

Bible Challenge 2017

Week 31: July 30 – August 5

Prayers: 2 Samuel 1; 22-23

The first chapter of 2 Samuel is a mixture both of narrative and prayer, but our focus this week is on the prayer. Here we see David's eulogy for Saul. As wicked as Saul was and as bloodthirsty toward David as Saul happened to be, we see David honoring Saul for the good things that Saul did and for the office (of King) that he held. It is a reminder to us that no man or woman is as bad as they possibly could be and thus there is a time and place to give honor where honor is due. It is also a precedence, I believe, for honoring the good works of those who have died as a part of their funeral.

As we arrive at the final chapters of today's readings, we arrive at the close of David's life and we find David's prayer that celebrates God's deliverance from his many enemies. These words are also quoted largely in Psalm 18, so they may sound familiar to you. The final chapter begins with an oracle of David, giving a reminder that a ruler who rules well, rules righteously regardless of what the world might foolishly suggest. It is sad that his son and grandson did not pay closer heed to these words.

Gospel: Mark 15-16

We close out Mark's Gospel with Jesus' final trial before Pilate, his death, burial, and resurrection. It should be noted that in the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark, chapter 16 ends with verse 8. There is nothing heretical in verses 9-20, but the style and verbiage clearly changes in the text when one moves from the earlier work to the later, indicating that it is not in Mark's own hand. By the time of the Vulgate it was included as a part of Mark (the 4th century translation of the Bible into Latin), but there are no Greek manuscripts that predate the Vulgate. The majority of scholarship believes that early scribes considered the ending of Mark in verse 8 rather abrupt and thus borrowed from Matthew's ending to conclude Mark's earlier Gospel. Does this make the content bad? No, but it means that we are not sure whether it is inspired text.

Wisdom: Proverbs 8-9

As one comes to expect, our chapters contain a series of statements about the value of wisdom and about how to live a wise life. Proverbs 8:10 and 9:10 are two of the most important statements. The first is a reminder that wisdom is more valuable than anything money can buy. The second is that true wisdom is found in a fear (reverence/awe) of the Lord. Yet, how often, as Christians, we neglect that truth and seek our own ends and pursue wealth or fame instead of true wisdom because we do not wish to submit to the commands of an almighty God.

History: 1 Kings 21-22; 2 Kings 1-6

We begin with Naboth and Jezebel's scheming. Naboth had a vineyard that the king wanted, but that he would not sell to the king. Jezebel, the King's wife, created a plan to have Naboth disgraced and killed, thus providing the king with the property. There are two things at work here. First, the thing that Naboth understands is that one's property is one's birthright not just from his family, but also from his God. You were not to sell your property, per say, except in the most dire situations...and even then it was to come back to you in the day of jubilee. Naboth stubbornly held onto his property, but it was rightly his to hold onto.

The other aspect is the mindset of the king. King Ahab was not a believing king. He was a wicked pagan. So, Naboth should have understood that Ahab would take whatever he wanted, whether it was his to take or not. For Ahab, the philosophy is *Rex Lex* -- "The King is Law" whereas we have been blessed to live in a nation that has adopted a Biblical foundation for its government, one where *Lex Rex* — the Law is King. The latter is the way it ought to have been in Israel, but none of the northern kings cared

or respected the laws and commands of God...instead they chose to be kings in the vein of other nations around them.

We finally see the death of Ahab and the rise of Ahaziah in his place. When Ahaziah rose to prominence, the scriptures say that he walked in the ways of his father and of his mother. He is the only king in either kingdom of whom this is said (many mention walking in the ways of their father, but there are no other mention of mothers). The picture is that he adopted not only the wicked ways of his father, but of his mother too.

Second Kings begins to transition us from the ministry of Elijah to that of Elisha. Elisha works more miracles than any other Old Testament prophet other than Moses. This is significant, because just as Moses led the people out of bondage in Egypt and into the promised land, Elisha will prepare the people to leave the promised land and return to the wilderness. Further, Elisha is a foreshadow of Christ and many of Christ's miracles are greater versions of the miracles worked by Elisha. So, just as Elijah is the forebear of Elisha; so too is the greater Elijah (John the Baptist) the forebear of the greater Elisha (Jesus).

Prophets: Ezekiel 36-42

As we continue into these latter chapters of Ezekiel, I should remind you that they are highly symbolic and anticipate the establishment of the church and eventually a renewed heavens and earth and a new Jerusalem, with the book of Revelation employing some of this imagery as well.

There are some principles that we can draw from this language, though. First of all, notice the language about the new heart and the Spirit of God dwelling in the people of 36:24-38 and notice that God not only says that he will do this for his people — he does it "not for your sake." In other words, God's redemption is about God's character, not about a foreseen righteousness in us. It is about His election and of this we are beneficiaries.

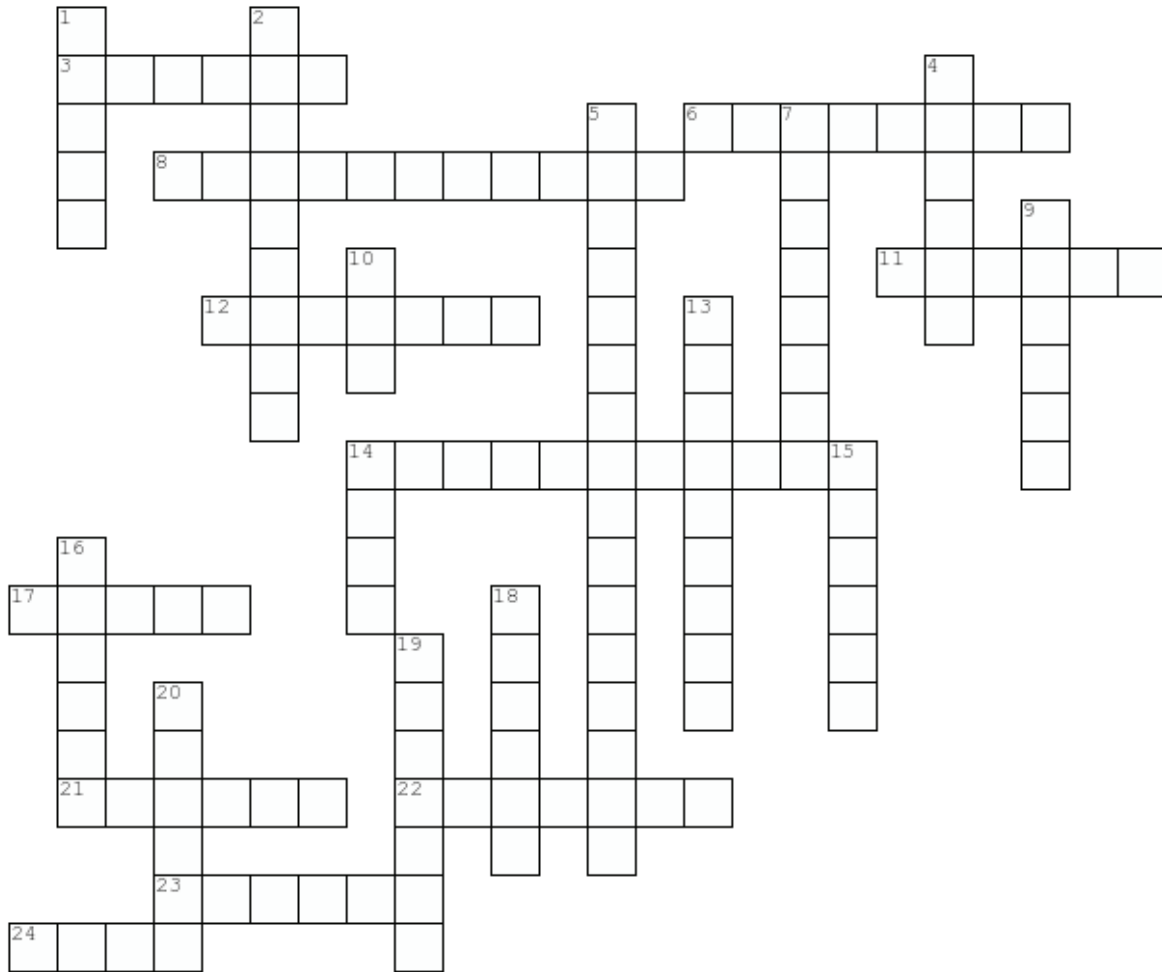
Epistles: 2 Thessalonians 1-3

We close this week with Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica. The church begins on the theme of looking toward the end times. Based on a reading of the first letter (and their being worried about those who had died and whether they would enter into glory), it now seems that they were concerned that they had missed the boat. Thus, Paul assures them that the consummation had not yet arrived and we see reference to a "man of lawlessness" who is also called "the son of destruction."

The various opinions on this passage run the gambit and we do not have time to dig into them here. There are similarities that can be drawn between this passage and Jesus' Olivet Discourse (see Matthew 24-25) as well as to the Book of Revelation. All of that being said, it can still be argued that some of this language anticipates the Romans coming in 70 AD to destroy the Temple and Jerusalem, making the Man of Lawlessness a reference to Caesar Titus, who led the attack.

Regardless of one's views or interpretations of the matter, the lessons at the end of Chapter 2 and beginning of chapter 3 must not be missed. And that is to resist trials in faith, trusting that God will comfort us and establish his good work through us. And second, do not be lazy, but be industrious. Charity is a good thing, but it is wasted on those who stubbornly refuse to contribute to their own needs (or other's). This is why the current welfare system that creates an "entitlement" mindset is immoral and needs to be done away with. This is also the reason that Reformed churches through the ages have created jobs and industries to enable those who do not have work to earn their keep rather than to humiliate themselves and rely on charity. We, too, need to be innovative in creating jobs and industries to promote work.

Week 31



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Across

- 3.** This prophet works more miracles than any other Old Testament prophet save Moses.
- 6.** This false prophet took horns and told the king he would be victorious
- 8.** This is evidence that we are worthy of the Kingdom of God.
- 11.** This man from Arimathea took Jesus' body down to bury it.
- 12.** This prophet was kept locked up for inciting Ahab to attack Syria.
- 14.** Paul writes that the 'Man of _____' who leads the rebellion.
- 17.** God promises to cleanse his own by sprinkling this on them.
- 21.** This man would not sell his vineyard to Ahab.
- 22.** Guard against him (2 words).
- 23.** Ezekiel witnesses a new one of these in his vision.
- 24.** What animal eats Ahab and his family which are in the city walls.

Down

- 1.** Wisdom built her house on this many pillars.
- 2.** Elijah went up into heaven by this.
- 4.** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of this.
- 5.** He 'takes his seat in the temple of God.' (3 words)
- 7.** Ezekiel witnessed a vision of a valley filled with this...anticipating the church. (2 words)
- 9.** Mary Magdalene was healed from seven of these.
- 10.** Those who don't work shall not do this.
- 13.** 'You, _____ of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches...'
- 14.** 'For you are my _____, O Lord, and my God lightens my darkness.'
- 15.** Elisha raised the child of a woman in this city.
- 16.** This Syrian Commander was healed of his leprosy.
- 18.** This nation, Cush, and Put are in the same boat as God.
- 19.** Ahab's wicked wife.
- 20.** It was this measure that Ezekiel used to measure the temple in his vision.