

# Bible Challenge 2017

## Week 2: January 8-14

### *Prayer (Psalm 5-7)*

Notice the use of instruments as you read through the superscripts of these psalms. Psalm 4, which we read last week, was written for a stringed instrument. This psalm was written for a flute. Sadly, we don't have any record of what the actual tunes sounded like, but it does not take a lot of imagination to think of how different the psalms would have sounded due to the instrumentation. Such is a reminder of the importance that music has in the life of God's people, in particular, for worship.

Psalms 6 and 7 both contain the name of the tune that is connected to the psalm. The first was to the tune of "Sheminith." Literally, this means, "on the eighth," which has caused all sorts of speculation as to what is being spoken of. Some suggest a specification that it is an eight-stringed instrument and others think that it is a reference to a song sung at the eighth festival of the year. Again, such has not been preserved for us. The latter is a "Shiggaion" which means "dirge." This then is clearer, though we still do not know what it would have sounded like for sure.

Psalm 7 also gives us the occasion of its writing. In this case, it is in response to the words of Cush, the Benjaminite. Of course, we know nothing else of this particular man. In Hebrew, Cush means "black" and this could have been a reference to his being dark-skinned or perhaps his mother had come from the land of Cush, which is near modern Ethiopia.

All of these psalms carry with them the themes of God's protection from his enemies, but Psalm 7 seems to emphasize more strongly the notion that God will avenge the harm done to his people. Such a promise should be a comforting note for the believer, for we need not fear our oppressors, though they should rage. Our God is a consuming fire and a God who will bring swift vengeance on the wicked.

### *Gospel (Matthew 2-3)*

Matthew 2 begins with the account of the Magi from the east. Most likely these men were astrologers from Persia (modern day Iran) who had heard the prophesy of Numbers 24:17, though they would not have been familiar with the prophesy of Micah 5:2, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Thus, they went to the source — Jerusalem — to discover where the child would be born. Here, Herod shows his absolute lack of knowledge of the prophetic scriptures and has to send for his scholars to answer the question.

When the Magi arrive, we are told that they come to a house and they worship Jesus who is then a *child*. The Greek word used here in the scriptures refers to a toddler and it is very reasonable that Jesus was close to two years old by this time (which would explain why Herod would later seek to kill children 2 years old and under). It is a mistake to place the Magi as part of the Manger scene, but such is the way things go.

Many speculate about the nature of the three gifts that the Magi brought. Note, that we are told of three gifts, not of three Magi (or Wise Men or Kings, depending on the account). There were more than one, as the term is plural, but that is all we know. Most likely it was a group of astrologers accompanied by a caravan of body-guards and attendants. We should note that the presence of gold and the frankincense is in fulfillment of the prophesy found in Isaiah 60:6. The myrrh most likely points us back to Psalm 45:8, which is a song that anticipates the Wedding feast of the Messiah (Revelation 19:6ff). Again, these Magi probably did not understand the significance of the three items, apart from the fact that they were common gifts for a king in that era, but God the Holy Spirit guided these choices. What happened to the items? It is a speculation, but there is a good chance that Joseph used them to underwrite the cost of their flight to and sojourn in Egypt. After the death of Herod, they return to their home in Nazareth.

Chapter 3 contains the baptism of Jesus. It is often asked why, given that Jesus had no sin, that he had to be baptized. This is the same question that puzzled John the Baptist. Jesus' answer was that it was to "fulfill all righteousness." In theological terms, we refer to this as part of the exchange Jesus engages in — he exchanges his righteousness for the sin of his elect.

### *Wisdom Literature (Leviticus 4-6)*

And again, we continue with sacrifices for various sins of the people. Note, though, we begin chapter 4 with the idea of Federal Headship, for if the priest sins he brings guilt not only on himself, but on the people he is called to serve. And though we are a nation of priests, as Christians, this is a reminder as to why our pastors and other church leaders must be men of integrity and spiritual character, for God will not

hold guiltless those who blaspheme his name (Exodus 20:7) and he will judge the shepherds who exist only to feed themselves (Ezekiel 34).

The other thing to note about these chapters is that they cover not only "unintentional" sins, but also sins of omission. Whether we engage in an act intending to sin or not, in God's eyes, sin is still sin and we are held rightly accountable for it. Such a reality ought to make all of us tremble.

### *History (Genesis 9-16)*

We find ourselves moving from Noah to Abraham here with the various generations in between. A few notes are worth being made here. First, what we know as the Tower of Babel — the confusion of the languages, is a judgment against mankind for sin — God said, "disperse and fill the creation," and the people gathered together to build a city so that they would be remembered forever. Curiously, they are still remembered, but for their foolishness, not for their greatness. Thus, God scattered them, and by doing so, forced them to do what he told them to do in the first place.

Entire volumes have been written on the life of Abraham, the "friend of God" (James 2:23) — a list to which I have contributed a volume as well. God chose him to work through from all of the people of the nations, who descended from the line of Shem. One of the most important chapters in the life of Abraham is chapter 14 (chapter 22 is arguably the only more significant chapter). For here we are introduced to Melchizedek, a Priest-King, who anoints Abraham with a blessing. And, it will be this Priest-King who becomes the character-type for Jesus' priesthood (Hebrews 7). For while the Levitical priesthood was still in the loins of Abraham, Abraham offered a tithe to Melchizedek.

### *Prophecy (Isaiah 6-10)*

Isaiah 6 is one of my favorite chapters to preach. It tells of Isaiah's call to a prophetic ministry and his witnessing of the Son of God (before the Incarnation) in his glory, seated in his throne above the Temple. The seraphim were singing "Holy, Holy, Holy" and Isaiah's response is to confess that he is a man of unclean lips amongst a people of unclean lips...a reference to idolatry, for in ancient times, you would kiss an idol to show devotion (and defile yourself in God's eyes). And then a powerful commission is given, that through Isaiah's preaching, the blind will remain blind lest they see their sin and repent. This, by the way, is the reason Jesus gave for teaching in parables (Matthew 13:14-15).

There is some powerful language in these following chapters that speaks of the coming Immanuel (meaning "God with us") in 7:14, the promise that the Messiah will be a stumbling block for the religious leaders of Jerusalem in 8:14, and that he will be a light to the nations (Isaiah 9:1-7). Further, for the preacher, we also have Isaiah 10:15, that should be emblazoned on every pulpit — a reminder that it is not the preacher that should be praised, but the God who wields the preacher.

### *Epistles (Romans 4-5)*

We close our week once again in the book of Romans and with one of the most profoundly important statements in all of Scripture — "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness." Salvation is not about works, it is about faith — in Greek, "to have faith" and "to believe" are the same word." The saints throughout history — all of the way back to Adam — were saved because they had faith. Those saints who lived before the cross had faith in the promised Christ to come; post-Cross, in the Christ who came. But always a matter of faith. And the righteousness part? That ties to our justification. We find ourselves separated by God because of our sin. Faith, then, is counted as the righteousness we do not naturally have of our own being. So, in faith, we stand before God as righteous.

This teaching of Paul on justification continues through these chapters, pointing us to the redeemer of men, Jesus Christ. For as through one man sin came into the world, so too, though one man, Jesus Christ, comes redemption. Note, sometimes people take 5:18 to be a universalistic statement, that Jesus died to give righteousness to *all* mankind. Yet, to read the passage in this way takes it out of context. The "all" mentioned here is not all mankind without exception, but all mankind without distinction — it is all of God's elect who are given faith by which they will then be counted as righteous.

*Unscamble the words in the column to the left and place the letters in the appropriate box to discover the final phrase.*

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HAASII

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CLHEIKEEMZD

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NUTICJIOFITSA

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MAIG

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TASIBPM

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SRHIEMAP

14	38	36					

SAGOIGINH

41	40	16		39	44	28			

PETRIS

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NORFEGIF

17		43					

DESIYKN

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LERVI

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LABEB

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HEMS

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GAHAR

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