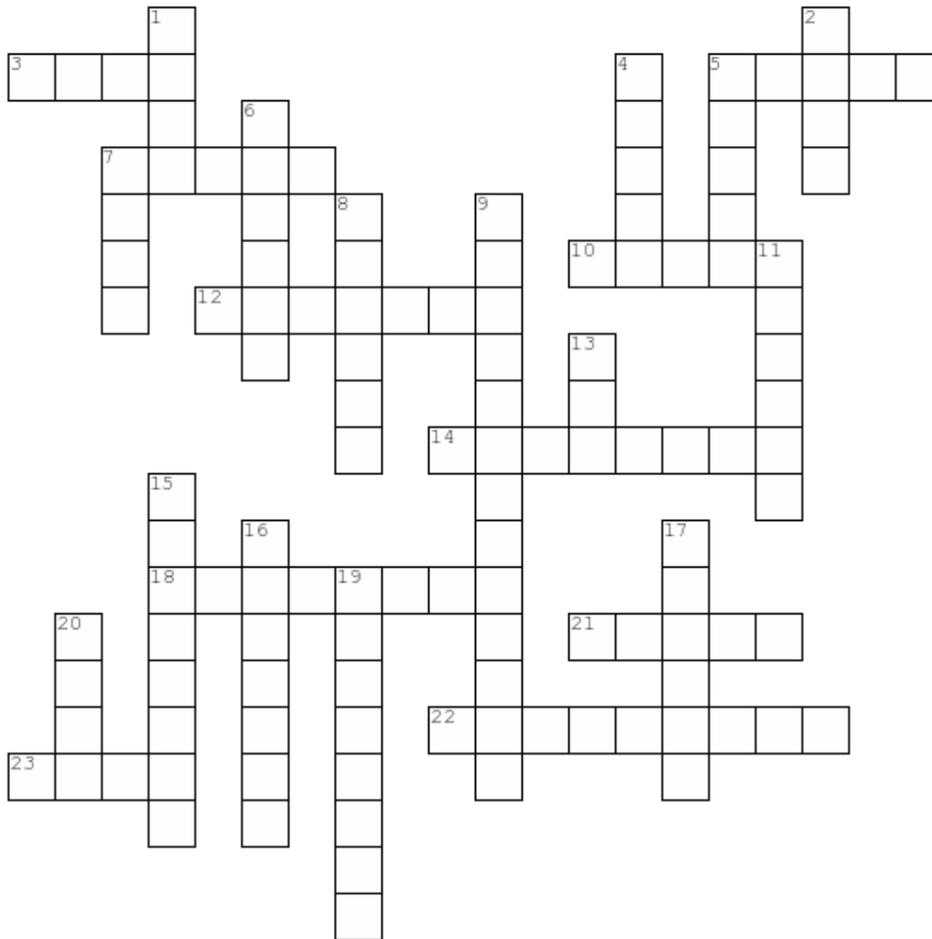
What we find here is a clear promise of substitutionary atonement made by the savior to redeem his people from their sins. There is even prophetic writing here as to the people with whom the Messiah will be executed (verse 9) and that he would be buried in the unused grave of a rich man. And note, while some people would teach that Jesus died for all people without exception and that it is simply up to us to accept that gift of salvation...that is not what the text says. Verse 10 reads, "he bore the sin of many..." — not all. This ties back to Paul and Moses' teaching on God's election.

Epistles (1 Corinthians 9-11)

In chapter 9, Paul continues with the language of his freedom...noting that we find confirmation here not only that Peter and some other Apostles were married (so much for an unmarried priesthood), but also that Peter took his wife with him when he traveled for ministry (1 Corinthians 9:5).

Chapters 10 and 11, then transition to talking about the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Table. The emphasis here is on the symbolic and covenantal nature of these practices...we must take them seriously (because God does) but we must also be clear in our mind that the sacrament itself has no power in the actual elements, only in the faith that the believer has when he comes to the table or to the waters of baptism (or brings his child to those waters).

Week 11



Created with TheTeachersCorner.net [Crossword Puzzle Generator](http://TheTeachersCorner.net)

Across

3. This was not allowed to be made on the Sabbath day.
5. 'All we like _____ have gone astray...'
7. 'It was the will of the Lord to _____ him.'
10. You ought not have this kind of guide.
12. One of the craftsmen working on the Tabernacle crafts.
14. Be satisfied with this for your life, Solomon says. (2 words)
18. God's _____ is what makes his people distinct from the nations.
21. The traditional Hebrew reading is 'my _____'.
22. Do not dishonor your parents for the sake of this.
23. Jesus had withdrawn to this gentile region when he met the Canaanite woman.

Down

1. One of Solomon's answers to questions is that despite loss we must _____ God.
2. This group of people shall inherit the land.
4. God told the people, because of their sin, just this would go with them.
5. How many loaves did Jesus multiply in the feeding of the 4000?
6. The twelve stones in the High Priest's breastplate were named after the sons of _____.
7. The people made a golden one of these at Mount Sinai and worshipped it.
8. The Ark of the covenant was made out of this kind of wood.
9. This was inscribed in the High Priest's headdress. (4 words)
11. You cannot both drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of _____.
13. 'Then my soul will rejoice in the Lord and I will rejoice in _____ salvation.
15. In the crossing of the Red Sea, the people were _____ into Moses.
16. '_____ yourself in the Lord...'
17. This cannot bring satisfaction.
19. 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious' is used by Paul to teach which doctrine?
20. Jesus bore the sins of _____.