

Bible Challenge 2017

Week 30: July 23-29

Prayers: Psalm 87-89

We close out Book 4 of the Psalms with this week's readings. We find the last two of the Psalms of the Sons of Korah before we move on to Ethan the Ezrahite. Psalm 87 is a simple psalm of praise, though the ending (in English) seems to contain a bit of a play on words, for the dancers are stating, "my springs are in you." Based on this English translation, some have thought of the jumps and springs of a dancer in the context of this passage, but the original Hebrew does not contain any plays on words. In the Hebrew, the word refers to springs of water or fountainheads — reminiscent of Jesus' language that he is the source of Living Water (John 4:10) and that if we will believe in him, out of us will flow living water as well (John 7:38 — for indeed, our springs of water are found in Christ alone).

Psalm 88 seems to be a joint venture of the Sons of Korah and Heman the Ezrahite. Heman as well as Ethan the Ezrahite were known for their great wisdom and it is only Solomon himself who is described as being wiser than these men (1 Kings 4:31).

Heman's psalm is a remarkably important one due to its relatable pastoral nature, speaking out to those who are in despair. How important it is in today's world to hear words such as these. And how gracious God is with words of promise to the downtrodden. In the United States alone, there are reported over 1 million suicide attempts annually and on average, about 44,000 people every year succeed in taking their own lives. And many of these people are Christians, but have lost their way in this world. Yet, in psalm 88, God issues his promise never to abandon his own even when they are in their darkest hours.

Finally, Psalm 89 is a song of celebration to our glorious God.

Gospels: Mark 14

This chapter is both a passage of sober gloom as much as it is a passage of eternal remembrance. For here is where our Lord instituted what we now know as "The Lord's Supper" or "Communion." Jesus took the Passover meal (instituted in Exodus 12) and applied it to himself, essentially saying to us that everything that took place in the passover foreshadowed him.

Yet, Mark also records the betrayal of Jesus by Judas in this passage as well as his arrest in Gethsemane and the false trial held in the High Priest's court. Finally, when it seems that the night could not get any darker, Peter, the spokesman and leader of the Apostles, denied his Lord and Savior three times. All we can say is, "woe is me" after walking away from these passages.

Wisdom: Proverbs 6-7

Much like the philosopher Aristotle that would come about 600 years after Solomon, Solomon, it seems, was fascinated by the natural world. We see evidence of that as Solomon uses his observations about the ant. In this case, that he is industrious, does his work without being nagged or micromanaged, and looks down on slothfulness. There are other animals found in the book of Proverbs, like the horse, the ox, the rock-badger, the eagle, and the adder, this ant reference has always impressed me as most remarkable set of observations and provides us with good applications.

Verses 16-19 are verses with which many are uncomfortable. There are six, even seven things that God hates, as Solomon describes, and many of the things mentioned are not just the sins, but the sinners as well — like one with haughty eyes or one who sows discord amongst the brethren. It is not just that God hates these sins...but in this case, he hates the sinners as well.

As we move toward the end of this chapter as well as into chapter 7, we find Solomon employing the analogy of the adulteress that leads people away from wisdom. Why the adulteress? It is because idolatry and adultery are inseparably connected in the Scriptures...and how does one gain wisdom? It begins with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10).

History: 1 Kings 13-20

We begin our readings with a disobedient prophet. The rule of thumb is simple, God expects obedience from his people and especially from those he calls and uses as ministers of the Word. This applies to all of us who claim the name of Christ. When God calls you to do something he cares about your obedience and the way in which you obey (i.e. God not only wants you to do what he calls you to do, but he wants you to do it in the way he tells you to do it). This should especially be seen as applying to our worship, which God expects to be done as the Bible prescribes it.

What now follows is a series of brief reigns over Israel in the north and Judah in the south. One of the benefits that God has given to us is in the form of scholars through the years who have taken time to trace the genealogies so that we don't have to. Recognizing that there is some overlap in leadership, the lines of kings covered in our chapters looks something like this:

South	North
Rehoboam (931-913 BC)	Jeroboam (931-910 BC)
Abijam (913-911 BC)	Nadab (910-909 BC)
Asa (911-870 BC)	Baasha (909-886 BC)
Jehoshaphat (873-848 BC)	Elah (886-885 BC)
	Zimri (885 BC)
	Omri (885-874 BC)
	Ahab (874-853 BC)

What is sobering about this list of early kings is that of all of these men listed, only Asa and his son, Jehoshaphat are listed as good kings. All of the rest...all of them...have reigns that are marked by sin and idolatry.

Chapter 17 begins what are known as the Elijah narratives. Elisha was a prophet to the northern nation, and in particular, to the very wicked Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. These narratives are well known to many Christians because of Elijah's duel with the 450 prophets of Ba'al on Mount Carmel. Elijah accuses them of "limping" back and forth between the God of Israel and the Ba'als...while the people who belong to God are to walk with a clear stride on the straight and narrow path.

Similarly, Elijah is well known to us for his meeting with God who was in the "Still, Small Voice." It is a reminder that God encounters his people in many ways...sometimes with the small voice and sometimes with the rumbling of nature. We should note that this is the same cave in which Moses witnessed the passing of God in Exodus 34... "the cave" at mount Horeb (also known as Sinai)

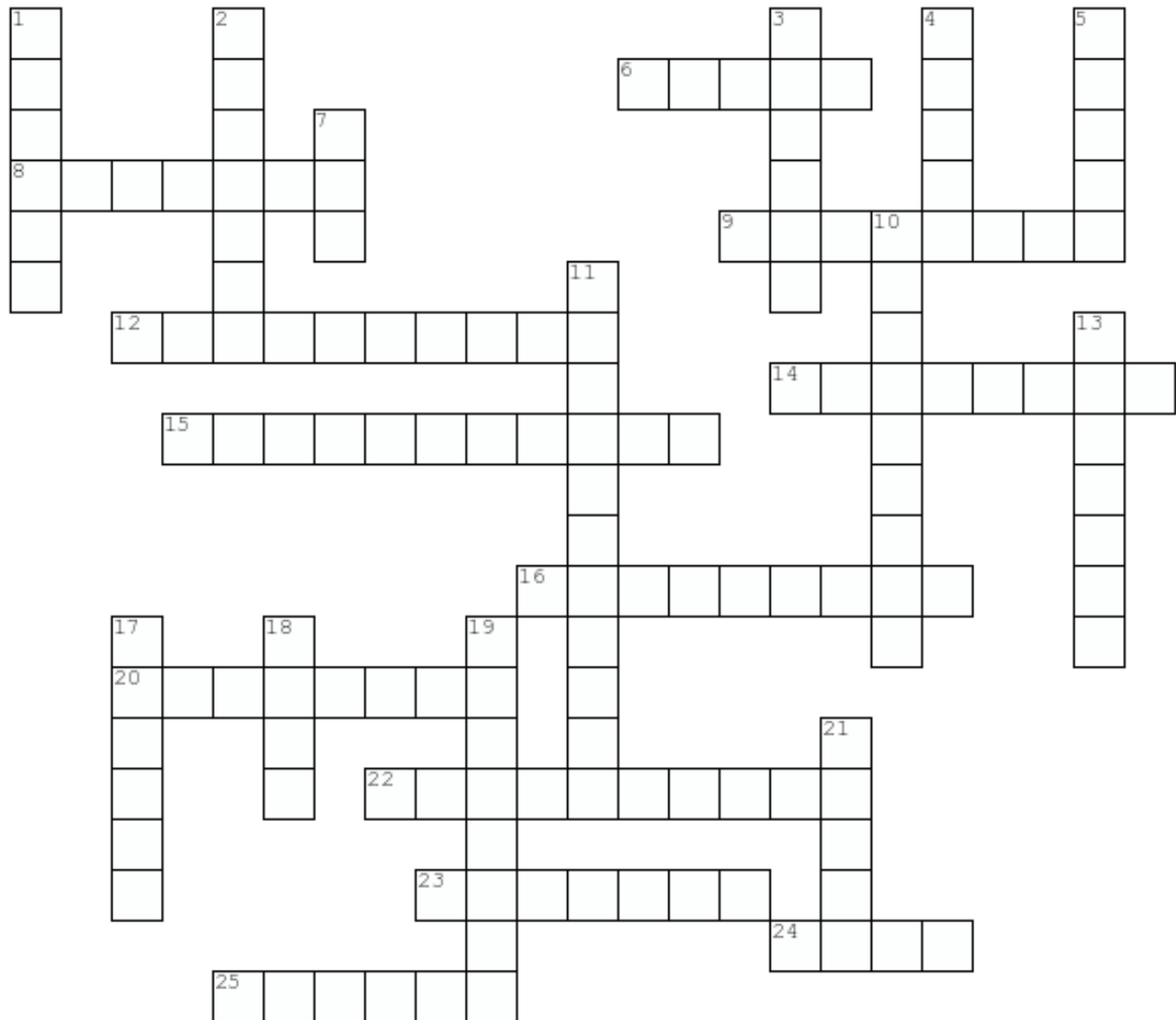
Prophets: Ezekiel 31-35

Within the pages of judgment against Pharaoh and the nations, there is the imagery of the Shepherd and the sheep. This is significant because Jesus will pick this imagery up (see John 10) and apply it to himself. Here we find God's wrath against the false shepherds of his people, feeding only themselves and he says that he will remove the Shepherds from their place and that he himself will shepherd Israel (Ezekiel 34:15). Thus, when Jesus states that he is the "Good Shepherd," he is plainly stating that he is the fulfillment of Isaiah 40 — God come in the flesh to shepherd his people.

Epistles: 1 Thessalonians 4-5

We wrap up Paul's first letter to the church in Thessalonica with an exhortation to live in morality to wait with confidence for the coming of the Lord, along with one of the shortest verses in the Bible: "Rejoice always!" How important it is to remember that no matter how badly things are going in our lives, we can rejoice in the Lord with all our strength.

Week 30



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Across

6. He betrays Jesus.
8. This man was wiser than Ethan or Heman.
9. Believers should control their bodies in holiness and not act like this group of people.
12. Jesus was arrested in this garden.
14. This meal will become 'The Lord's Supper.'
15. God worked a miracle for the widow at Zerephath by making this not run out. (3 words)
16. The Thessolonicians are known throughout this region for their love.
20. Ahab was under the judgment of God for sparing this man's life.
22. Solomon portrays idolatry as this kind of woman.
23. God hates the one who sows this amongst brothers.
24. We are to do this without ceasing.
25. This prophet prophesied against Ahab.

Down

1. The prophet Jehu prophesied against this king.
2. When the watchman sees the sword coming, he is to blow this.
3. Elijah had a showdown on this mountain with the prophets of Baal.
4. Another name for Horeb.
5. Who fulfills God's statement that he will shepherd Israel himself.
7. Solomon recognizes this creature as industrious.
10. Do not quench this. (2 words)
11. One of the two good southern kings in the divided monarchy.
13. Ahab's wicked wife.
17. The son of Jeroboam who fell sick who died under God's judgment.
18. This king rebuilt the city of Jericho
19. We are to do this toward the idle.
21. He denies Jesus.