

Bible Challenge 2017

Week 12: March 19-25

Prayers (Psalm 38-41)

As we read today, we are completing "Book 1" of the Psalms. The psalms are broken up into 5 books...or arguably, 5 scrolls, due to its length. Thus, Psalm 42 begins the second book of the Psalms, though we won't start this book of Psalms until mid-April. Next week we will take a break from the psalms and look at some of the poetic literature found in the historical books.

Psalm 39 is addressed to Jeduthun, whose sons were assigned by David to provide music for the Temple (1 Chronicles 25:1). Here, we see David specifically contributing toward their work. In many ways, though, this is a psalm that is rather dark and reflects a humbled and defeated David...yet, how appropriate that is for the worship of a sinful people.

One of the great things about the psalms is that it addresses every emotion and season of life known to man. Calvin even called it an "anatomy of the human soul." We tend to like to only focus on happy thoughts; God knows better, and has provided us with songs and prayers to guide us through dark and depressing times — even for times in which we are utterly broken.

Gospel (Matthew 16)

As the Apostle Paul would write, "the Jews demand signs" (1 Corinthians 1:22), yet, how often they ignore the signs. Jesus condemns them for being unwilling to pay attention to the signs all around them (miracles that he worked) and judges that the only sign they will receive is the sign of Jonah.

What is the sign of Jonah? Jonah was placed in the belly of a great fish for three days — given over to death were it not for a divine work of preservation that returned him (after his initial repentance) to the land of the living (literally!). Similarly Jesus would give the Jewish leaders the greatest sign of all...he would be buried in the 'belly' of a rock tomb and would rise again from the dead on the third day. Three days and three days — miracles both.

The most important passage in Matthew 16, though, is Christ's institution of the church. We find Jesus asking the Apostles who the people thought he was. After several answers, Jesus asked them who *they* thought he was. Peter speaks first making the claim that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah. And it is upon this testimony that Jesus says he will build his church. There is a bit of a play on words here between Peter (*Petros*) and Rock (*Petra*) that people sometimes get wrong. Peter's name refers to a small rock, the Rock on which the church is built refers to a large rock — so the church is not built on Peter (as the Romanists would claim), but it is built on the rock of Peter's testimony, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

We are also told that when it comes to the church, the Gates of Hell cannot stand against it. Gates are fortifications, not offensive items. Thus this is not a picture of the church withstanding the attacks of hell, but of the church attacking the strongholds of hell with the aim of tearing them down in our culture and communities.

The last verse in Matthew 16 sometimes causes a bit of a stir. How can it be that there will be some present with Jesus who will still be alive when they see Jesus coming in his kingdom? Of course, we must remember that the kingdom of God is the church...present already in part but fulfilled in the second coming.

Given the death of the Apostles, we know that this cannot be a reference to Jesus' second coming, so how should we understand this phrase? There are three views that seem to answer this question in a way consistent with Scripture.

The first view is that this is a reference to the transfiguration which takes place in the following chapter. In that context, the "some here" refers to Peter, James, and John, who witnessed the glory of Jesus. The second view is that this statement refers to Pentecost, thus the "some" refers to all but Judas, who hung himself prior to the Pentecost event. The third view is that it is a reference to John's experience at Patmos witnessing the Revelation of God. Depending on how you date the writing of Revelation, that means the "some" most likely referred to John plus some unnamed disciples (not Apostles) who would have remained faithful alongside of John. If pressed, I would lean toward the second of the three views, but all three can be held without abusing the text.

Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7-9)

Much of what you will find in these three chapters will seem like you are reading the book of Proverbs — mostly short and pithy statements that sum up Solomon's view of life as he looks back on his life as an older man. If you wish to sum up this section of the book, probably 7:13 is as good as any: "Consider the work of God: Who can make straight what he has made crooked?" The answer? Only God can. It is a futile thing to fight against God. He always wins and in the end, you will be worse for the wear. Thus, we might be tempted to complain when the wicked seem to have an easy life, in 8:12, Solomon reminds us as well that God wins in the end and judgment will be the end of the wicked. So fear God and obey his commandments.

History (Exodus 40 & Numbers 1-7)

As Exodus comes to a close, we have the Tabernacle completed, the people coming to worship and the Glory of God descending in the form of a cloud into the Holy of Holies. And then, preparations to leave Sinai.

Numbers covers the exit of the people from the foot of Sinai and the 40 years of travel in the desert before they prepare to enter the Promised Land. Though it is often a book that is dreaded due to its many lists of names, the book of Numbers also contains some very rich stories as well as prophecies of the coming Christ. As a pastor, it is also a favorite book because when I am tempted to become discouraged due to complaining and disagreements in the life of the church, I remind myself that Moses faced the same things and that perhaps the discouragement that I occasionally feel is meant to give me just a little taste of what Moses must have felt as he watched friends and even relatives face the wrath of God.

The other important thing that the book of Numbers teaches us is about patience. Due to the people's sin they were not permitted to enter the Promised Land. In fact, Caleb and Joshua were the only two people who came through the Red Sea who were permitted to enter the land. God does not rush his purposes...ever. Today, we want things to happen right away. We have microwaves, instant oatmeal, and answers to everyday questions with just a question posed to Siri, Alexa, or Google, without ever having to open a book. God is not concerned so much with instant; instead, he is concerned with lasting maturity...and that takes time.

So, why all of the names? When God makes covenants, he does not make them with generic groups of people. Instead, he makes them with individuals (though through representatives — namely, through a Covenant Mediator). Thus, these lists of names are given at different times in the Bible to identify households who are part of the covenant. In fact, this is the reason not only for lists of names in Numbers, but it is the reason we have lists of names in our Church membership rolls. We identify those who have committed to the covenant here in our local church and in turn, those who have so identified themselves, are committing to submit to God's law and to God's rule lest they face judgment for taking the covenant lightly.

So, Numbers begins with names...lots of them. And it is not until we get to the end of chapter 3 before we shift from names to rules connected to being in the covenant community. Thus, there is an offering to redeem the firstborn son from priestly service (the Levites will take on this role), instructions given to certain members of the priesthood, and laws for cleanliness. Chapter 6 is likely the most important of the chapters of this week's reading. For here we are introduced to the Nazirite vows (Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist are notable Nazirites from birth) as well as the priestly blessing — often called the "Aaronic Blessing" because it was given to Aaron.

Chapter 7 sometimes confuses people as the various tribal leaders are brought forward to give their offerings at the consecration of the Tabernacle. Each offering is identical, but the ordering of the names is odd. Reuben, for example, is firstborn, but is listed fourth in the list (Reuben lost his birthright, see 1 Chronicles 5:1 and Genesis 35:22) and Levi is not listed (their inheritance is not in the land, but God is their inheritance — which is the same for Christians, which is why we are called a "priesthood" of all believers, see Joshua 18:7 and 1 Peter 2:9). Joseph is not listed, but his two sons are each listed (they assumed Reuben's role of firstborn and the double-inheritance that was due to the position (see Genesis 48:5). My design in pointing this out is to show the importance of connecting the dots between the books of the Bible and in our theology. The more intentionally we search out connections, the better we will understand the design of God in his Word and for us as his church today.

Prophecy (Isaiah 56-60)

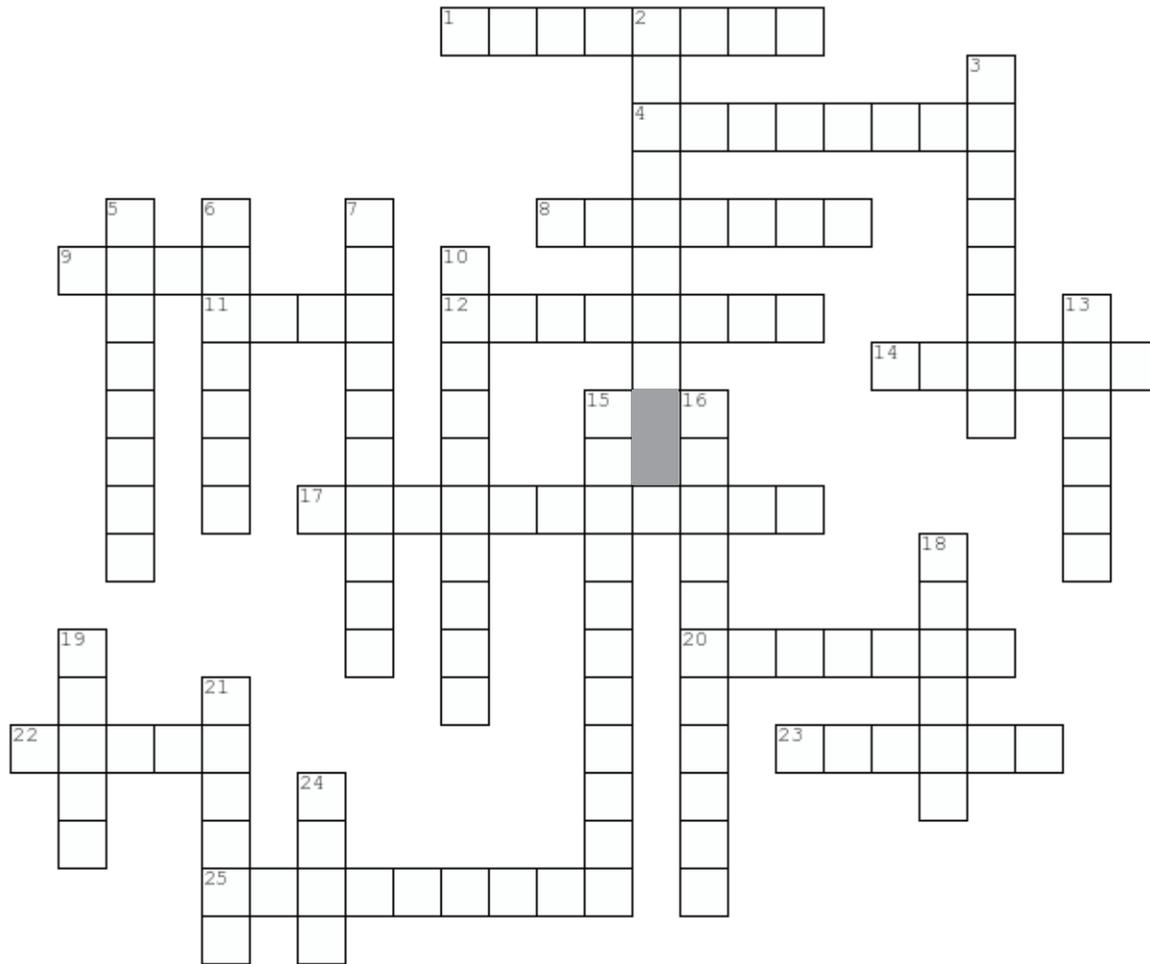
While there is much in these passages, particularly with respect to the foolishness of Idolatry when instead we can come before the almighty God of heaven for worship, the most important passage of our reading is found in Isaiah 58. Here there are two concepts that should inform our life and worship individually and as a church.

The first is contained in verses 6-12, and speaks of the fast that God demands from us. His point is that a fast is not just about food, but it is about seeking justice. The second passage that follows is found in verses 13-14 and that in the context of counting God's Sabbath to be a delight. Too often, when Christians speak of the Sabbath, it is only about rules. But God says, rejoice in it and consider it the refreshment that it is meant to be. What rule should we follow then? Pursue God on the Sabbath and not your own ends and God will show you what it really means to delight in Him. Further, if you are not feeling your delight in Him, Isaiah is also telling you that the remedy lies not in fancier surroundings, more wealth, or more exciting worship settings. It lies in the Sabbath. Set aside your own ends and seek the things of God on this one day in seven and see what God does. Take him at his word; you will not regret it.

Epistles (1 Corinthians 12-14)

As we wrap up our week, we do so with one major concept: The church is one body. We are then to live with love toward one another, work together with our many gifts to the glory of Christ, and approach all of church life in an orderly and Biblical way. And, for those who would lean toward experientialism, chapter 14 is why we reject the pentecostal practice of "tongues" and experiential worship.

Week 12



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

Across

1. Some of the people thought that Jesus was this Old Testament figure.
4. Samson was one of these from birth.
8. The kind of Sabbath that God desires focuses on this.
9. This is Paul's 'more excellent way.'
11. This son of Jacob did not receive an inheritance in the land.
12. 'A _____ will come to Zion...'
14. This son of Jacob lost his rights as firstborn.
17. Tongues are a sign for whom?
20. The 'Priestly Blessing' is also known as the '_____ Blessing.'
22. This day is better than the day of your birth.
23. The church is the body of whom?
25. God is not a God of _____ but of peace.

Down

2. One of the sons of Joseph.
3. This man's sons were assigned by David to provide music for the Temple worship.
5. God dwells with people who have this kind of spirit.
6. We are to call the Sabbath a _____ if we will delight in the Lord.
7. When gathering as a church, all things are to be for this. (2 words)
10. This will pass away.
13. Peter's name in Greek, meaning 'little rock.'
15. These are the words that close out Book 1 of the Psalms (3 words).
16. God promises that he will give his redeemed this kind of name.
18. There are many gifts, but they come from one _____.
19. There is no work, thought, knowledge, or wisdom here.
21. The gates of Hell will not prevail against the _____.
24. We should obey his law because his role has been ordained by God.