

# Bible Challenge 2017

## Week 27: July 2-8

### **Poetry: Psalm 77-78**

This week we look at two more of the psalms of Asaph. Psalm 77 focuses primarily on the might of God on behalf of his people. Psalm 78 is written as a form of a riddle, though many English translations render it "parable." Essentially, Asaph recounts the trials of the people of Israel, their failures, and God's redemption in history. God's call is that his people obey his command, but as we trace the hand of God on his people through history, we see the repeated failures of his people to be obedient to God's call. He closes this psalm with the reminder of God's call on David, the Shepherd-King, who is meant to be a reflection of God's perfect shepherding of his people.

### **Gospel: Mark 9-10**

We begin this week's reading, we begin with the Transfiguration of Christ. As we mentioned earlier, when we encountered this in Matthew's account, this event is the hinge on which the Gospel account turns. Here, Jesus begins to shift his focus from a broad ministry to a ministry on its way to Jerusalem for his crucifixion. Thus, the conversation begins to change to things of Jesus' death.

What follows is the healing of a boy who had been demon possessed. This is the passage from which the well-known phrase, "help my unbelief!" comes, but the statement that is of more value to us is the final statement of Jesus, that some demons can only be driven out by prayer (some variant texts read "prayer and fasting," which you will find if you read the KJV or other Majority Text manuscript translations). The key, here, illustrates the importance of prayer for the Christian life. The Apostles had been bickering about their own importance prior to their failed attempt to heal this boy; had they been faithfully committed to prayer, I would argue that they never would have bickered about their greatness in the first place. One of the great gifts that God gives us in prayer is a perspective on the world that places God first and our prestige (or the prestige of our institutions) second.

More teachings will follow. Here, Jesus teaches on divorce, on the significance of children, and on the role of humility in the Christian life. The rich young man who wanted to earn his entrance to heaven by his deeds is sent away with the Apostles dumb-founded about the impossibility of one entering heaven based on what they had seen. Jesus' point, of course, is that what is impossible for man is possible with God. Further, there is a promise given for those who leave earthly things behind in pursuit of Christ's calling. This is a promise that is especially dear for pastors and missionaries who regularly leave behind their homes, their biological kin, and sometimes even their native lands to pursue the Gospel. The promise, then is for those people and things that are left-behind, God will return those things to you a hundred-fold in the kingdom. And, indeed, this has been my experience. One of the things that I have enjoyed about making the occasional trip overseas or to speak in the context of a church, is there I get to meet more and more of my family in Christ. One day, I know that I will meet them at the foot of Christ's throne, but what a joy it has been to meet people that are part of my spiritual family in this life as well.

### **Wisdom: Job 40-42**

Job is brought to completion with the final challenges of God toward Job, this time focusing on Behemoth and Leviathan. Yet, before God makes his final challenge to Job, we find Job responding properly before the face of God — he confesses his sin and submits before the might of God. How radically different Job's action is than how this account began and how radically different it is than how we usually act in our age.

The unfortunate thing about many of the footnotes in our modern Bibles is that they presume an evolutionary timeline, thus when Behemoth is presented, many of our footnotes read, "probably a hippopotamus." Then, when Leviathan is presented, many of our footnotes read, "possibly a crocodile." Yet, show me a hippopotamus that has a tail like a cedar tree or a crocodile that is covered with impenetrable armor and which can breathe fire. The former creature sounds more like the descriptions we are given of sauropods and the latter sounds much more like a dragon (see Revelation 12:3 and Isaiah 27:1). If we are going to stand upon the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy and the principle that the scriptures can interpret themselves, then ought we not take the descriptions more seriously?

The final chapter in Job is essentially the concluding story. Job is restored, he offers sacrifices for the wicked words of his 3 counselors, and his family finds itself blessed by God. Note, though, the message of this book is not that if you suffer faithfully that God will bless you with riches; the message of the book is to submit before God and trust His sovereignty even when you do not understand what God is doing.

### **History: 2 Samuel 11-18**

There is a certain irony here as our reading begins with the death of Uriah and ends with the death of Absalom. Sadly, David's life is marked by a great deal of death and personal tragedy.

The account of David and Bathsheba is one of the more familiar events in the life of David; sadly, it is a tragedy. One of the responsibilities of the King was to lead the armies in battle and the account starts off with just that — the season for campaigns — but David is sitting the campaign out back in Jerusalem. Hence he spies Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah who was one of his "Mighty Men," soldiers faithful to David and who protected David while he was fleeing from Saul. How sad it is that the advent of David's lust will bring with it the death of a companion as well as the death of his first child with Bathsheba.

We further have the encounter of Nathan. David, having thought he had hidden his crime from man, forgot that no one hides sin from God. And thus Nathan leads David into a confession through a bit of a parable... essentially permitting David to condemn himself. The child does die for his parents' sin, but the parents of a lost child will always grieve more deeply than can be compared to the suffering of the little one. David's confidence that he will see his child again in the resurrection is one more affirmation that the children of believers who die in infancy will be with God in heaven.

The account then begins to shift to the rise of Absalom, David's third son, one whom he fathered with his wife, Maacah, the daughter of Talmai the king of Geshur (2 Samuel 3:3). Ultimately, Absalom seeks to usurp his father's throne. At first, he fails and has to flee back to his mother's home, but then he finds a way back into his father's graces and when his father is out of Jerusalem, Absalom steps in and takes the throne as well as his father's concubines. Thus, for the second time in David's life he finds himself being a fugitive. David does receive the upperhand, though commands that the life of his son be spared. Unfortunately, Absalom is caught fleeing with his hair tangled in tree branches (Absalom's hair was notorious for its length and weight). Joab finds him dangling by his hair and puts Absalom to death, much to the grief of the king. The trouble within David's family ought not be taken lightly and is a reminder to us of the importance of seeking to walk in grace and chastity in all of our marriages.

### **Prophets: Ezekiel 16-20**

"When I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you, 'Live!' As we begin this section of Ezekiel, how appropriate this passage is when it comes to the call of God upon Abraham, upon Israel, upon his church, but also when it comes to his call upon us. It is a reminder that there is nothing within us that deserves or has earned the grace God gives us and further that we cannot make a go of this life alone — we will end up a bloody mess in our sin.

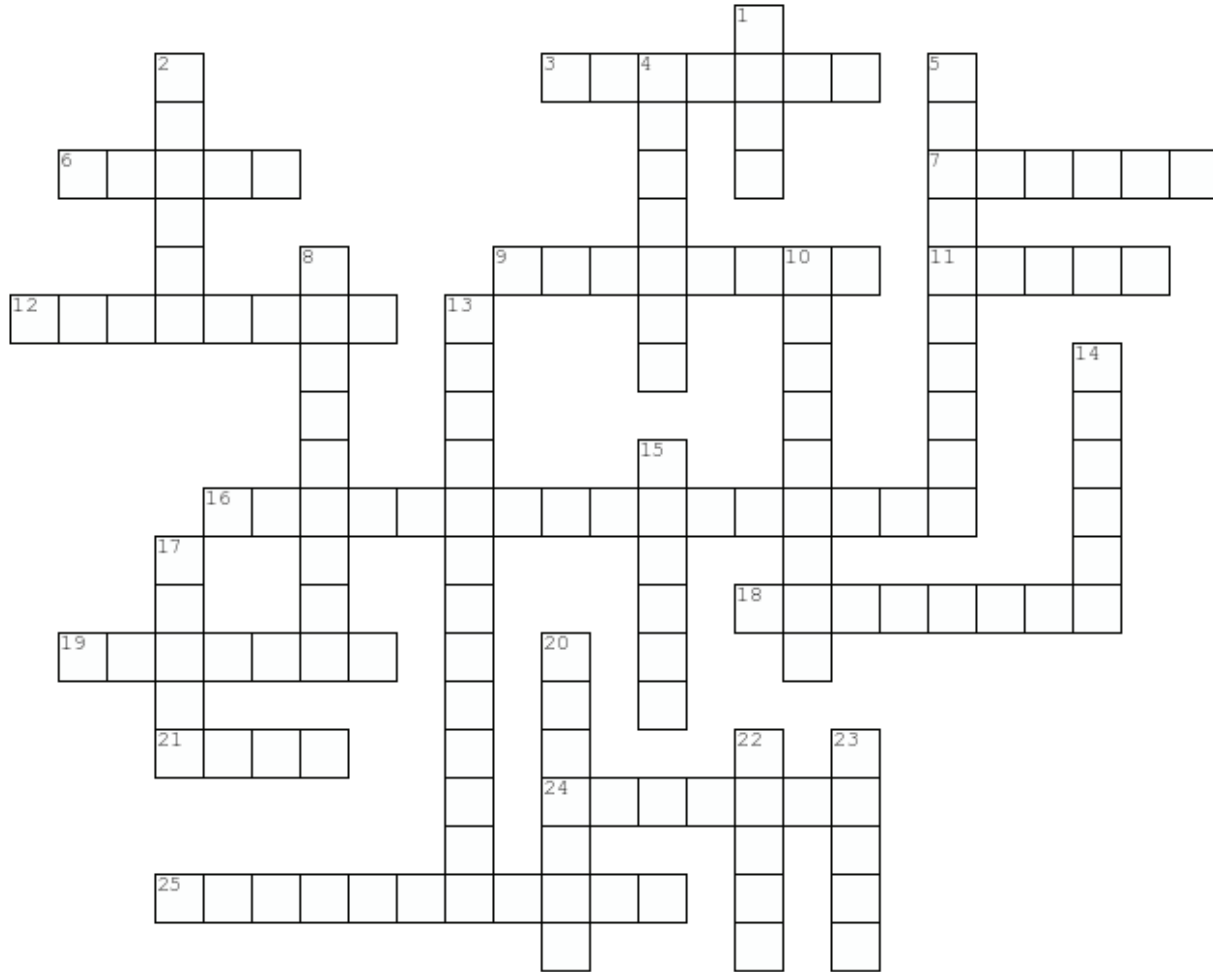
The saddest thing, as Ezekiel continues to relate the lament of God (something paralleled in the life of the prophet Hosea) we see the bride he redeemed pursuing sin and immorality — constantly longing for her destroyed, bloody state — longing for spiritual death rather than spiritual life. Christian, you must understand that when you pursue the things of this world and prefer sin to righteousness, you are longing for death instead of life. What follows the account of the faithless bride is the commitment of God to be a faithful husband...praise, be the Lord!

Space does not permit us to explore the language of the parables and laments of God in this passage, but we would be remiss if we did not pay special note to 20:37-38...the promise of God to bind his people to himself in a new covenant. And those so bound may never escape. The Christian life is a life of freedom, but not a freedom that lets us do whatever we wish; a freedom that gives us life to do whatever God wishes, which is the source of true joy and satisfaction. It may sound rather ironic, but as CS Lewis states, "The Will is most free when it is most in conformity to God's Will and designs." We live and act as we were made to do.

### **Epistles: Colossians 1-2**

Colossians is one of my favorite Epistles due to its language of Christ, particularly in 1:15-20. Jesus is the image of the invisible God (the perfection of the Imago Dei!) and the firstborn of Creation (as to his privilege and "birthright", this does not imply Jesus was created. By Christ all things were made and for him they were made...it is all about Jesus! It is not about you or me! What a transformation comes in our lives when we realize that single idea. It is not about me, my will, or my designs. It is all about Jesus and his will and his designs. While much more could be said of our reading, let it be said that this book is about making Christ preeminent in our lives.

# Week 27



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## Across

3. No one is to pass judgment on you with regard to festivals, new moons, or \_\_\_\_\_.
6. This ancient city is described as the sister of Jerusalem based on their sins.
7. This prophet confronted David in his sin.
9. Solomon's birth name given by the prophet.
11. Bathsheba's husband.
12. 'I believe; help my \_\_\_\_\_.'
16. 'Cast away the \_\_\_\_\_ and do not defile yourself with idols' (2 words)
18. Probably a sauropod, not a hippopotamus.
19. 'Whoever would be great among you must be your \_\_\_\_\_.'
21. This is good, but if it loses its essential character it has no value.
24. David's third son.
25. This describes God's covenant.

## Down

1. This was Absalom's downfall.
2. Psalm 78 is presented as a parable or a kind of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The Apostle Paul contrasts this with Circumcision.
5. Once in Jerusalem, Absalom takes his fathers \_\_\_\_\_ as his own.
8. This sounds more like a dragon than a crocodile.
10. David should have been leading battle against these people, but remained home and was tempted.
13. David ascends this mountain as he exits Jerusalem, in tears and lamentation, anticipating Christ. (3 words)
14. The Apostles saw this man along with Moses standing with Jesus.
15. Absalom's mother was from this city in Manasseh.
17. These will make their home in the branches of Ezekiel's transplanted sprig.
20. This nation has only committed half the sins of Jerusalem.
22. Jesus reconciled all things in heaven and earth to himself by making peace with this.
23. The wicked brother who violated Tamar.