

In the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, there is a roll call of many faithful believers from the Old Testament. Hebrews chapter 11 is known as the “faith” chapter. All those people listed in this chapter are commended for their faith:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. (Hebrews 11:1-2)

Through faith they saw the invisible God and knew him as their Father. Through this faith they obeyed their God. Abel offered a more pleasing sacrifice, Noah built an ark, Abraham left his home and went to a strange country, Moses chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than enjoy the riches of Egypt for a season, Israel fled Egypt and crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, Rahab welcomed the spies and saved her family. Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, David, Gideon, Samson and Samuel are all also mentioned by name. In verses 32-38 others are not named but are mentioned for their obedient acts that resulted from their faith:

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about

Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated--the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground

Reading through these verses brings to mind those faithful of long ago who, in the face of constant opposition, endured suffering and sometimes death, in order to obey their God:

Vs. 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms: After Moses died, his assistant Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land. The book of Joshua is a history of the nations that were conquered and how the land was distributed to each of the Tribes of Israel. Joshua’s faith in leading Israel in this conquest of the land of “giants” and powerful kings is a testament to his day by day commitment to the invisible but very real God.

“ After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years, summoned all Israel-their elders, leaders, judges and officials--and said to them: "I am old and well advanced in years. You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you. Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain-the nations I conquered-between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push

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A Great Cloud of Witnesses

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them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you". (Joshua 12:1-5)

Vs. 33 who shut the mouths of lions: Everyone remembers the story of Daniel and the lions' den. Daniel was one of the Israelites who was taken captive to Babylon almost a thousand years after the time of Joshua. Because of disobedience, the Israelites had to leave the land that had been given them. Daniel was one of the exceptions. He was a faithful believer in the God of Israel. As a young man he was taken captive and became one of the "wise men" in the court of the Babylonian king. Many people do not realize that when Daniel was thrown into that lions' den he could easily have been 70 years old. All his life he continued to serve his God. Even against the King's edict and knowing without a doubt that he would be fed to the lions he continued to pray to his God three times a day. That's called faith.

"The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered-in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.' So King Darius put the decree in writing.

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." (Daniel 6:7-11)

Vs. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison: Actually Jeremiah the prophet faced jeers, floggings, and imprisonment. Jeremiah lived during the time of the invasions and final captivity of Judah and Jerusalem by the Babylonians. He was sent by God to the Jewish people to bring the final warning and call for repentance. Not only did the Jewish king along with his advisors and subjects not listen to Jeremiah, they persecuted him, imprisoned him, and kept him in a slimy pit for days, yet his faith remained. He called to God for help.

"When the priest Pashhur son of Immer, the chief officer in the temple of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the LORD's temple. (Jeremiah 20:1-3)

So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud. (Jeremiah 38:6)

"I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea: Do not close your ears to my cry for relief. You came near when I called you, and you said, 'Do not fear.' (Lamentations 3:55-57)

All these faithful are called "witnesses" in Hebrews 12. The origin of this word "witness" is the word "martyr" in English. Their faith in the invisible God was tested to the utmost. This is what faith is all about. These are the examples given to us as encouragement to persevere in faith and obedience in the face of every obstacle:

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 11:29 – 12:3)

* * *

How did they do it? How did Noah have enough faith to build a huge ship and then take his family aboard when no one else would listen to his words of warning? How did Abraham have the faith to take his only son up that mountain to offer him up as a sacrifice? How did those three young Jewish captives have the faith not to bow down to the image that everyone else was worshipping when they knew the consequence would be a fiery furnace?

In reality we can identify more with the anxious young father who cried: “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” Or with the disciples when they beseeched Jesus: “Increase our faith!” We want to believe. We want to have faith. Would we have enough faith to face persecution, torture, even death for the name of Christ? Do we have enough faith to face the daily difficulties and make the right decisions so that we are truly servants of the Most High God?

In reading through the examples given us in the Bible of the faithful, there is one thing certain: their faith was personal. It was based on knowing their God. The testimony

concerning Noah was that “he walked with God”. Abraham was called the “friend of God.” The three Jewish youths, when threatened with the fiery furnace, were able to tell the powerful King of Babylon: “the God we serve is able to save us from it”. In the Gospel records the people who came to Jesus for healing knew that God was with him and that he had healed others. In persistence and hope they came to him armed with the knowledge and faith that he could heal.

God has given us every resource we need to learn about him and about his Son. There is no need for us to lack faith because of lack of knowing God as all those faithful of old knew him and believed him.

The Psalmist tells us in Psalm 19 about two of the resources that God has given us to learn about him and come to know him:

First is the creation itself. It tells about the Creator. The wonder, the beauty, the constancy, the detail, the balance and symmetry all tell us about the One who brought all this into being:

The heavens declare the glory

of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world. (Psalm 19:1-4)

Paul, the writer of the letter to the church in Rome wrote that people are without excuse in not recognizing God through the creation:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been

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Now, Two Opportunities to be part of a Bible Study Group!

Friday Mornings

Join with us Friday Mornings at 11:00AM at the Hampton Inn and Suites (across the street from the Patrick Henry Mall) where we are studying the Bible readings for the week according to the schedule on the cover of this newsletter.

Thursday Evenings

We meet every Thursday at the Hampton Inn and Suites, 12251 Jefferson Ave, across the street from the Patrick Henry Mall. The Thursday evening class starts at 7:00 PM and ends at 8:30 PM. See Page 7 for special seminars.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”

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made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20)

There are many in this world who choose to deny that there is an all-powerful Creator who has created and continues to sustain the heavens and the earth. They do so at their own peril according to Paul. For those willing to consider God’s handiwork, the power, beauty, and loving compassion of the Creator comes through loud and clear.

The second resource that’s given is the word of God. God has given us inspired writings through his prophets and servants to teach us about him, about his Son, about his plan and purpose for his creation, and about his plan and purpose for each of us. Paul tells us again in Romans:

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

The Psalmist tells us the same thing:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.

The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.

By them is your servant warned;

in keeping them there is great reward.

(Psalm 19:7-11)

God, through the Bible, has given us everything we need to know about him. He has revealed his power and glory, he has revealed his character, he has revealed his will, he has revealed his plans for the future.

Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan

to his servants the prophets.

The lion has roared--who will not fear?

The Sovereign LORD has spoken- who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:7-8)

He has also revealed what he requires of us, his people.

He has showed you, O man, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

History, warnings, examples, parables, life stories, prophecies, poetry, the Bible has it all. In so many ways God has reached out to teach us about himself, about walking with him, about believing and trusting and obeying him. Yes, faith comes by hearing the word of God. Faith comes through diligent searching for God. It comes through a gradual process of listening to God’s word and trusting him. Each day of reading the Word brings a deeper knowledge of God and a growing faith in him.

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the

Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:19-21)

All of these verses are from the New Testament but they are speaking of the Old Testament. The New Testament had not yet been completed. Both Testaments have been given to us by the power and inspiration of God. The whole Bible is given for our encouragement, teaching, training in righteousness, and we “do well to pay attention to it.”

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)

* * *

Traces of God's Existence

by N. Trevor Brierly

How can we know that God exists? We can't see or hear him directly, He has hidden himself from us now. How can you know anything about a being that you can't observe directly? This is similar to a problem that scientists, historians and other scholars face.

How do scientists study something that is too small, or too big, to be observed directly? Or something that happened in the distant past, before it could be observed by anyone?

Particle physicists face this problem, since they study the basic building blocks of matter, subatomic particles like electrons, neutrons, quarks, neutrinos, etc. that are far too small to be seen directly. However, you can study something that is too small by observing the effect it has on its environment, on something that is large enough to be seen. Particle physicists use a device called a "cloud chamber" containing supersaturated alcohol and water. It is specially designed so that as particles move through it, it produces tracks that are large enough to be seen and studied, somewhat like a boat leaving a wake in the water much larger than itself. The particles leave a "trace" of their existence.

Historians face this problem also, since they study events and things that happened a long time ago. But many historical events and cultures have left behind "traces" of their existence long after they are gone, such as ruins, artifacts, writing, etc.

God has chosen to keep himself from our view, he is invisible to us. How can we know anything about Him? We can answer this by looking for circumstances in natural or human history where we can see that more-than-natural processes have been at work. We can know about Him and what He has done by looking at the "traces" He has left of His activity. These would be places where God has been at work directly, intervening in natural processes to bring about His desires for the human race.

We would like to look at two such traces in this article, one from the natural realm and one from the historical. There are more of course, many more, but these are two that mean a great deal to myself.

The first trace concerns us as human beings. We are more than just animals, but we are still animals. What kind of animals are we? Where do we fit into the animal kingdom? Biologists have looked closely at us and realized that we belong in a family of animals called "primates". This is a family of mammals that includes lemurs, monkeys and the great apes. This last group is where we fit in. We are part of the family of great apes. This family has 5 species: the gorilla, the orangutan, 2 species of chimpanzee and human beings.

We have a lot in common with the great apes. Our basic anatomy is similar. We all have binocular vision (with depth perception) and we are all tail-less, with grasping hands with fingers and thumbs and large high-quality brains. We are all so-

cial animals and omnivores, and genetically we are very similar. You might have heard that we share 98% of our DNA with the chimpanzees, and slightly lower amounts with the other great apes.

However, we are also very different than our great ape cousins. That 2% genetic difference between us and the chimps includes hundreds of changes: Our proportions are different: our legs are much longer and our arms are shorter and weaker. We're not really suited anymore to swinging through trees, in fact we are not much suited to being forest animals at all. Unlike the other great apes, we have fully opposable thumbs capable of complex manipulation: we can hold a hymn book and also fire a machine gun. There are a number of changes that enable us to survive in a wider range of habitats: we are almost furless, with increased subcutaneous fat and more sweat glands. We are "bipedal" and thus comfortably walk on two feet - great apes are only capable of walking on two feet for short distances. This alone affects us in many ways, for example, giving birth is much harder, since the pelvis of an upright animal is narrower. Our feet are heavily modified for walking - great ape feet are much like hands. And our brains are much larger and much more complex, we are capable of self-awareness, complex language and complicated thought, unlike the other great apes.

Our behavior is different also. We are predators, in some ways more like cats and wolves and unlike the great apes who are mostly fruit-eaters. Great ape social organiza-

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tion is based on a dominant male who is often in conflict with lesser males who would usurp his position. In human societies males work together, particularly during hunting. Our sexual behavior is oriented towards "pair-bonding" (one male, one female) instead of the "harem" (one male with multiple females) structure among the great apes. This is a partial list, there are many other differences.

Even looking at this from an evolutionary standpoint as some may wish to do, at one point in time a branch of the great apes underwent massive and radical change in a short period of time. The basic great ape template was heavily modified. It underwent changes that finally resulted in a creature that could begin to understand God. These changes happened too rapidly for natural processes to account for them. Too many of them happened over too short a time period. It's clear that God intervened directly in the natural processes, beginning with a great ape template, but making radical changes. These changes are part of what it means to be made in God's image. Not in a physical sense, but spiritually and mentally we have been made to be more like God. We are still very far from being like God, but we are at the threshold of understanding.

This trace of God's existence in the natural realm is the radical difference between us and our closest cousins, the great apes. The changes are too great and took place in too short of a time period for this to have occurred naturally.

The second trace is from the history of the human race, specifically the events that took place after the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus puzzled many people. He didn't follow the pattern that people expected of a Messiah at the time. The normal story went something like this: A man, usually quite charismatic, would come to believe that God had appointed him to be the Messiah. The Messiah was understood to be a political and military figure, which specifically meant that he was expected to evict the Romans, morally purify the country and reestablish the Davidic kingdom. There were many men who tried this in the history of the Jews. They would gather followers and weapons and attack the Roman occupiers in the Land. They usually didn't get very far. Rome would come down on them hard, capturing and crucifying the leaders. The followers who escaped would scurry back home and try to forget the whole thing.

Jesus did not follow this expected pattern. He gathered followers, but taught them to love and forgive their enemies, and go an extra mile when forced to carry the pack of a Roman soldier for a mile. Instead of affirming the Pharisees and other religious leaders, he condemned them as hypocrites and oppressors. He ate with collaborators and prostitutes, and wasn't afraid to touch lepers and other "unclean" people. Because of all of this and other things, the religious leaders worked with the Romans to try Jesus falsely and then crucify him. And that should have been the end of the story.

But it wasn't, in fact it was just the beginning of a greater story,

the story of the origins and growth of the Christian church. Very soon after Jesus died many people claimed that they had seen and touched him, to have talked with and listened to him. They began to preach a risen Jesus, and many believed them. The Christian church grew rapidly after that. Believers were so strong in their belief that Jesus had risen from the dead that they were willing to be tortured and killed for their faith.

What happened at that time can't be readily explained, unless you assume that Jesus really did rise from the dead. Only this would explain the phenomenal growth of the Christian church, and the strength of the faith of its members. They taught that Jesus had risen from the grave, and people don't preach and endure torture unless something has made them believe that what they are teaching is correct. This is the second trace of God's existence, the remarkable growth of the Christian church with its incredible claim that the man Jesus Christ had risen from the dead and was reigning over the earth at God's side.

These are only two of the many traces of the existence of God that serve as an affirmation of my faith. There are numerous other traces of the existence of a grand designer, a higher power, a supreme being not covered in this brief article. I encourage you to look everywhere for other traces of God's existence and as you find them, may they be as encouraging to you as they are to me.

Sacrifice Thank Offerings

The faith and obedience that we see in the faithful of old was rooted not only in knowing about the one true almighty God, but also in knowing God in the sense of knowing a friend or someone deeply loved. It is this relationship that we see between the Psalmist and his God in the book of Psalms. The Psalms included in the Bible readings for this quarter include Psalms 33 through 73. Some of these Psalms were written by King David one example of which is Psalm 51. The heading indicates that in this psalm David realizes his sin with Bathsheba and repents. Notice the beginning words. David realizes that his sin has separated him from his God. He is in anguish over this:

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing
love;
according to your great com-
passion blot out my trans-
gressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,

and my sin is always before
me.
Against you, you only, have I
sinned and done what is evil
in your sight,
so that you are proved right
when you speak and justified
when you judge.
(Psalm 51:1-4)

Another Psalm of David shows
his utter reliance on God:

I sought the LORD, and he
answered me; he delivered
me from all my fears.
Those who look to him are
radiant; their faces are never
covered with shame.
This poor man called, and the
LORD heard him; he saved
him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the LORD en-
camps around those who fear
him, and he delivers them.
(Psalm 34:4-7)

Asaph, one of the chief musicians
in the Temple, wrote psalm 50.
This is a beautiful Psalm about
the might, beauty, and glory of
God. In it we are told how to
come close to God and what his
response will be:

Sacrifice thank offerings to
God, fulfill your vows to the
Most High,
and call upon me in the day of
trouble; I will deliver you,
and you will honor
me." (Verses 14-15)
He who sacrifices thank offer-
ings honors me, and he pre-
pares the way
so that I may show him the
salvation of God." (Verse
23)

The Psalms show us how David,
a man after God's own heart, and
others such as Asaph, knew God,
not just in an intellectual way, but
in a very personal way. It was in
this close walking with God that
brought about the faith and obe-
dience that is required in the ser-
vants of God. Begin, then con-
tinue in, reaching out to God in
offering the sacrifice of praise
and thanksgiving. Call upon him
in the day of trouble. He has
promised to deliver when we call
and to show us the way of salva-
tion when we come to him with
true thanksgiving and praise.



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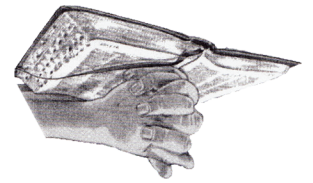
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May 23 to June 27 - The Work of Jesus in the Life of a Believer. A study looking at the life and teachings, the death and resurrection and the current work of the Lord Jesus and how it affects the life and hope and salvation of a believer.

See Pages 3 and 7
for upcoming
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Daily Bible Readings for April, May and June

Read the Entire Bible in One Year

Day	APRIL		MAY		JUNE	
	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa
1	Deut 13,14	Mark 6	Judges 3,4	1 Corinth 11	Job 38,39	Psalms 59
2	Deut 15,16	Psalms 33,34	Judges 5,6	1 Corinth 12	Job 40-42	Luke 17
3	Deut 17,18	Mark 7	Judges 7,8	1 Corinth 13	I Sam 1. 2	Luke 18
4	Deut 19,20	Mark 8	Judges 9,10	Psalms 48	I Sam 3. 4	Psalms 60. 61
5	Deut 21,22	Mark 9	Judges 11,12	I Corinth 14	I Sam 5. 6	Luke 19
6	Deut 23,24	Psalms 35	Judges 13,14	I Corinth 15	I Sam 7. 8	Luke 20
7	Deut 25,26	Mark 10	Judges 15,16	Psalms 49	I Sam 9.10	Luke 21
8	Deut 27,28	Mark 11	Judges 17,18	I Corinth 16	I Sam 11. 12	Psalms 62. 63
9	Deut 29,30	Psalms 36,37	Judges 19,20	Psalms 50	I Sam 13. 14	Luke 22
10	Deut 31,32	Psalms 38,39	Judge 21 Ruth 1	Psalms 51. 52	I Sam 15. 16	Luke 23
11	Deut 33,34	Mark 12	Ruth 2-4	Luke 1	I Sam 17. 18	Luke 24
12	Prov 17,18	Mark 13	Prov 29,30	Luke 2	I Sam 19. 20	Psalms 64. 65
13	Prov 19,20	Mark 14	Prov 31	Luke 3	I Sam 21. 22	Psalms 66. 67
14	Prov 21,22	Mark 15	Job 1-3	Psalms 53	I Sam 23. 24	II Corinth 1
15	Joshua 1,2	Mark 16	Job 4,5	Luke 4	I Sam 25. 26	II Corinth 2
16	Joshua 3,4	Psalms 40,41	Job 6,7	Luke 5	I Sam 27. 28	II Corinth 3
17	Joshua 5,6	1 Corinth 1	Job 8,9	Luke 6	i Sam 29-31	Psalms 68
18	Joshua 7. 8	1 Corinth 2	Job 10,11	Psalms 54,55	Eccles 1. 2	Psalms 69
19	Joshua 9,10	1 Corinth 3	Job 12,13	Luke 7	Eccles 3. 4	II Corinth 4
20	Joshua 11,12	Psalms 42,43	Job 14,15	Luke 8	Eccles 5. 6	II Corinth 5
21	Joshua 13,14	1 Corinth 4	Job 16,17	Psalms 56	Eccles 7. 8	II Corinth 6
22	Joshua 15,16	1 Corinth 5	Job 18,19	Luke 9	Eccles 9.10	Psalms 70. 71
23	Joshua 17,18	Psalms 44	Job 20,21	Luke 10	Eccles 11. 12	II Corinth 7
24	Joshua 19,20	1 Corinth 6	Job 22,23	Luke 11	II Sam 1. 2	II Corinth 8
25	Joshua 21,22	1 Corinth 7	Job 24,25	Psalms 57	II Sam 3. 4	II Corinth 9
26	Joshua 23,24	1 Corinth 8	Job 26,27	Luke 12	II Sam 5. 6	II Corinth 10
27	Prov 23,24	Psalms 45	Job 28,29	Luke 13	II Sam 7. 8	Psalms 72
28	Prov 25,26	1 Corinth 9	Job 30,31	Psalms 58	II Sam 9. 10	Psalms 73
29	Prov 27,28	1 Corinth 10	Job 32,33	Luke 14	II Sam 11.12	II Corinth 11
30	Judges 1,2	Psalms 46. 47	Job 34,35	Luke 15	II Sam 13.14	II Corinth 12
31			Job 36,37	Luke 16		

See page 7 for some thoughts on the daily readings.

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