

Bible Challenge 2017

Week 8: February 19-25

Prayers (Psalm 25-27)

As we continue reflecting on the psalms of David, pay attention to how much emphasis that David places on the character and attributes of God. Yes, he speaks of his own condition, but largely only in the context of his relationship to God — not seeking to garner favor with his meritorious actions, but to speak of his resting in the hands of an almighty God. This, I think is significant, for it gives us a template by which we can judge our hymns and praise songs. Do we sing of the character of God? Do we speak of the character of God in our prayers? We ought, but sadly, too much of our devotion is focused inwardly and not outwardly. Remember, prayer is not inward meditation; it is outwardly communicating with the glorious King of the universe. That reality should shape the way we pray.

Many of you have likely heard me say that in a number of places, I have written out sermon outlines in the margins of my Bible. We are to be prepared in and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2) to preach the Word and over the years there have been many times when I have been called upon to preach with little to no notice. Thus, the outlines in my Bible's margins to give me some places to go. Psalm 27 is one of those places. What strikes me about this psalm is the language of dwelling in the house of God and how God's house provides for us the safety, refuge, comfort, and freedom that we desire in our own homes and in our lives. If you have been facing a season of discouragement, this psalm is a place for you to go for strength.

Gospel (Matthew 11-12)

We begin our readings this week with a point of doubt in the mind of John the Baptist. It is a reminder to us that even the prophets of God have their times of doubt and fear. Jesus' response to John's messengers (John is in Herod's prison) is to look to the scriptures and to ask if the scriptures are being fulfilled. Such is a reminder to us as to God's view of the significance that the scriptures must play in the life of the believer — everything is tested and tried by them.

We also find a very significant statement about John and Jesus on the lips of our Lord. When speaking to the crowds about John, Jesus quotes from Malachi 3:1 (Matthew 11:10). In context, Malachi is telling the people that before the Messiah comes, there will be a prophetic forerunner...one who, later in Malachi, is called Elijah. Here in this passage, Jesus is alluding to the fact that John the Baptist is the Elijah that was prophesied (and in Matthew 11:14, Jesus explicitly makes that known). And, by making the claim that John is the forerunner, Jesus is also making the claim that he (Jesus) is the promised Messiah.

We also have Jesus' teaching here on the Sabbath. Jesus, of course, is Lord of the Sabbath (so it is a day for us to worship Him and not to sing praises to men), but he also reminds us that the Sabbath day was made for our benefit and not God's. In other words, it is meant (when properly observed) to be a blessing to us and not a curse. Yet, how many people have chosen to make the Sabbath about self rather than God and in doing so have robbed themselves of the blessing it was meant to be...not only growing weary in the flesh but growing weary in the Spirit also.

I want to comment on one more passage from our reading today, and it is the language of the "sin against the Holy Spirit." This sin, Jesus states, "will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come." What is interesting is that this sin is not specifically identified and that has caused many to speculate on just what this sin may really be. For a number of years, based on the context, I suggested that this sin might be the accusation that Jesus is of the devil. That is what the Pharisees were saying about Jesus. Yet last year, as I was preaching on Deuteronomy 29:16-29, verses 19-20 of that passage impressed upon me perhaps the need to rethink this statement, for here once again, we find the language of God being unwilling to forgive one who practices a given sin. The difference between the passages being that in Deuteronomy, the specific sin is mentioned — that sin deals with those who know the Law of God and who choose to unrepentantly break it anyway, thinking, "I will be safe even though I walk in stubbornness of heart." Given that the Pharisees ought to have known better, this explanation seems to fit the context as well. It is a reminder to us, as we know the expectations of God that are laid upon us as God's covenant people, that we ought indeed be a people marked both by obedience on one hand and repentance on the other...never by the stubbornness of our sinful hearts.

Wisdom (Leviticus 22-24)

"Acceptable offerings." Why does Moses put so much stress on the offerings without spot or blemish. The simple answer is that God does not accept that which is second best from his people. Such is the lesson that Cain learned many years back and sadly, such is the same tendency we still have today — keep the best for self and give to God what is left over. Or, perhaps another way of putting it, our sinful tendency is to give to God out of our abundance, not sacrificially. We are called to be cheerful givers and generous

at that, but if we want God to honor the sacrifice we make, it must be a sacrifice and it must be the best of what you can offer.

Much emphasis, in our reading this week, is also placed on the various festivals of the faith. Of course, we no longer practice most of these festivals as they are fulfilled in Christ, yet once again, we find them to be a reminder of the importance that God places on the worship of his people. We also find the second narrative of judgment in the book, in this case, the son of an Israelite woman who had married an Egyptian is being blasphemous. His punishment? Being stoned to death. God's name is to be revered and thus blasphemy is a capital crime.

History (Exodus 7-14)

In our readings this week, we cover Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh, along with the Plagues, all of the way to the crossing of the Red Sea. In the initial segment, we find of Aaron, the definition of what a prophet is. In Exodus 7:1, Aaron is referred to as Moses' prophet. In the verse that follows, we see how it is described: God speaks to Moses, Moses speaks to Aaron, and then Aaron speaks to Pharaoh. In each case, nothing is altered and the words are spoken exactly as they are originally given. A prophet is not a paraphraser of God's word, he relates God's word exactly as it was spoken by God.

Then comes the plagues, first water into blood, then the frogs, then gnats, then flies, then the death of the livestock, and boils, and hail, and locust, and darkness. Then in between the 9th and the 10th plagues, we have God commanding the Egyptians to pay silver and gold to the people (reparations for the abuses in Egypt) and he instituted the Passover sacrifice and feast.

The Passover itself is the most important feast in the Israelite tradition, but not just for Israelites, for Christians as well as Jesus is the "Passover Lamb" that God gave to his own. And thus, it is those whose lives are covered by the blood of the eternal Passover Lamb (Jesus) who will be saved from the destroyer and the final judgment of God. And though we no longer sacrifice lambs at Passover (Jesus' sacrifice is once and for all time — Hebrews 10:10), we remember the Passover whenever we break the bread at the Lord's Table.

The Israelites fled Egypt quickly only to arrive at the Red Sea with Pharaoh's chariots right behind them. And here we find one of the most wonderful and most poorly portrayed events of the Exodus. If you grew up watching Charlton Heston play Moses in the movie, you will likely envision the Red Sea being parted all at once as he lifted up his hands. That could not be further from the Truth. God parted the sea, but it took all night. And God did it through a wind blowing from the east side of the sea, separating the waters. All of this to teach the Israelites patience and trust. In many ways, this was a reenactment of the creation account where God separated the waters from the dry land. And the word that refers to the land on which Israel walks, as they walk across, is a word that refers to "bone-dry" ground.

Prophecy (Isaiah 36-40)

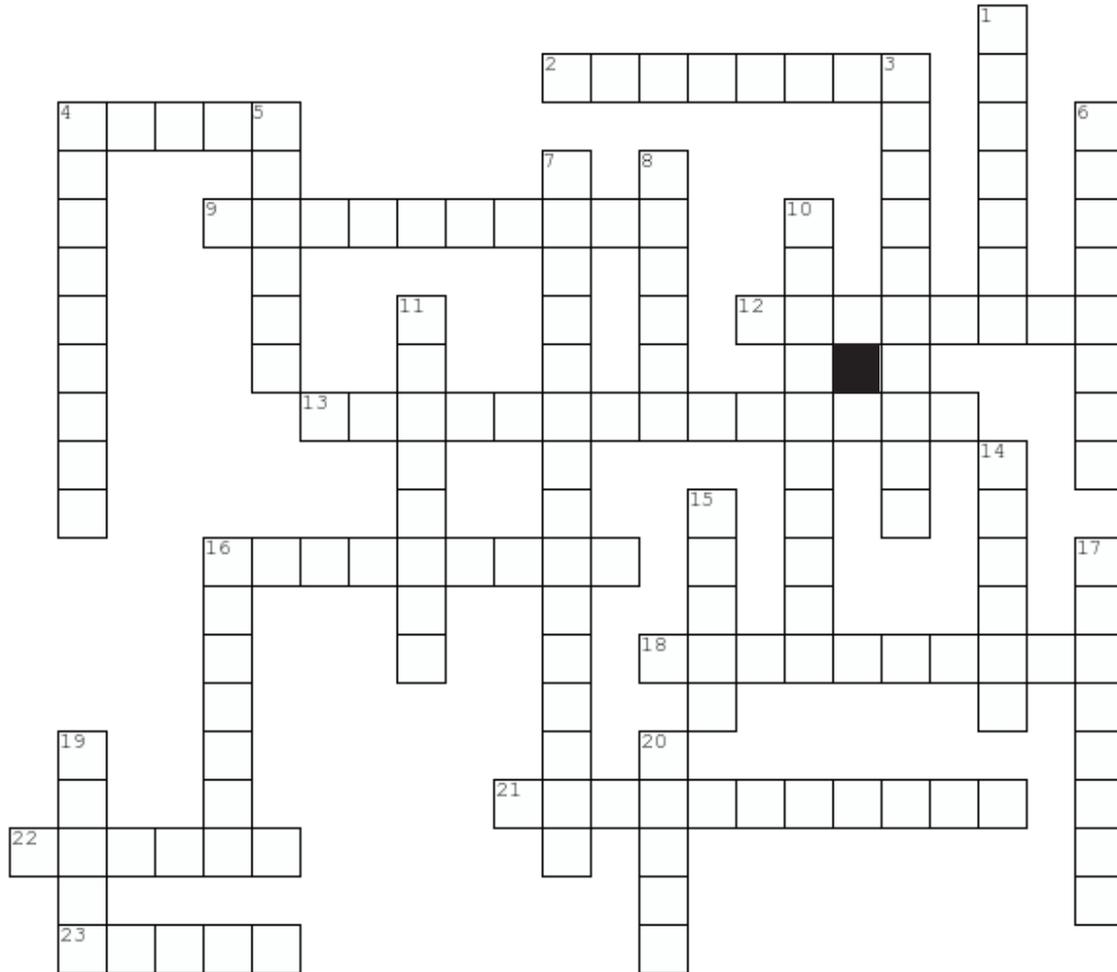
In our passage in Isaiah, we have a little bit of a departure from what we have likely become accustomed to, for we move into several chapters of historical narrative surrounding Sennacherib's invasion of Judah. One of the interesting things about this account is that it is supported by Assyrian archaeological evidence. The tablet known as the "Taylor Prism" contains the annals of Sennacherib and his assault on Jerusalem. What is interesting about these annals is just when Sennacherib states that he had Jerusalem like a bird in a cage, he returns home with no real explanation why. Isaiah gives us that explanation as he relates how the Angel of Yahweh (the Pre-Incarnate Christ!) went through the camp and slew 185,000 people in the Assyrian camp. Such is the judgment of God and woe to those who will find themselves standing at odds with the Lord of Hosts.

Chapter 40 marks a major division in the book of Isaiah, shifting from passages primarily about Judgment and about how God will deliver his faithful to language that anticipates the coming Messiah. And thus, the words, "Comfort, Comfort my people," are words we are all too familiar with, predicting the coming of John the Baptist.

Epistles (1 Corinthians 1-3)

The church in Corinth was a mess as Paul addresses this letter to them. Infighting and pride of position had created divisions and partisan groups. We are told by Paul that at some point, the household of Chloe (a woman who clearly is hosting a house church) has revealed this information to Paul and this is Paul's first attempt at bringing correction to the problems. While he deals with problems and issues specifically in this letter, notice the theme of chapter 2 — that of proclaiming Christ. While there are all sorts of problems that can arise in the life of the church, it seems that the heart of all our problems has to do with losing sight of Christ Crucified for our sins and raised from the dead. If we really get captured by that idea, then most all other problems will fall away as secondary.

Week 8



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

Across

- 2.** This was the king of Judah when Sennacherib attacked.
- 4.** It was her house that alerted Paul as to the problems in Corinth.
- 9.** This is the location of the Israelite camp before they cross the Red Sea.
- 12.** The blasphemer's father was of this nationality.
- 13.** My one request is to dwell here. (4 words)
- 16.** 'The Lord is my light and my _____'
- 18.** Isaiah and John the baptist were both voices crying out here.
- 21.** This of God is wiser than men.
- 22.** On the fifteenth day of the seventh month this is a festival that is held (also known as Tabernacles).
- 23.** Jews demand this

Down

- 1.** This Old Testament prophet foretells that the Messiah will have a forerunner.
- 3.** The sin against Him will not be forgiven. (2 words)
- 4.** This Christian feast is the New Covenant fulfillment of Passover.
- 5.** Jesus says that John the Baptist represents this person from the Old Testament.
- 6.** This is the ninth plague.
- 7.** The Sabbath day is reserved to be this for believers. (2 words)
- 8.** Church problems are caused when people lose focus on Him.
- 10.** This person defended Israel until the Red Sea was fully parted. (3 words)
- 11.** Jesus is called this by his enemies.
- 14.** 'Redeem _____, O God, out of all his troubles.'
- 15.** This is how you know a tree.
- 16.** Jesus is Lord of this.
- 17.** This feast is instituted in between the ninth and the tenth plagues.
- 19.** The second plague.
- 20.** This kind of animal was unacceptable for sacrifice.