

Bible Challenge 2017

Week 5: January 29–February 4

Poetry (Psalm 14-17)

When it comes to Christian worldview, Psalm 14:1 is one of the most basic statements in the faith. It is the fool who states that there is no God. It is with these words that Psalm 53 will also begin (they are nearly identical) and it raises a question...why? Why is it foolish to deny that there is a God? The answer is simple and clear — when you look at the world around you and see the design and precision within its structure, one must be foolish to say that it just came about by random chance. Disorder and chaos (random chance) does not produce order (design). And where there is design, there must be a designer.

Anselm, a influential theologian of the 11th century, AD, started with this principle when he debated that the existence of God was obvious to all rational thinkers...or, in other words, atheism is an irrational position to hold. The argument that he developed was known as the "Ontological Argument for the Existence of God," and by which he proved that the existence of God is a must for reasonable thinkers. Interestingly, many have tried to refute his argument over the centuries...Immanuel Kant and David Hume probably being the most famous, but none have succeeded in undoing Anselm's very simple, but elegant, argument based on Psalm 14:1.

Psalm 17 is the first of only three psalms that are referred to as prayers of David. While all psalms are both songs to be sung and prayers, this is one that explicitly identified as the latter. My encouragement to you as you read this psalm is to not simply read these words, but make this your prayer for at least one or two days this week and let it be a model for how you pray at other times.

Gospel (Matthew 6-7)

We continue with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as we enter into this week. If you remember last week's lesson, Jesus was focusing on the latter half of the Ten Commandments, addressing the spirit behind the Law, which goes far deeper than the letter of the Law itself. In chapter 6, Jesus begins focusing on the first half of the Ten Commandments, largely dealing with the abuse of God's name (Commandment 3) and their idolatry (Commandment 4). Remember, when we speak of taking the Lord's name in vain, that is not simply a matter of crude language, but it is a matter of using God's name for our human purposes or gain. You could reword this commandment this way: "Do not use the Lord's Name for your vain purposes." Convicting, isn't it?

Chapter 7 focuses on applying the principles within the sermon. Here we find some very familiar passages once again, probably the most famous of which being what we call the Golden Rule. One of the most significant statements in this whole section comes at the end of the sermon and tells us about the people's response. Here they are astonished by his teaching...not so much with respect to what he says, but with respect to the authority with which he preaches. The Rabbis' preaching largely consisted of quoting other respected rabbis (just as much Christian preaching today is little more than quoting from one Biblical commentator or theologian after another). Jesus spoke on his own authority as the Word of God incarnate, not parroting the words of men.

Wisdom (Leviticus 13-15)

The ancient laws regarding leprosy are extensive because in that day and era, leprosy was one of the most dangerous diseases known to the people. And, while there is much debate over whether what they called leprosy then is what we still call leprosy today, the concerns over just how contagious this disease was caused the people to be considered outcasts. And, as in many ancient cultures, the priests became the doctors of the body as well as the doctors of the soul and were charged with the task of overseeing the inspection of those suspected to have this disease. And, as if two chapters about leprosy wasn't enough to start your day off on the right foot, we close today's reading with purification rituals for bodily discharges that would make you ritually unclean.

History (Genesis 33-40)

We begin our readings once again with Jacob (now Israel) as he readies himself to meet up with Esau. Sometimes people take pause when they see the reunion of the two brothers and then Jacob, having promised to spend time with his brother, takes his family and continues on to the city of Shechem. Though this might seem odd to us, we must remember

that Jacob is the one given the promise of God and he is not to mix his line with that of his wicked brother. Were they to have spent an extended period living near one another, not only might their children intermarry, but also Jacob would be beholden to his brother as he would have been living on his brother's physical land.

In our readings this week, we also have the rape of Dinah and the sexual abuse of Tamar. The first is about the people of Shechem greedily wanting to blend the people of Jacob into their own culture through inter-marriage. The brothers, of course, use subterfuge to take their revenge, much to their father's displeasure...but who was being righteous? Jacob worrying about how the people would view him? Or, the brothers for avenging their sister's honor? Vengeance is mine, says the Lord (Deuteronomy 32:35), and while the command and law has not yet been given to the people, the principle is certainly found in the Flood or with Sodom. So, is this justifiable? The answer I would give is, 'yes.' The basis of this is that the totality of the land has been given to Jacob and to his children, thus one may see them as magistrates in the land and able to carry out justice as the hand of God.

In Chapter 35, we find a renewal of the covenant with Jacob as well as the renaming of Jacob for a second time, again, a covenantal renewal. In chapter 37, we begin to transition into the next cycle of narratives in Genesis: the life of Joseph. Genesis can be divided into sections based on the life of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Even though Jacob will come back into view in the story, when he does so, it is in the context of Joseph's story. We enter with the prophetic dreams of Joseph, cross over the betrayal by his brothers, and discover, in God's providence, that Joseph is taken to Egypt. He is betrayed again in Egypt, this time by Potiphar's wife and discovers himself providentially in prison along with two of the Pharaoh's assistants, interpreting their dreams. And, while it may be easy, in our human character, to lift up Joseph as the hero of these narratives, more than anything else, they are meant as a testimony of God's sovereign providence over all the nations of the earth, for he has ordained that all these events would come to pass, events that would eventually place Joseph in power over most all of Egypt as well as using him to make a place for his covenantal people to dwell until the time to inherit the land is right.

Prophecy (Isaiah 21-25)

Isaiah continues to relay God's words of judgment upon the people of the world and Jerusalem for their sins. One of the things that has always struck me as odd is that there is a popular book of Puritan prayers that is entitled *The Valley of Vision*, which takes its name from Isaiah 22:5. Yet, the Valley of Vision is a place of confusion and judgment, which seems like an odd context to think about prayer...perhaps the editor should have entitled the book, *Out of the Valley of Vision*, or something like that...clearly the publishers didn't ask my opinion...lol!

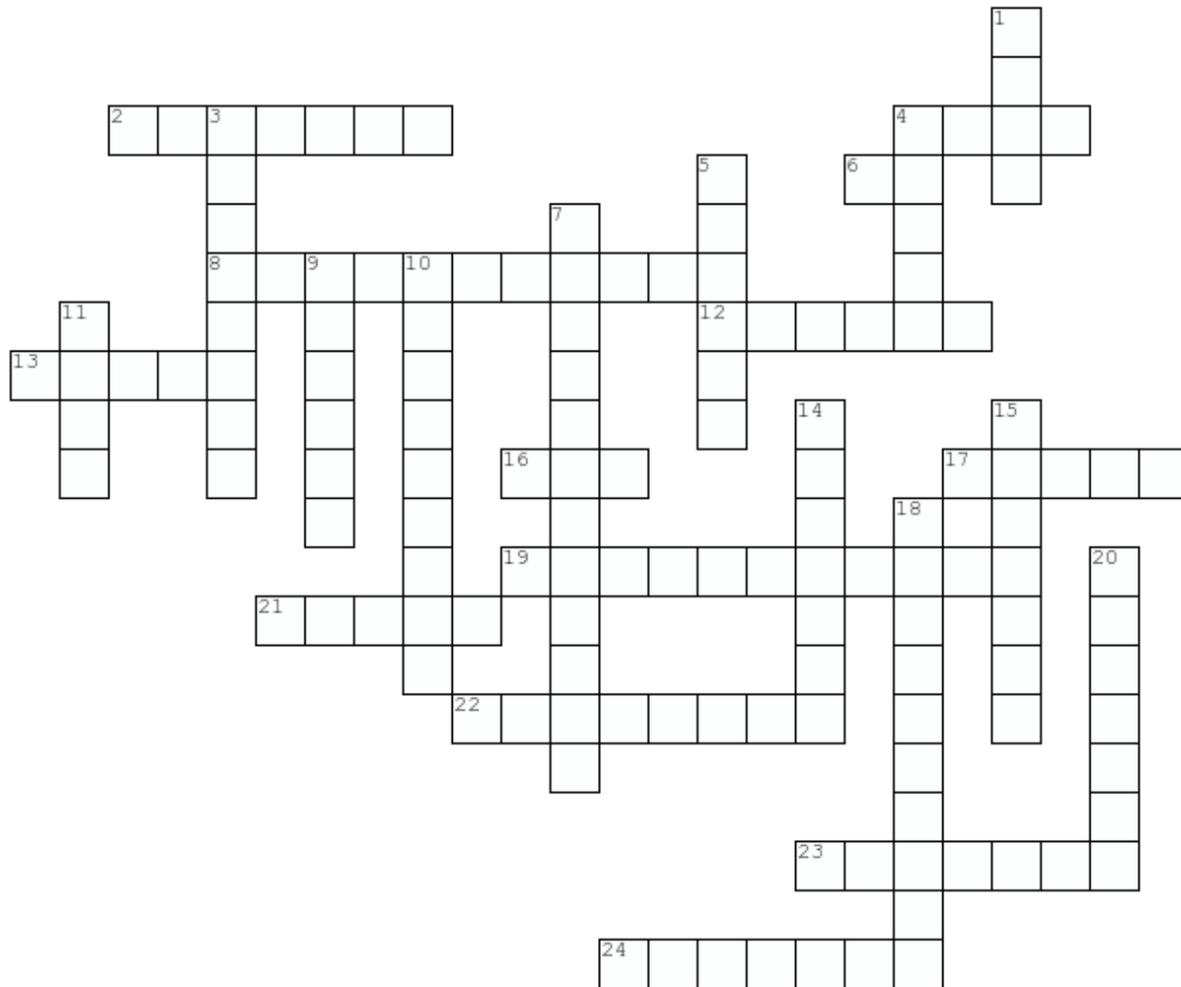
Our readings end, though, with words of praise, where God is glorified for destroying the great enemy once and for all time — the enemy of death. This language will be picked up later in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 15 and in Revelation 7 and 20, to speak of the finished work of Christ.

Epistles (Romans 11-12)

Romans 11 continues the language of God's sovereign election of his people. For if works were a part of our salvation, then grace would no longer be grace (Romans 11:6). As Paul writes, he also addresses the plan of God with respect to the Jewish people...they were cut off from the vine in order that the gentiles might be grafted on and then, upon the gentiles, we find God showing mercy even to many Jews. This language causes confusion in many, making them think of some end-time influx of Jews into the Kingdom. A better understanding of this is that as the Jews are cut off and the gentiles brought in, it will now be gentiles who will evangelize the Jews and through history, because of the gentile witness to Christ, many Jews would repent and be saved.

In chapter 12, Paul begins to change gears from the highly theological to the very practical. Here are marks of those who would profess salvation in Christ — a renewed mind and a sacrificial life. We are to love what is good and to hate that which is evil, overcoming evil with good. How often this is not the case in terms of the way that Christians live out their lives in this world.

Week 5



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

Across

- 2.** A skin ailment that brought great distress to the Israelites.
- 4.** We are to overcome evil with this.
- 6.** Judah's wicked firstborn son.
- 8.** Joseph is sold by his brothers to traders of this clan.
- 12.** Jacob's covenantal name.
- 13.** Hamor's son, Shechem, raped this daughter of Jacob.
- 16.** The language Paul uses in Romans 11:35 comes from which Old Testament book.
- 17.** This man received a very unfavorable interpretation of a dream when he spoke with Joseph.
- 19.** Paul writes that we are to show this to others.
- 21.** This will be swallowed up forever by the completed work of the Messiah.
- 22.** Treating others like you would like to be treated fulfills the Law and this.
- 23.** This son of Hilkiah will replace wicked Shebna.
- 24.** In the Lord's prayer, we pray that God will do this to us as we do to others.

Down

- 1.** The atheist is this.
- 3.** This man bought Joseph to have charge over his household.
- 4.** If works is involved in our salvation, this will not be present.
- 5.** In the Valley of _____ there will be confusion and judgment.
- 7.** We are to seek this first (3 words).
- 9.** Lay up your treasure here so it cannot become defiled, destroyed, or stolen.
- 10.** Jesus taught unlike the Rabbis because he taught with this.
- 11.** We are transformed by the renewing of this.
- 14.** Joseph had a dream where this represented his brothers bowing to him.
- 15.** Isaiah's language of 'Fallen, Fallen is _____' will be picked up again in Revelation 18.
- 18.** The sons of Jacob convinced the Shechemites to do this to themselves and then the sons of Jacob attacked.
- 20.** Instead of residing with his brother, Jacob went on to this city.