

Bible Challenge 2017

Week 4: January 22-28

Poetry (Psalm 11-13)

One of my favorite themes from the psalms is that of finding my refuge in the Lord. In times of trouble or temptation or when I feel embattled due to a time of crisis, psalms like Psalm 11 is where I find myself leaning toward and to the notion of finding my refuge in He who is mighty and righteous. Notice also, the theme of righteousness that is found here in the psalm. The wicked take their aim at the upright of heart (another way of saying, "righteous") — verse 2. What can the righteous do if the foundations are destroyed? — verse 3. The Lord tests the righteous — verse 5. And why does God do this? It is because He is righteous and He loves righteous deeds and will bless the righteous — verse 7. God is righteous and it is Him we should fear rather than the wicked who can do nothing to harm those who are held in God's mighty hand.

Psalm 12 focuses on God's judgment against the wicked...how he will cut off those with flattering lips and who have tongues that boast against Him or against His people. And while the wicked prowl all around us, God will keep us sure (a reminder of the Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints — that true believers will remain faithful to the end not because we do not face troubles or temptations, but because God keeps us pure until the very end. Psalm 13 follows with David's cry to God for deliverance from his enemies. He is sure of the hand and the goodness of God's provision, but at the same time cries out with the words, "How long, O Lord!" much like the martyrs under the throne in Revelation 6:10. Trust and assurance does not mean that we do not cry out to God in times of trouble.

Gospel (Matthew 5)

We begin the Sermon on the Mount this week. This is the longest single teaching that we have from Jesus, comprising nearly 3 chapters of the Biblical text. Much of the language from this sermon can be found elsewhere in Jesus' teachings — most notably in Luke 6-7 where Jesus preaches a very similar sermon, but that time on a plain instead of on a mountain.

This chapter, though, can be broken up into three sections. The first is the Beatitudes — a series of blessings that also establishes a kind of theology of salvation: One must recognize that they are spiritually bankrupt before God and then mourn or grieve over their sin before they will come meekly to Christ for salvation. Our response to this work that God does in us is to hunger and thirst for the things of righteousness. God then, little by little, develops 2 attributes in us: mercy, purity of heart, and a desire for peacemaking. Finally, the world responds to our salvation with oppression.

The second section to the chapter deals with the relationship Christ has to the Law of God. He is fulfilling it, but not casting it away. In fact, the moral law as summarized in the 10 Commandments will endure until the heavens and the earth pass away.

Finally, the third section of this chapter addresses the intent behind the Law of God. In other words, the people devoted themselves to not breaking the letter of the law, but entirely missed the spirit behind the Law. Thus Jesus repeats the phrase, "you have heard it said...but I say to you" several times, helping the people to understand that, as the Apostle Paul writes, we have all fallen short of the glory of God and that no one pursues righteousness. No One. Thus Jesus addresses commandments 6, 10, 7, 9, and 8 (in that order) before wrapping up with an explanation of loving your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18), emphasizing that it is even our enemies that this law applies to.

Wisdom Literature (Leviticus 10-12)

For those of you who have been struggling through the book of Leviticus and the constant laws, chapter 10 gives you a little bit of a break as it shifts to a narrative account, though the narrative here is anything but uplifting. Two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu chose to break the commandment of God and bring fire for the altar of incense from outside of the temple. We are not told from where the fire came and we are not told their motivations, but they broke the Law of God and were burned to death by God himself as a result of their impudence. So severe is this crime that Aaron is commanded not to grieve over the death of his sons — their actions represented blasphemy and the people of God should be ready to stand against those who would do so...even if those that blaspheme come from within our households.

The seriousness with which God treated these two men is part of the basis behind what we know as the "Regulative Principle of Worship"

in our Reformed circles. In other words, God takes his worship seriously and thus even with Good intentions we are not permitted to invent ways to worship or to adapt things that pagan traditions do. The only things we are permitted to do is that which is commanded in Scripture (something that Nadab and Abihu should have heeded). Thus, our worship includes the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes, prayer, reading scripture, vows, offerings, sacraments, and preaching on the Bible. Things like drama, dance, preaching from a book other than the Bible (for example, from a hymn-text or from a popular writing) is prohibited. Outside of the context of public worship none of the aforementioned things are bad... they are actually quite good, but they do not belong as part of organized public worship.

From this account we descend back into more laws...laws about food and about leprosy. The first often throws people off. Why would God restrict the food ways of the people. Many have taught over the years that these laws exist for health purposes because of the parasites, for example, in pork. Yet, this answer is a bit naive. The fact is that people knew how to handle and cook meat safely and lots of Gentile nations happily ate pork with no ill side effects. The better answer is that the food ways are tied to the clothing rules and are designed to make the people of God distinct and different than the people of the world.

Finally, childbirth is addressed and cleansing and purification from the birthing process. Notice verse 8 as to the animal required if the person was poor and then compare that text with Luke 2:24. This is a confirmation that Mary and Joseph were not well-to-do and were of humble means.

History (Genesis 25-32)

We begin this week with the final marriage and then the death of Abraham. Note the significance of the statement in 25:5 — Abraham gave everything that he had to Isaac. His other sons received gifts, but Isaac was the promised child through whom the inheritance of God would flow...and thus the entire estate belonged to him.

In the chapters that follow, we move through the account of Isaac's life and the birth of Esau and Jacob...God choosing to work through the latter and not the former as a sign of his election (see Romans 9:6-13) and then we move to the life of Jacob and his offspring. We end our readings as Jacob is traveling back to Canaan to make amends with his brother.

Our reading, thus, ends with the well-known and remarkable wrestling match with the mysterious man, whom most consider to be the Angel of Yahweh which is the pre-incarnate Christ. Interestingly, the term used for the wrestling match that is used here is only ever used here in the Old Testament, a reminder that this striving was more than a simple tossing one around on a mat, but a serious engagement by which God was changing the life of his anointed leader. And here we also see Jacob's name being changed by God, much as the name of Abraham before him... for he is called Israel — "one who has striven with God."

Prophecy (Isaiah 16-20)

As we move through Isaiah, we find a series of judgments against the enemies of God. First will be judgment on Damascus (in modern Syria, to the Northeast of Jerusalem), Cush (modern Ethiopia, to the southwest of Jerusalem), and Egypt.

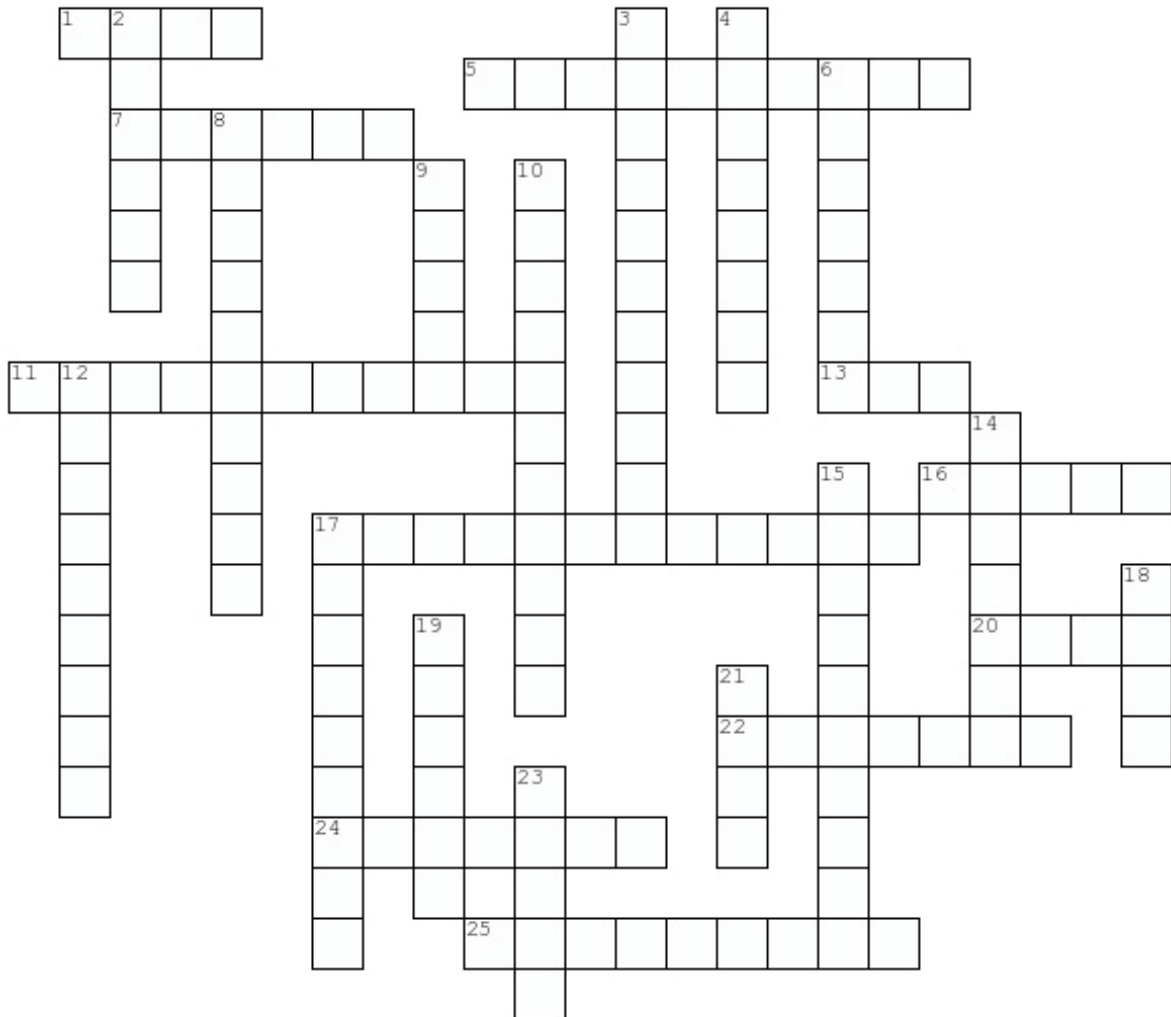
What is surprising is that in chapter 19 there is a promise for a limited redemption in Egypt — those dwelling in 5 cities will repent and worship God. There is some debate as to how this has or when this prophecy will be fulfilled. In Josephus' ancient writings, there is a reference to Onias III fleeing to Egypt for protection and building a city and temple near Heliopolis in Egypt, where many came to worship the God of Israel. In any sense, it should also be stated that one of the themes of Isaiah is that when the Messiah comes, people from the nations will be called to God (the Gospel going out in the book of Acts) and indeed, even today, there are many in Egypt who still name the name of Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Epistles (Romans 8-10)

We conclude the week with some of the most powerful chapters in the book of Romans when it comes to the Sovereignty of God in his election to save and in his election to judge. Paul sums up this theme with a quote from Exodus 33:19 "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

Name: _____

Week 4



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

Across

1. How many Egyptian cities does Isaiah prophesy will come to serve the God of Israel?
5. This book also contains language of the righteous crying out, 'How Long, O Lord?'
7. The wife that Jacob loved.
11. 'For those he foreknew, he also _____.'
13. This will not pass away before the heavens and earth pass away.
16. 'So, he has _____ on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills.'
17. Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (3 words).
20. An Aramaic word that means 'Bone-head.'
22. Another word for Righteous.
24. You shall love this group of people.
25. A tune to which a psalm can be sung.

Down

2. This is the name given to Jacob after his wrestling match.
3. These shall be called the Sons of God.
4. This ancient city is the capital of modern Syria.
6. Esau took the daughter of this man to be one of his wives.
8. 'No, in all these things we are more than _____.'
9. Jacob's scoundrel of a father-in-law.
10. If this is destroyed, what shall the righteous do?
12. God loves this kind of deed.
14. Abraham's wife at the time of his death.
15. Esau despised this.
17. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of these, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.
18. You cannot make this either white or black.
19. Jacob's oldest son.
21. This is the region around modern day Ethiopia.
23. 'You are the _____ of the world.'