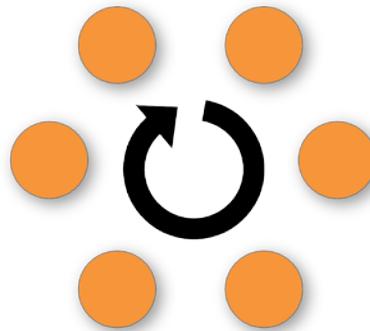


READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Exploring our story through biblical stories

**Proper 21 - Reign of Christ
October 1 - November 26, 2017**



**Volume 24, Issue 6
*D. Andrew Kille ~ Editor***

Formerly BibleWorkbench

Reading Between The Lines – Volume 24

(Formerly *BibleWorkbench*)

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We believe in stories. Stories are how we make sense of our own experience and learn about the experiences of others. Stories are how we pass on perspectives, traditions, understandings and expectations. As we make our way through life each day, we are surrounded by stories—from conversations around the breakfast table to items in the newspaper or on TV to books, movies, songs, pictures and videos.

The Bible is full of stories, too. They speak to us of what is best and worst, hopeful and despairing, creative and destructive about human life and the experience of the sacred in its midst. From generation to generation, human beings have discovered themselves again and again in the Bible story.

Reading Between The Lines offers a different way to engage the Bible stories, to connect them with the world around us, and to explore the resonances those stories stir in our inmost depths. Some forms of Bible study treat the Bible as an objective teacher, a ground for doctrine, or a quaint historical record, others look to it as a book of rules for behavior.

Reading Between The Lines invites you to use your imagination as well as your intellect, your intuition and your reason.

Our assumption is that the biblical text and story is not *about* you, but it *is* you. Engaging at that level requires stepping through the looking glass as Alice did, into a world where assumptions and values are challenged and brought to awareness. An encounter of this kind with the text invites you not simply to analyze and understand the text, but to experience it as a reality within yourself, connecting the text, the world around you, and your inner world.

What's in *Reading Between The Lines*? For each Sunday of the Church year, there are five components:

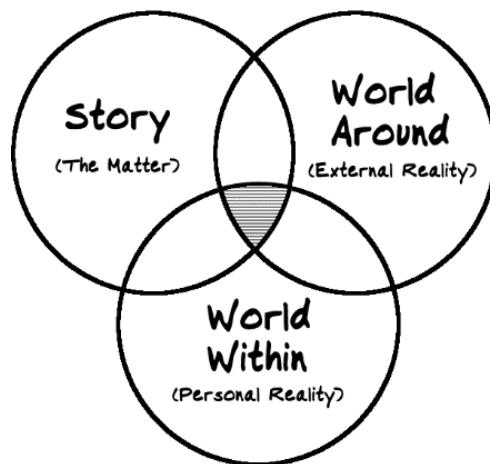
Lectionary Text: Each week, one of the readings designated by the Revised Common Lectionary is featured. The text is taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, and is formatted without verse numbers, to focus more clearly on the story. Line numbers in the margin can help in referring to specific sections.

Begin with the text. Try to read it as if you have never seen it before. *Don't confuse the words with the Word.* Read between the lines, listen to and note your feelings, questions, wanderings, confusions, and surprises. Rather than trying to figure out, master, or understand the text, your initial task is to begin to see yourself in the text and to recognize the text within you.

Entering the Story: Some brief contextual notes to help you get started. It helps you to locate the story in the flow of the larger Bible story, and may include some historical background to help you understand the story better.

Exploring the Story: This series of open-ended questions helps to move systematically from encountering the text to connecting with the world around and to the inner world. Enter as fully as you can in response to questions and suggestions, and try the non-verbal exercises.

The questions can be used "as-is," but be open to other ways of encountering the text that may come to mind. Particularly if you are working with a group, shape the questions to fit what you know of the members. Let the process be "God's playground" where you can stretch and dig and build.



What is Reading Between The Lines?

Between the Lines: These brief comments and questions may open up other avenues of approach to the text. They can be incorporated into the main questions, or substituted as seems appropriate.

Exploring Further: Readings are offered to stir up, console, challenge, upset, enrich, and tantalize you. There is no right answer hidden here. Sometimes readings will contradict each other or other material presented for the same text. They will, hopefully, be timely words from the world for your reflection.

Group Guidelines: Over years of practical experience, we have developed a set of guidelines for using *Reading Between The Lines* in a group setting:

- **Focus on the text.**

Reading Between The Lines is an invitation to enter into the story. It is not a group for exegesis, theology, discussion, or therapy. If the focus begins to wander, come back to the text.

- **"I statements" are encouraged.**

The goal is to explore how *you* respond to the text. This is not to discount tradition and the scholars; but to say that here it is how you hear, feel, think about, and react to the text that is of primary importance.

- **Pauses between responses are important.**

A subtle reminder that we are not in a discussion group. The aim is to engage the text rather than one another. What we hear others say can be crucial. Why they say what they do is a conversation that can take place over coffee later.

- **The goal is not consensus, agreement, or a right answer.**

The richness and value of the experience may depend upon the very opposite.

- **There is no expectation that you explain, justify, or defend anything you say.**

This may be hard to remember; even if you are working through *Reading Between The Lines* alone.

- **Silence is part of the process/ silence can be pregnant.**

Alone this may simply be about taking your time and allowing some in-between spaces. In the silence there is a chance not only to ponder what others have said, but to hear the echo of your own voice.

- **Allow space for others to speak**

The richness of the discussion depends on hearing different voices and different perspectives, not just one.

- **You can change your mind as often as you like.**

"How do I know what I think until I hear myself say it?" In this process, once you hear what you have said, feel free to change your mind not once, but over and over again.

- **Honestly try the nonverbal exercises.**

This is not an art or theater competition. Silence your inner critic and be prepared to be amazed and enlightened.

- **What is said in the RBTL group stays in the group.**

In the group, we touch sacred ground in ourselves and each other. Have the respect for the group and yourself to honor that confidentiality.

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Lectionary Readings ~ Year A
Revised Common Lectionary

First Reading	Exodus 32:1-14
Psalm	Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23
Second Reading	Philippians 4:1-9
Gospel	Matthew 22:1-14

Proper 23
October 15, 2017

Exodus 32:1-14

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

5 Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" When 10 Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD." They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 15 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' The LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.'"

But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why 20 should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?' Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall 25 inherit it forever.'" And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

ENTERING THE STORY

This lectionary selection is the second half of an extended narrative telling of Moses' visit with the Lord on Mt Sinai (Exodus 24:12-18). The Lord commands Moses to meet him on the mountain where he will give him the tablets of stone with the law and the commandment for their instruction. Moses enters a cloud of God's glory for six days and on the seventh days the Lord calls Moses out of the cloud to meet him. When the people below look to the mountain they see only a devouring fire. Moses is on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. It is during this "delay" to come down the mountain that the people ask Aaron to "make gods" for them and he fashions the golden calf (Exodus 25:1-32:1). Take time to read over what is delaying Moses on the mountain top before exploring the text.

EXPLORING THE STORY

1. Where is this story taking place? Recall "why" the wilderness, and from whence the people have come. What do you recall of their journey through the wilderness on the way to a Promised Land thus far? The Lord commands Moses to the mountain top for what reason?

When the people look up to the mountain where Moses has gone what do they see? What might they imagine is happening? What do you suppose they think is going on between Moses and the Lord? Moses is *delayed*. How long does he delay returning to the people? As those days pass and they wait what do you imagine they may be thinking and feeling? Their greatest hope? Their worst fear?

As you read over Exodus 25:1 to 32:1 what do you learn about what is happening on the mountaintop? What are Moses and the Lord doing and discussing during this forty day and forty night delay? List below some of the things the Lord tells Moses the people are to do and make:

How do you imagine Moses is feeling during this delay? What might he be thinking and wondering about what is happening down below?

What do you suppose the wait is like for Aaron? What might be his concerns and anxieties? How do you suppose he feels when they come to him asking him to "*make gods for us*"? What are they wanting? What choices does Aaron have? The implications of such choices might be what?

How would you describe what happens when the *delay* ends and Moses returns down the mountain only to hear below *the sound of revelers* and he sees *the calf and the dancing*? [Exodus 32:15-20]

2. As you look around your world today where do you see people who are frightened and uncertain when their leaders are "delayed" at a distance and beyond their reach? Who are the people at the bottom of the mountain who are left estranged and frightened when those they depend and count

upon are “delayed” and out of touch? How does this happen in a nation, church, parish, business, non-profit or social welfare organization? What is the “delay” by the leaders that makes them anxious and leads them to search for “other gods” and answers?

Who are the Aarons in your world, who because they are frightened, compassionate, greedy, disloyal, or ambitious, are making other gods for the people? How is the dancing and revelry happening in government and religious institutions meant to ease the fear and anxiety of those who feel deserted and desolate?

How does this story happen in a family? In a marriage or special relationship between two people? Between a parent and child? How does the other get “delayed” with important things in ways that upset and make the waiting one uneasy? When we are left behind, or below, and the one who we count on is gone for “forty days and forty nights,” what are the kind of golden calves we make? Who is the Aaron who enables and encourages us to fashion other gods or loves?

3. When in your life did the one you counted upon most leave, promise to return only to be “delayed” for too long? What do you recall of the fears and anxieties over an absent parent, sibling, lover, mate, best friend? What did you do as the waiting intensified? What is the golden calf you turned to, to take his or her place? Who was the Aaron who helped you fashion your replacement and surrogate? What happened next?

What do you recall of being the Moses one who the other or others depended upon? How were you “delayed” doing what was important business on the mountaintop? What was it like to come down the mountain, hear the sound of revelry and dancing, and discover an Aaron who created for the other(s), a golden calf? What happened next?

4. What do you know of this story as an inner drama? How does the same plot continue to unfold in your dreams and anxieties, your fears and depressions, your anxieties and your longing? What do you know of a part of yourself that is delayed on the mountaintop, busy with important matters, while the rest of you waits, wonders and worries? What is your Moses so consumed and concerned with?

What of an inner Aaron who knows something about having to settle for second best and is skillful in turning your treasures and wealth into a golden calf that will still your fears and quiet your longings?

What do you know of a tension between your Moses and your Aaron? What do they have to say to each other? How might you experience a costly struggle between your preoccupied Moses and your fearful Aaron? What do you know of their tension with one another in your life each day?

BETWEEN THE LINES

Bill asks what Aaron might be feeling when the people come to him and ask him to make gods for them. I find myself wondering what the people are feeling as they come. What might it have been like if it was just one person asking? How do you imagine that conversation might have gone? How does that

situation change when Aaron is faced with more than one person? How many? Was it an “ask” or something else? What do you imagine would have happened if Aaron said no?

- Bill Lindeman (blindeman@educationalcenter.org)

And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

This is just one of the stories in the Hebrew Bible in which someone argues God out of taking some course of action (usually destruction) See, for example, Gen. 18:20-33 or Amos 7:2-3. What might that say about God’s ways of dealing with people? How would you describe the God you find in this story? Have you ever found yourself arguing with God? About what? What moved you to do so? What sort of reply did you feel you got, or did not get, from God?

- Andy Kille (editor@educationalcenter.org)

EXPLORING FURTHER

From *A Book of Psalms: Selected and Adapted from the Hebrew* translated by Stephen Mitchell

Psalms 15

Lord, who be-trusted with power,
and who may act in your place?
Those with a passion for justice,
who speak the truth from their hearts;
who have let go of selfish interests
and grown beyond their own lives;
who see the wretched as their family
and the poor as their flesh and blood.
They alone are impartial
and worthy of the people's trust.
Their compassion lights up the whole earth,
and their kindness endures forever.

From *Concerning the Book that is the Body of the Beloved* by Gregory Orr

The beloved moves through the world.
Is the world.
Becomes the hundred things we love
Or the one and only thing or person
We love.

From *Silence* by Shusaku Endo

“It's not because of any prohibition nor because of persecution that Christianity has perished. There's something in this country that completely stifles the growth of Christianity.”

The words of Ferreira, uttered slowly syllable by syllable, pierced the priest's ears. “The Christianity they believe in is like the skeleton of a butterfly caught in a spider's web: it

contains only the external form; the blood and the flesh are gone." So Ferreira had gone on with blazing eyes. And somehow in his words

there was a certain sincerity unlike the self-deception of a defeated man.

From *Essential Rumi*, translations by Coleman Barks

Let yourself be silently drawn
by the strange pull of what you really love.
It will not lead you astray.

From "Camas Lilies" in *Blessing the Bread: Meditations* by Lynn Ungar

And you—what of your rushed
and useful life? Imagine it setting it all down—
papers, plans, appointments, everything—
leaving only a note: "Gone
to the field to be lovely. Be back
when I'm through blooming."

From "To the Soul" by W.S. Merwin in *Present Company*

Is anyone there
if so
are you real
either way are you
one of several
if the latter
are you all at once
or do you
take turns answering

From "The Benedict Option" by David Brooks at *NewYorkTimes.com*

Faith seems to come in two personalities, the purist and the ironist. Purists believe that everything in the world is part of a harmonious whole. All questions point ultimately to a single answer. If we orient our lives toward this pure ideal, and get everybody else to, we will move gradually toward perfection.

The ironists believe that this harmony may be available in the next world but not, unfortunately, in this one. In this world, the

pieces don't quite fit together and virtues often conflict: liberty versus equality, justice versus mercy, tolerance versus order. For the ironist, ultimate truth exists, but day-to-day life is often about balance and trade-offs. There is no unified, all-encompassing system for correct living. For the ironists, like Reinhold Niebuhr or Isaiah Berlin, those purists who aim to be higher than the angels often end up lower than the beasts.[...]

The right response to the moment is...Orthodox Pluralism. It is to surrender to some orthodoxy that will overthrow the superficial obsessions of the self and put one's life in contact with a transcendent ideal. But it is also to reject the notion that that ideal can be

easily translated into a pure, homogenized path. It is, on the contrary, to throw oneself more deeply into friendship with complexity, with different believers and atheists, liberals and conservatives, the dissimilar and unalike.

From The Dangerous Safety of College by Frank Bruni at *NewYorkTimes.com*

The moral of the recent melee at Middlebury College, where students shouted down and chased away a controversial social scientist, isn't just about free speech, though that's the rubric under which the ugly incident has been tucked. It's about emotional coddling. It's about intellectual impoverishment.

Somewhere along the way, those young men and women—our future leaders, perhaps—got the idea that they should be able to purge their world of perspectives offensive to them. They came to believe that it's morally dignified and

politically constructive to scream rather than to reason, to hurl slurs in place of arguments.

They have been done a terrible disservice. All of us have, and we need to reacquaint ourselves with what education really means and what colleges do and don't owe their charges.

Physical safety? Absolutely. A smooth, validating passage across the ocean of ideas? No. If anything, colleges owe students turbulence, because it's from a contest of perspectives and an assault on presumptions that truth emerges—and, with it, true confidence.

Contributed by Bill Dols; address comments and responses to bdols@educationalcenter.org

What We're Reading

Al Ledford: I'm working my way through *House of Names* by Colm Tóibín. It's a retelling (in English) of the Greek myth starring Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and their children, Orestes and Electra. "Game of Thrones" has nothing on this. If you can't judge a book by its cover, you might judge it by its first line: "I have been acquainted with the smell of death." So says Clytemnestra. Tragedy, love, jealousy, hate, pain, revenge; it's all there.

Melissa Thomas: The last two books I've read both address themes of the sacred feminine and the other. I'm currently reading Alice Hoffman's *The Dovekeepers* (2011). Set in 70 CE it is a fictionalized retelling of the siege of Masada, a mountain in the Judean desert where 900 Jews held off the Romans for months. According to the ancient historian Josephus only two women and five children survived. This novel focuses on four unique and extraordinary women whose lives intersect while they try to survive those harrowing days. It is a remarkable book so far...

Lighter, and set in current day, Hoffman's *Practical Magic* (1995) hones in on the theme of the "other" highlighting a family of female witches beginning several generations and a few hundred years earlier. Set around the Salem, Massachusetts area, the Owens women are blamed for everyone's bad luck, including their own! It's a great exploration of unity, family differences, forgiveness of self, love, and yes...magic. Sadly, this great book was made into a mediocre movie that explored none of these themes.

Bill Lindeman: I just finished reading again *A Failure of Nerve* by Edwin Friedman. He managed to get most of it on paper before he died in 1996. It was completed in its final form by colleagues, friends and family, and was considered by Ed to be the summation of all his life's work. In his first book, *Generation to Generation*, published in 1985, Ed basically took the work of psychiatrist, Murray Bowen (Family Systems Therapy), and translated it for churches and institutions. The title of this book, *A Failure of Nerve*, refers to the widespread inability of leaders across all disciplines to have the "nerve" to, first and foremost, manage their own functioning, (including their anxiety), instead of first relying on fixing other people, institutions, and nations by their skill, technique, and diagnosing. He refers to this ability to self-regulate as self-differentiation. That is, maintaining a clear connection with one's family, church, institution, nation, etc., without being overwhelmed by the anxiety in that particular system. This kind of stance shows itself by making decisions that are thoughtful, well-reasoned responses as opposed to reactions in the moment that are always driven by the anxiety of the surrounding situation, as well as your own. In short, it calls for a kind of leader who knows the difference between their stuff and other peoples' stuff. The kind of universal leadership he describes is illustrated in his oft-used phrase in the book, "from parents to presidents." Highly recommended reading!

Bill Dols: I returned to the Jung Institute in Washington recently to hear Ann Ulanov, professor of Psychiatry and Religion at Union Theological Seminary in New York, speak. She is an amazing teacher and, I was reminded, a gifted writer. I read again, after many years, an earlier book, *Picturing God* (Cowley Publications 1986). I was reminded again of the riches and mystery of the psyche as described by Jung. Ulanov has a sense of the symbolic that undergirds all the work of RBTL.

I have a shelf full of 700 page books that never got finished. *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (Simon & Schuster, 2017) by Francis Fitzgerald is instead a page-turner that ended too soon. The history of religious people intent upon shaping America is clear and familiar. One of the

Further Exploration: What We're Reading

valuable parts of the reading was to be reminded how in my ordained life I ignored some of the important movements in church and state that continue to influence us today. An important thread weaves through the pages in the career of Jay Sekulow who early on served as president of Pat Robertson's American Council for Law and Justice and has gained prominence these days as attorney for the President.

Robert Lowell: Setting the River on Fire (Knopf 2017) by Kay Redfield Jamison is one of the most moving biographies in years. It is the story of a man haunted as bi-polar who experienced twenty deaths in terms of manic depressions leading to hospitalization and came back to life each time, broken but courageously determined. For all the darkness in his life, Lowell the genius poet mirrors in an abiding way the kind faults and failures that plague each of our lives. It is a heartening if sad account of the foils of being human.

Interviews with Richard Rothstein on NPR led me to his new book *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (Liveright 2017). It reminds me of the dark underside of our country that I not only had forgotten but managed to ignore for a lifetime. Coming to terms with "the color of law" may be an essential step toward healing ancient wounds of racial prejudice.

The Christian Century reported recently the death at age 60 of Brian Doyle, poet, novelist, theologian, prophet. You can learn something about this talented man at the magazine website in a piece called "Brian Doyle's Ferocious Attention." You can find there articles and blogs he has written in recent years on religion and culture. Doyle was one of those rare writers who touches me not so much by what he said but how he wrote it. My favorite novels of his are *Chicago* (Picador 2016), *The Plover* (Picador 2015) and *Mink River* (Oregon State University Press 2010). Doyle was a gifted observer of the symbolic world around and within us. I am saddened by his death at so early an age.

Kenneth J. Meyers: Book Review: *Jesus Stories – Traveling Toward Testimony* by H. Stephen Shoemaker (Judson Press, 2016)

Finally. Finally a book that theologically and intellectually forms the functional foundation that the church is the "steward of the Jesus story" (p. ix). What's more, the book is highly readable for lay and clergy folks.

I am speaking of *Jesus Stories: Traveling Toward Testimony* by noted author, scholar and pastor, H. Stephen Shoemaker.

In Thomas Groome's book, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, he writes that faith formation comes to us best when we find the intersection between God's Story and our own story. This pilgrimage to such an intersection can be brilliantly enriched with Shoemaker's book. It is a gift to the church and those seriously searching for a Jesus life.

Shoemaker distinguishes between a search for the historical Jesus and the "more-than-historical Jesus" or between the "figure who lived in first-century CE Galilee" and the "one who is alive to us in the Spirit of God" (p.1). This approach promotes one's personal faith formation story while fully engaging the Jesus story.

The readability of Shoemaker's book is remarkable. With his vast scholarship, he provides a synthesis with the Gospels at many levels for a broad and thoughtful resource.

Most of all, Steve's pastoral approach invites the reader into serious connections for faith responses. It guides the pilgrim of faith toward future practice to engage in authentic lives and model justice.

Every congregational faith formation minister will do well to include this extraordinary book into the overall curriculum. There is power in the Jesus story when it intersects with our own stories. Go forth and find that intersection.

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Note: All Bible passages are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, Oxford University Press, copyright © 1989, unless otherwise indicated. Pentecost selections from Hebrew Scripture are those linked to the Gospel for that Sunday, not the semi-continuous selections available in the Revised Common Lectionary.

Volume 24.1

<u>Date</u>	<u>Selection</u>
Nov 27	Matthew 24:36-44
Dec 4	Isaiah 11:1-10
Dec 11	James 5:7-10
Dec 18	Matthew 1:18-25
Dec 25	John 1:1-14
Jan 1	Matthew 2:13-23
Jan 8	Isaiah 42:1-9
Jan 15	John 1:29-42
Jan 22	Matthew 4:12-23

Volume 24.2

<u>Date</u>	<u>Selection</u>
Jan 29	Matthew 5:1-12
Feb 5	Matthew 5:13-20
Feb 12	Matthew 5:21-37
Feb 19	Matthew 5:38-48
Feb 26	Exodus 24:12-18
Mar 5	Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7
Mar 12	Matthew 17:1-9
Mar 19	Psalm 95
Mar 26	John 9:1-41

Volume 24.3

<u>Date</u>	<u>Selection</u>
Apr 2	Ezekiel 37:1-14
Apr 9	Matthew 21:1-11
Apr 16	Acts 10:34-43
Apr 23	Acts 2:14a, 22-32
Apr 30	Acts 2:14a, 36-41
May 7	Acts 2:42-47
May 14	John 14:1-14
May 21	John 16:12-15
May 28	Acts 1:6-14

Volume 24.4

<u>Date</u>	<u>Selection</u>
Jun 4	Acts 2:1-2
Jun 11	Matthew 28:16-20
Jun 18	Matthew 9:35-10:8 (10:9-23)
Jun 25	Genesis 21:8-21
Jul 2	Genesis 22:1-14
Jul 9	Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
Jul 16	Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23
Jul 23	Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Volume 24.5

<u>Date</u>	<u>Selection</u>
Jul 30	1 Kings 3:5-12
Aug 6	Matthew 14:13-21
Aug 13	Matthew 14:22-33
Aug 20	Genesis 45:1-15
Aug 27	Matthew 16:13-20
Sep 3	Exodus 3:1-15
Sep 10	Matthew 18:15-20
Sep 17	Matthew 18:21-35
Sep 24	Matthew 20:1-16

Volume 24.6

<u>Date</u>	<u>Selection</u>
Oct 1	Philippians 2:1-13
Oct 8	Isaiah 5:1-7
Oct 15	Exodus 32:1-14
Oct 22	Matthew 22:15-22
Oct 29	Matthew 22: 34-46
Nov 5	Joshua 3:7-17
Nov 12	Matthew 25:1-13
Nov 19	Matthew 25:14-30
Nov 26	Matthew 25: 31-46

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