

Bible Challenge 2017

Week 25: June 18-24

Poetry: (Judges 5; 1 Samuel 2)

Both of our passages for today contain songs sung by God's people at different stages in history. The first is the song of Deborah, recounting God's overthrow of Sisera and the Canaanite armies of Jabin. And while the historical narrative is recounted, there is a great deal of emphasis on the spiritual side of the victory and the work of God not only in raising up Deborah but also in his raising up of Jael, who is called here, "blessed amongst women," a title reserved for Mary by Roman Catholics.

Notice too that the reason for God raising up female leadership is given — namely, because the men are cowardly not rising to the call. Often, people look to Deborah as an example of female leadership in the Bible when they seek to promote a theology of female leadership in the church. The argument that is made is essentially, "God raised up Deborah because the men were not taking up their proper leadership roles in the church." The problem with that is first, Deborah is an exception to the rule, made clear by the way she is introduced in Judges 4:4. Today, people often argue that men are not rising up to their spiritual responsibilities, just as in Deborah's day, and so we should expect the same. The faulty logic ought to be obvious. First, those promoting female leadership in the church are not recognizing it to be an exception and are trying to make it a norm. Second, God raised Deborah up, Barak did not. That means, in days like our day, where many men will not stand up and lead, the solution is not to set our own exception, but to prompt the men to do the right thing... that is, to lead the church.

1 Samuel 2 contains the prayer of Hannah in giving thanks to the Lord for the birth of Samuel. What follows the song, of course, revolves around God's rejection of Eli's line — the birth of a righteous priest to replace the unrighteous ones. Notice, the content of Hannah's song, though, because it is somewhat different than we might expect. Certainly it gives thanks to God (something we would expect), but it also contains a great deal about God's character and his work of redemption through history. I think that if we are honest, most of our prayers can be considered rather shallow in comparison to this prayer...a prayer, by the way, that contains many similarities to Mary's prayer when it is made known to her that she will give birth to Jesus.

Gospels: (Mark 7)

Mark 7 begins with a rebuke of the legalists and concludes with a pair of healings. The first deals with a challenge about the Apostles not washing their hands before eating (of course, as a kid, I loved to use this passage with my mom...okay, I never really stopped using this passage...). Truly, the washing that Jesus was dealing with was the symbolic purification of the hands by pouring water over them (and this was referred to as a "baptism" in the Greek). Jesus' point is simply that it is what comes from the heart, not what goes into the mouth, that defiles us. Jesus attacks the pharisees because they considered themselves holy because they followed the letter of the law, though the intent is ignored.

Another point about this rebuke is that in this passage, Mark points out, Jesus declared all foods to be clean and thus acceptable for consumption (see verse 19). Too many people rob themselves of the liberty that they have been given and in their zeal to obey Old Testament statutes, they become Judaizers of a modern sort.

The healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter is largely misunderstood because we are removed from the original Greek text. There is an interplay between Jesus and this woman around the use of the word, "dog." When Jesus tells her that he came to feed the children and it was not yet time for the dogs to eat, the word for "dog" that he used was that of a farm dog...the kind that would remain outside of the house and which would be fed with the scraps leftover from the table. This woman understands Jesus' reference, but when she speaks of the dogs getting the scraps, she changes terms, and uses the Greek word to refer to a small dog that would be kept inside of the master's house as a pet...one whose place was under the table and which would be fed (at least initially) with scraps that the children dropped to the ground. Her merit is not her persistence, but in coming to Jesus in faith, she is saying that while she does not yet have a place at the table, she has been admitted to the house by that faith and thus is eligible to the crumbs. Jesus clearly understands that she understands and heals her daughter. When he returns to the Roman region of Decapolis (Capernaum being one of those cities), he also heals a blind man who had a speech impediment.

Wisdom: (Job 34-36)

We continue with Elihu's exhortation. At the end of the previous chapter, Elihu leaves off with the statement that wisdom is learned in silence. What follows, then, is Elihu's instruction in wisdom which is aimed not only at Job but also at Job's three counselors. He begins by bidding them to listen while also commending Job on his patience in putting up with the bad counsel of the three counselors. He asserts God's authority on the basis that God is the creator of all things. Later, when God appears, we should note, that God begins on the same basis — what right does the created have to challenge the will of the creator?

The theme that follows through the rest of Elihu's testimony is that Job keeps talking, but is speaking empty words against God, thus making him guilty of rebellion against his maker. The force of Elihu's argument is to make much of God and to submit to His authority.

History: (1 Samuel 25-31; 2 Samuel 2)

We complete the book of 1 Samuel this week and begin the second book. Here, in our reading, we see the death of Samuel and eventually the death of Saul and Jonathan, which sets the stage for David's rise to authority. And all through the last chapters, we see Saul declining in his personal piety, even to the extent that he seeks out a witch to raise the spirit of Samuel from the dead...not something that a believer would do and not something one would expect from the king of Israel. While deserved, Saul dies a heroic death, not willing to retreat in the face of a terrible loss.

The second book of Samuel begins with the lamentation of David over the death of Saul. As David's elegy is in poetic form, we will cover that at the end of July. Chapter 2 begins the account of David ascending to power and rallying people to be loyal to him in his kingship. What is interesting is that with the death of Saul, it seems that the northern tribes are already in danger of pulling away from the nation, something that is prevented, but which is a foreshadowing of what would take place in the reign of David's Grandson.

Prophets: (Ezekiel 6-10)

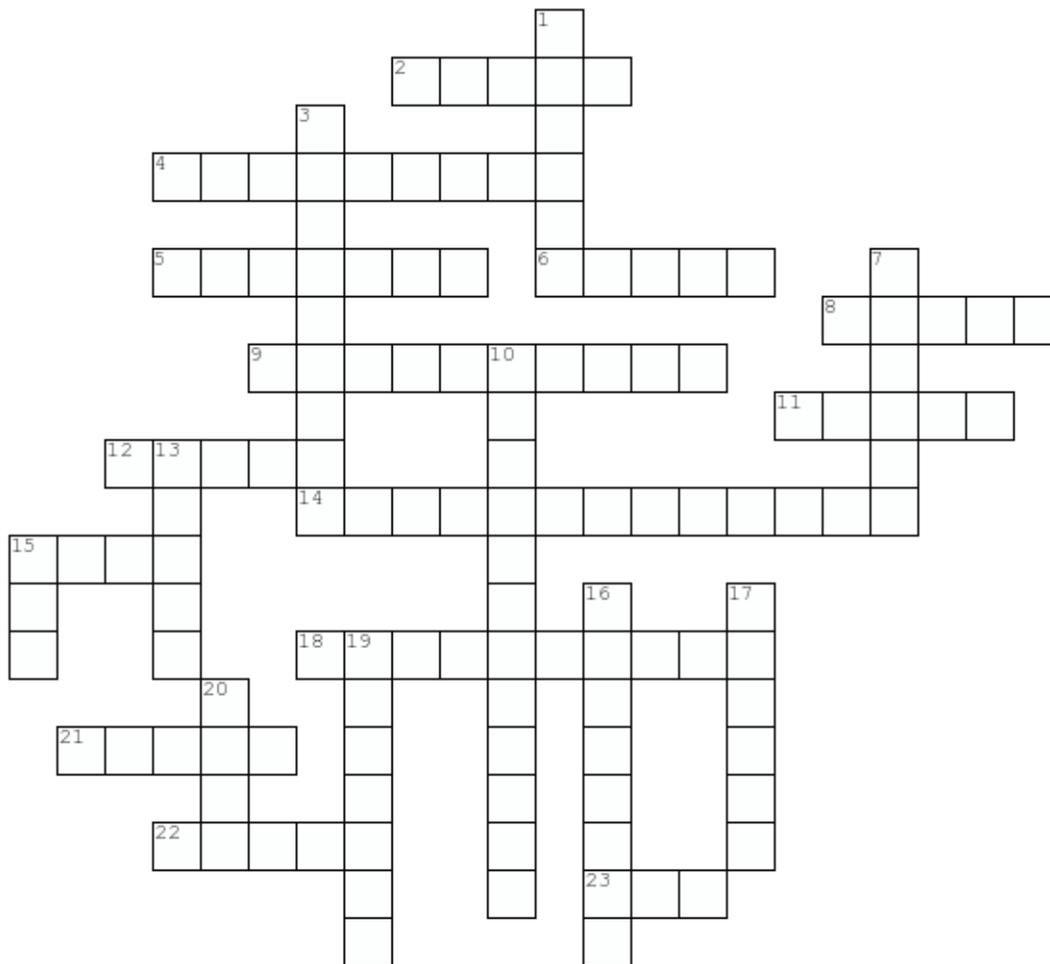
The passages we read from Ezekiel today are largely passages of judgment, God giving justification to the people as to why he is destroying Jerusalem and the temple...for ultimately it has become a place of idolatry and not genuine worship. What (to me) is most sobering, is found in Ezekiel 10, where the Glory of God is seen removing itself from the Temple. There are echoes here of Moses' language that it is God's presence that will make his people distinct and unique (see Exodus 34)... here the visible presence of God is seen leaving the people to their fate. As many scholars argue that the description of the throne and of the wheels is a depiction of the Ark, it is considered by many that the Ark of the Covenant was removed to heaven prior to Israel's fall.

Epistles: (Philippians 1-2)

Philippians is described by many scholars as a "Thank-You" letter from the Apostle Paul to the Philippian church for their generous support of his labors...a kind of missionary support letter of sorts. It is also a book that is intensely pastoral and is useful in pastoral counseling. Chapter 1 opens with the theme that any suffering is worthwhile so long as the cause of Christ is advanced ... oh, how we have lost that mindset in the life of the church.

Chapter 2, verses 3-4 are the single-most commonly referenced verses in the Bible for me when it comes to counseling. Whether it is in the form of pre-marital counseling, marital counseling, or conflict resolution; these verses are where I start. And, if you are experiencing conflict with another person who happens to be a professing Christian, this is where you should start as well...and if you start here, it is my conviction that you will be able to resolve the matter without ever having to come to me. Rule of thumb: count the needs of others as more significant than your own. Why? Because that is what Jesus did and whether we like it or not, either now or in eternity we will all submit to his authority...the one who submits through faith to Christ in this life, will rejoice with him eternally; those who do not, will find themselves crushed under his conqueror's boot in eternity.

Week 25



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

Across

- 2.** The general of the troops under Deborah.
- 4.** According to Elihu, Job is adding this sin to himself by demanding justice.
- 5.** Samuel's dad.
- 6.** What defiles a person is what comes from this.
- 8.** Saul goes to a _____ from En-Dor to raise Samuel's spirit.
- 9.** Elihu's rebuke is aimed at Job and his _____.
- 11.** This was Abigail's wicked husband.
- 12.** Saul gave David's wife, Michal, to this man as a wife.
- 14.** The woman seeking to have her daughter healed was from this region.
- 15.** 'To live is Christ, to die is _____.'
- 18.** This son of Saul was originally made king in Saul's place.
- 21.** Samuel is buried here.
- 22.** Jesus declared all foods this.
- 23.** This seems to leave the Temple when God's glory leaves it.

Down

- 1.** 1 Samuel 2 contains the prayer of this woman.
- 3.** A group of 10 cities on the eastern frontier of Rome, Cesarea being one of them.
- 7.** Saul died on this mountain.
- 10.** This man was sent to Paul, but fell very sick and almost died.
- 13.** This was the general of Saul's army.
- 15.** According to Elihu, who is the first mover who created all things?
- 16.** One of the wicked sons of Eli.
- 17.** This was not seen amongst 40,000 men in Israel.
- 19.** Wisdom is learned in _____.
- 20.** She is 'Blessed Amongst Women.'