

Bible Challenge 2017

Week 17: April 23-29

Poetry (Psalm 49-51)

Psalm 49 is the last of the psalms of the Sons of Korah for a little bit (there will be another series of such psalms later in the text. Yet, this psalm very much encapsulates the experience of the Sons of Korah. It is a psalm of deliverance and at its heart, in verse 15, the psalmist cries out that God will ransom his soul and not abandon him to the power of Sheol, or death. Given that the family of Korah was swallowed up in the ground in his rebellion, this testimony is indeed quite significant.

Psalm 50 is a psalm of Asaph. Twelve psalms in are written by Asaph, the son of Berechiah (1 Chronicles 15:17). He was a singer who also played the cymbals (1 Chronicles 15:19) and who served as a director of singers in the Temple (Nehemiah 12:46). He was also given the distinct privilege of ministering before the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:37). We are also told that Asaph and his sons "prophesied" while playing music under the direction of the king (1 Chronicles 25:1-2). This may seem a bit odd as Asaph and his sons were called as priests and not necessarily as prophets. While there are examples of people fulfilling both roles for a season, it should also be noted that sometimes what is called "prophesying" in the Bible is little more than preaching God's word, an act that one would come to expect from a Levite.

That said, notice the language of the psalm — largely it is God calling his people to task for their sins. Moreover, there is a legal feel to the language. For example, in verse 7, God is calling the people to stand in the dock while God testifies against them. This "covenantal lawsuit" language is stylistically very similar to that of the prophets.

Psalm 51 is one of the most profound psalms when it comes to addressing personal sin. It, of course, is David's prayer of repentance before the Lord after his sin with Bathsheba. It is heart-felt and an excellent model for us today when it comes to repenting before the Lord. It begins by repenting before God alone. While our sins are often against other men or women, all of our sin is first and foremost a sin against God on High. David acknowledges his guilt and pleads that God restore his heart and spirit. And David does not stop there, but David also reminds us in his prayer that when God restores us, we are to express our gratitude of his restoration by sharing the truth of the things of God with others that all may worship God. It is my conviction that the more we recognize the greatness of our sin the more we will recognize the greatness of God's redemption...and tell others about it!

Gospel (Matthew 23-24)

Matthew 23 contains a series of "woes." In the Hebrew culture, "woe" is distinguished from a curse in that while a curse is irrevocable, a woe is a cry for repentance. Thus, when Jesus pronounces these seven "woes" he is basically laying down the law with these Pharisees, telling them to repent or else. It is meant as a strict exhortation.

What follows is Jesus highlighting why the Pharisees as ones worthy of the "woe" language they receive due to their legalism. In principle, the pharisees have established "purity rules" but by doing so, lost grace altogether from their system of thought.

Chapter 24 begins what is best known as Jesus' "Olivet Discourse." This is a sermon that Jesus preaches that is largely focused on the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD but that also contains overtones that anticipate his second-coming. Space does not permit an in-depth exploration of this sermon from Jesus, books have been written on Jesus' words. Let it suffice to say that it is prophetic in nature (which means that Jesus employs a lot of figurative language) and that it has as its primary theme: be ready because you don't know when God's judgment will be upon you (or upon the land in which you live).

Wisdom (Job 10-12)

In our reading today, we find ourselves with the final portion of Job's defense against Bildad, the introduction of Zophar's argument and the beginning of Job's defense against Zophar.

One of the profound statements that Job makes in found in 10:12-15. Job proclaims that while God has given him life, if he sins, God will not forgive him and that there is nothing he can do to acquit himself. While that might sound rather depressing to us, it is true. There is nothing we can do to earn God's forgiveness. How often we try, though. We say things like, "God, if you forgive me this time, then I will always do 'x'." And sometimes we even think that God believes our foolishness.

We cannot earn God's favor, no matter how hard we try and we will never totally erase sin from our lives...again, no matter how hard we try. That's why the Gospel is good news, though. Because Jesus' Gospel is not about law but it is about grace. Does that mean we live however we want? No. It means that we try and live a life that is pleasing to God precisely because he has already forgiven us in the work of Christ on the cross. As Job says, we can't earn it...praise God that he chooses to give it in grace through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ.

History (Joshua 8-15)

The first part of our reading in Joshua can be summed up in one sentence: God's people are conquering the Promised Land either destroying or subjugating the people that stand in their way, with God leading the battle. There are many well-known accounts in this text, for example that of the sun being made to stand still and the treaty made with the deceptive people of Gibeon.

The latter part of the reading begins the process of allotting the land between the tribes. Here there begins a great deal of overlap with the opening chapter of Judges (Judges begins with a summary of Joshua, in essence). Don't get bogged down in the boundary lines, but note the importance that is assigned to tribal inheritance and the establishment of boundary lines, which is an indication of private property in the eyes of God.

Prophecy (Jeremiah 16-20)

One of the verses I quote most frequently comes from our reading today: Jeremiah 17:9 — "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?" How true this is. When we follow our passions and let the desires of our heart rule the day, trouble and sin is all we ever find. How important it is to govern our hearts with our reasonable minds. Yet, how common it is that people in our society get that reversed — what you feel tends to trump what you think and how backwards that is.

I had a conversation recently with a friend who attends a pentecostal church but who is really beginning to see the shallowness and vanity of that world. Yet, he remains in the pentecostal church despite its bad teachings and ideas. This I do not understand. As someone who left behind a denomination because it was in theological error, I think I can understand the relational draw to remain in a bad church because of the friends and fellowship you have there. At the same time, theological precision is important to me (and I think it should be important to all of us).

I will make one more note on this reading, dealing with the imagery of sanctification found in Jeremiah 18. Once again we see the language of the potter and his clay. What we see is God (as the potter) shaping, crushing, reshaping, re-crushing, and finally reshaping again the clay into a suitable vessel. Often we apply this to our personal lives, recognizing the way that God does repeatedly reshape us in the process of sanctification.

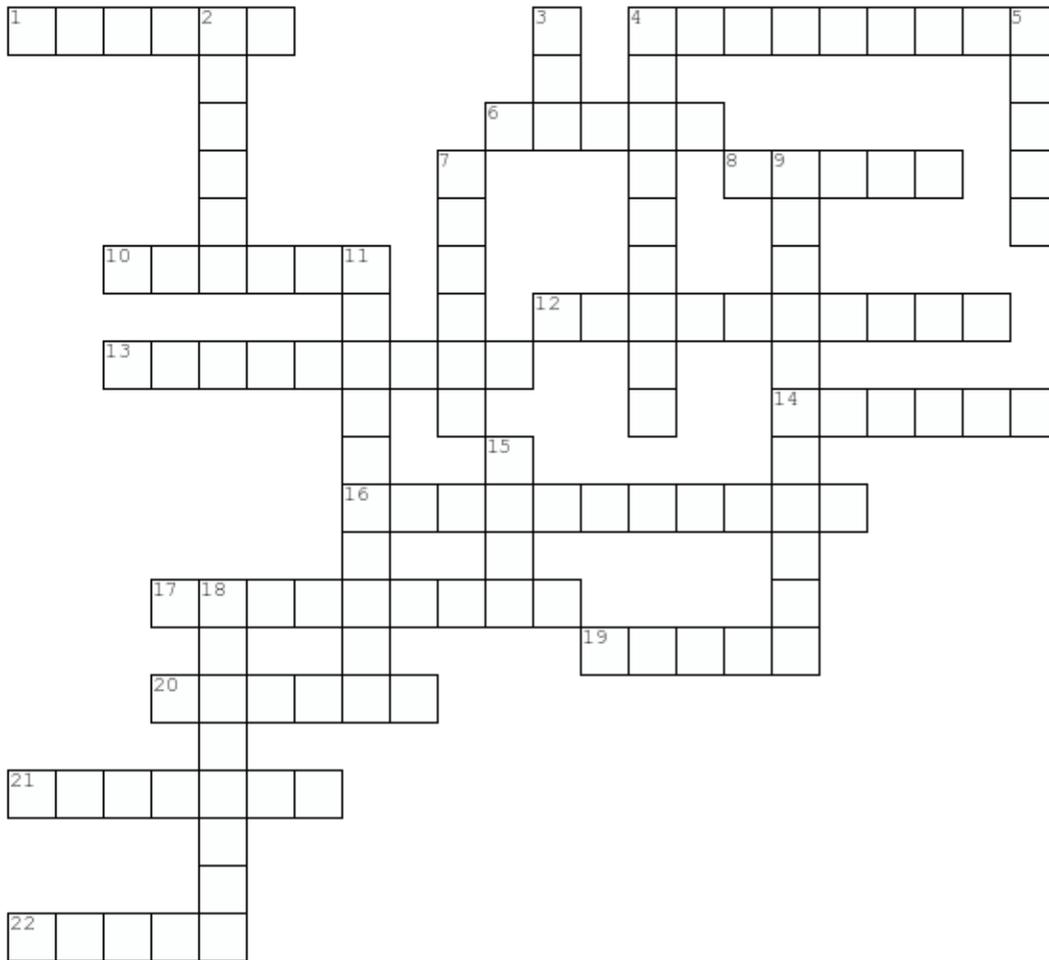
Yet, the passage, in context is dealing with the corporate sanctification of the people. Sometimes people struggle with the notion of corporate sanctification, yet Christ sanctifies his church...he does this as individuals but he also does this as a larger body, conforming the church into a clearer witness to the culture. Such is the tone of the letters to the various churches in Revelation 2-3.

Epistles (2 Corinthians 8-10)

As we wrap up our reading for the week, we begin with some practical advice on generous giving and the care of those who bring the Gospel. Then, as we arrive in chapter 10, Paul reminds the Corinthian church of his divine calling as an Apostle (recalling that the Corinthians were enamored by the eloquence of some false teachers that had come to town — how little things change!).

If I quote from Jeremiah 17:9 a great deal, I also suppose that I quote from 2 Corinthians 10:4-6 a great deal. Here, we find part of the task of the church — our Mission statement as a church. We are to tear down the strongholds of the devil in our communities. How do we do this? We do this by tearing down every lofty opinion raised up against the knowledge of God. How we are inundated with Secular Humanism in our world; we have much work yet to do.

Week 17



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

Across

1. The account of the sun standing still for Jacob is also recorded in the book of _____.
4. These are the rulers of Jerusalem that could not be cast out.
6. This body part is wicked.
8. A director of Music under David.
10. This prophet confronted David regarding his sin with Bathsheba.
12. A stupid man will get understanding when this animal's colt is born a man (2 words).
13. Paul was taking up an offering for Christians in this city.
14. The people from this region tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them.
16. Jesus says that he will appear after this.
17. 'Whoever sows _____ will also not reap much.
19. Paul lifts up this man as an example of character.
20. Jeremiah describes God as having this profession.
21. When we are forgiven we should teach others to do this.
22. How old was Caleb when Moses sent him to spy on the land.

Down

2. Nothing I do can _____ me of my sin.
3. This word is similar to 'cursed' but leaves hope for repentance.
4. This discourse of Jesus is largely about the fall of this city under God's judgment.
5. The Sons of Korah proclaim that God will ransom their souls from this place.
7. Chapter 24 of Matthew begins what is called the _____ discourse.
9. Our weapons destroy the enemy's _____.
11. Zophar is described as this kind of person.
15. From this mountain the judgments of God were supposed to be read before the people.
18. Psalm 50 is written in the style of this kind of literature.