

Bible Challenge 2017

Week 18: April 30-May 6

Prayers (Psalm 52-55)

We find ourselves once again amongst the Psalms of David, the first of which we once again have a historical marker that directs us to its context. This time the context is found in 1 Samuel 22:9, where Doeg reports to Saul that David had found refuge in the Tabernacle and with the house of Ahimelech, eating (at that time) of the shewbread and taking Goliath's sword. Saul would subsequently execute Ahimelech's family for their actions. Thus, Psalm 52 is a psalm about betrayal, a reminder that David, too, knew the challenges that come from being betrayed by one close to you.

Psalm 53 is one that is familiar to us for several reasons. The first of which is that it is a near quote of Psalm 14, which we have already looked at. This psalm also begins with the famous words: "The *fool* declares in his heart that there is no God..." It stands as God's eternal testimony against atheism and agnosticism. Why is he a fool? The person that rejects God is a fool because the invisible attributes of God can be plainly seen in the creation around us...so much so that the unbeliever is without excuse (Romans 1:19-20). When St. Anselm developed his famous "Ontological Argument" for the logical necessity of God's existence, he did so to defend these words of scripture. Curiously, Gaunilo of Marmoutiers, the first monk to challenge Anselm, entitled his critique of Anselm's view, "In Defense of the Fool."

Psalm 53 is also well known because of the language of verses 1-3 are quoted in part by the Apostle Paul in Romans 3:10-12. As we move to Psalm 54, we again are given historical context; this time in 1 Samuel 23:19 and 26:1. And Psalm 55 is a cry for mercy and preservation from the wicked ones in this fallen world.

Gospel (Matthew 25)

In this chapter, we see Jesus close his Olivet Discourse with a parable of the end times (servants awaiting the return of their King with the warning that we must be ready and watchful for Christ's return. Similarly, the parable of the Talents poses the same challenge — use your gifts and resources to God's glory as a Christian... And finally Jesus closes with a warning about sheep and goats and their separation unto judgment. The bottom line? Those who are truly believe demonstrate that by faithfully watching for Christ's return and they will faithfully use their gifts in the work of the kingdom, caring for the poor and disenfranchised with an aim toward sharing the Gospel with them.

Wisdom (Job 13-15)

Once again, we find ourselves beginning with Job's response to his friend (this time, Zophar) before we see Eliphaz begin his second oration. Each of these three friends will speak in turn and there are three cycles of this kind of comment and response (though the third cycle is interrupted by Elihu).

Some of the language, though, should sound quite familiar to you. For example, Job says to his three "counselors": "As for you, you whitewash with lies; worthless physician are you all..." (13:4). This, of course, is the language Jesus borrows when he calls the Pharisees "whitewashed sepulchers" (Matthew 23:27). And, indeed, how little the methods of the wicked change — how they seek to make their evil look clean and inviting with lies. Sadly, how often God's people also fall for that tactic.

One of the favorite statements of Job, though, is found in 13:15 — "Though he slay me, I will hope in him." It is a statement of confidence that he will indeed see God and be vindicated in his life. What we often fail to do, is to read the rest of the verse. Job continues: "I will yet argue my ways to his face." Job is demanding to be vindicated and he has faith that this will either happen in his life or in his death because God is a just God. We should remember, that this statement of Job is not like the statement of Daniel's three friends who were put into the fires when they promised never to worship the king even if the king killed them. Job is demanding a hearing before God for what he has endured and will not be silent until he gets what he demands (well, that is what he is stating here...what happens when

God shows up to give Job that hearing is a different matter entirely.

Finally, we see Eliphaz, the fatalistic friend, speak again, insisting that Job is simply getting what Job deserves for sin. And recognize that there is truth in that statement even if that truth is not found in the way that Eliphaz presents it. "None of us are good, no not one!" says David. What we deserve is death. What God gives us is life. What Job deserves (what we all deserve!) is far worse than what Job is getting. But in grace, God gives us life and for that we should be thankful.

History (Joshua 16-23)

We arrive at the point of Joshua's book that many people get overwhelmed by. Here there is a division of and settling into the land. Hills and rivers and pasturelands and trees are given out and marked by tribes and by tribal leaders, one after the other. If you are fascinated with geography or archaeology, these are chapters for you. If you are not so much interested in these areas, this is a section that you might be tempted to skim through, and if so, you will miss some important principles.

The first principle is that the people's inheritance is tied to the land. It is considered eternal in nature and thus its divisions are recorded for us in Sacred Writ. The second principle is that the people saw the importance of having their names identified as part of the covenant community. In a sense, this is meant to be a prequel to the Lamb's Book of Life. This is also the basis for the Christian church having membership roles — God's people publicly self-identifying as part of the covenant community and thus both recipients of the covenant blessings and submissive to the covenant requirements.

The third principle, which is the most important of all, can be found in 21:43-45. All of these lists were meant to be perpetual reminders of God's faithfulness. God promised the land to Abraham. Here, God's promise is being fulfilled in Abraham's seed. If we miss these words, we will just see these records as a history of one nation conquering another. When we understand these words, we understand that this record is so much more.

Chapter 23 takes us closer to Joshua's death...beginning with the words, "a long time afterward..." It prepares us for the covenant renewal that will take place next and further leads us into the book of Judges. Do not miss the sober nature of these words and God's constant insistence that we (as his people) not live like the Canaanites. Yes, that is another principle the church in America has largely forgotten...

Prophets (Jeremiah 21-25)

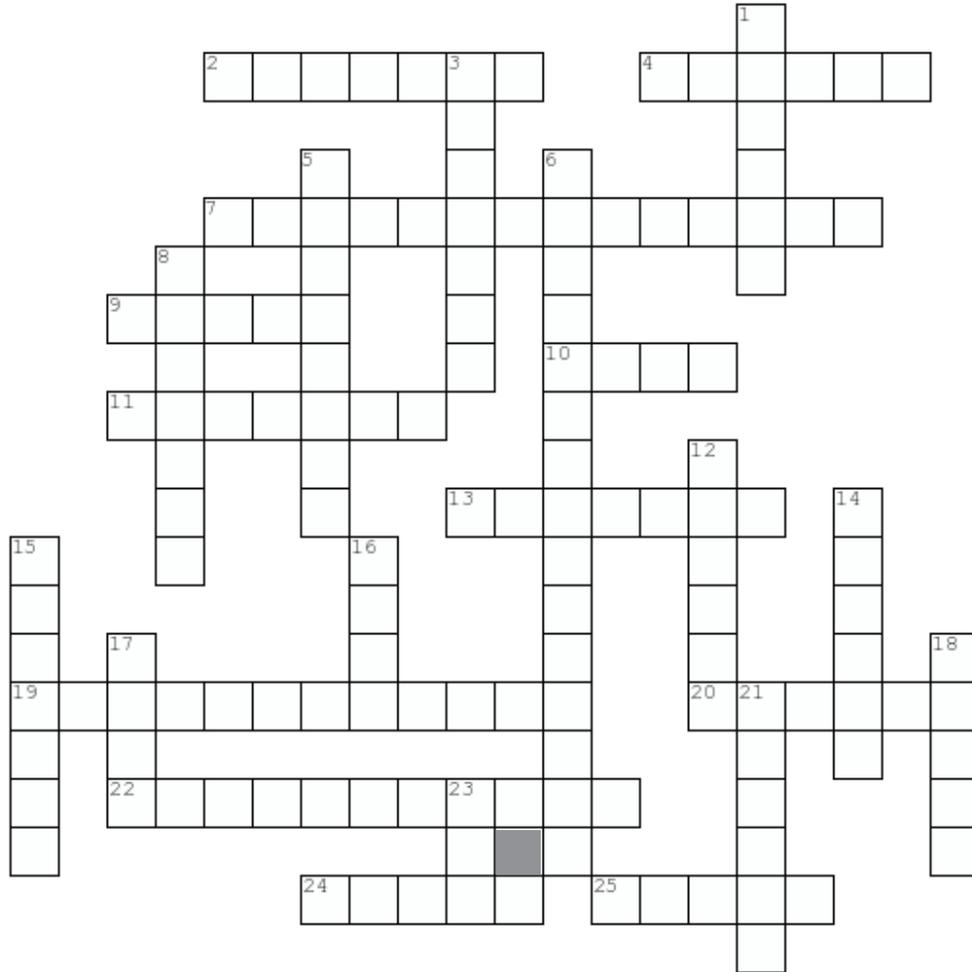
While there is too much in these chapters to deal with in depth, there are a few passages of which we ought to note. The language of the "Righteous Branch" is found in 23:5-6. This language is language that is fulfilled by Christ and is also picked up in Isaiah 11:1 (paralleled in Isaiah 11:10) and Zechariah 3:8. Further, just before the language about the Branch is a promise that God will set shepherds over the people of God — language that anticipates the office of "Pastor" (which means "shepherd") as well as Jesus, who is the "Good Shepherd."

The second passage that we must not overlook is the prophesy that Israel will be in bondage in Babylon for 70 years (25:11-12). Let it be understood by believer and unbeliever alike that God is sovereign over all things, even over the actions of the wicked in Babylon who are taking his people captive.

Epistles (2 Corinthians 11-13)

Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church closes with an autobiographical portion. This is not a matter of Paul "tooting his own horn" so much as it is Paul humbling himself by highlighting his sufferings for Christ. The church had been facing the lies of some very charismatic teachers and Paul is putting their arguments to rest while pointing people repeatedly to what Christ is doing through his weak and broken vessel. How we ought follow the same example today.

Week 18



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

Across

2. Phineas and the people of Reuben set up an altar and called it by this name.
4. God promises his righteous _____ over the people.
7. The cities of refuge were established to protect criminals from this person. (3 words)
9. 'I will _____ my ways to his face...'
10. How many times was Paul lashed 39 times?
11. 'Do _____ and righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor...'
13. This monk defended the fool.
19. The allotment of the land is primarily to demonstrate God's _____.
20. This is where the people of Israel assembled to divide the inheritances.
22. This happened to Paul three times.
24. Half of the virgins did not bring oil for these.
25. Jesus will separate these from the goats.

Down

1. This word means 'shepherd.'
3. How many years will Israel be in captivity in Babylon?
5. God gives this king into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.
6. The faithful servant gets to enter into this.
8. 'Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of _____.'
12. When you bear up with fools you make this out of yourselves.
14. This monk developed an argument to prove God's existence from Logic
15. 'My power is made _____ in weakness...'
16. This person declares that there is no God.
17. The wicked whitewash their evil with these.
18. Paul speaks of a man 'caught up' to the _____ heaven.
21. God's word is like fire and this that breaks stones into pieces.
23. This holds the 'wine of God's wrath' — something that Jesus asked be taken from him.