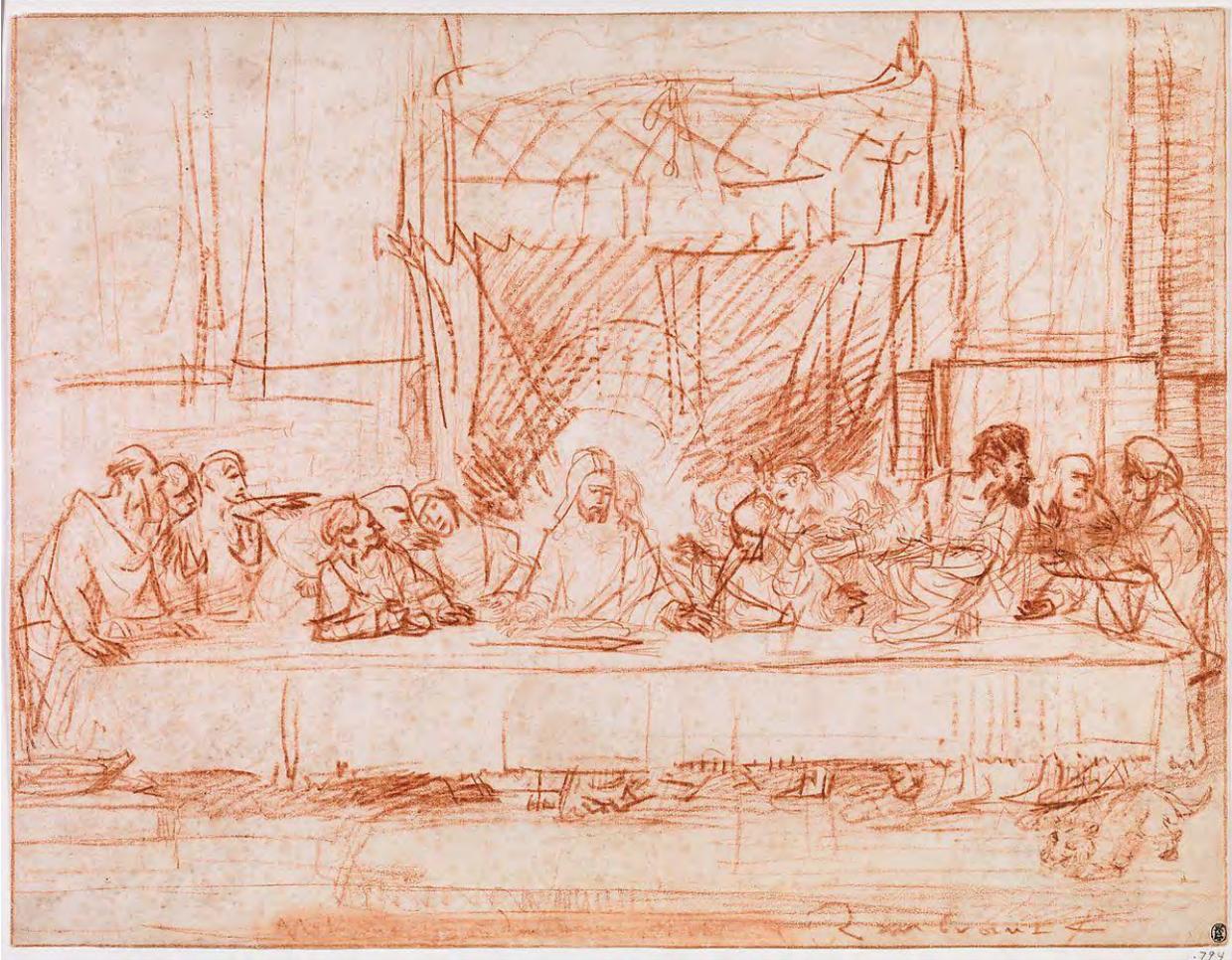


## Deuteronomy

### Farewell address — Deuteronomy 1, John 16:16



*Rembrandt van Rijn, The Last Supper*

Moses' farewell address to Israel can be compared to Christ's farewell address to his disciples in John, both offering their loving last words to their followers. If Exodus was the foundation of the society and worship, Leviticus gave details for worship, and Numbers told of their journey, Deuteronomy was personal instruction from someone who deeply loved his people and wanted the best for them. In many ways it foreshadows Christ's teachings, sketches for what he would fully develop later.

Moses reviewed their life together and looked to the future, just as Christ reviewed his love for them and promised the presence of the Spirit. Both occurred in a moment of crisis and change. Moses would soon die, transfer leadership to Joshua, and the people would finally enter the land.

Moses reviewed the journey from Sinai, appointing leaders, scouting the land, the refusal to enter, and the disobedient and failed military campaign. The structure of the book includes three different speeches, and an epilogue regarding Moses' death. Seven times in the book he reminds them of how they provoked God's anger. Ten times he warns them that if they worship idols and other gods rather than God, they will provoke God's anger and judgment. But throughout the book are many reminders of God's love and promises of blessing.

He reminded them that God had promised to go before them, a promise that we can apply to our daily life. If I am afraid, he is there as a protector. If I am uncertain, he is there to give guidance. If I am joyful, he is there for me to celebrate. Israel discovered that defeat followed when they went off on their own rather than following God, and we discover the same thing. But when we follow, just as Christ invited his disciples to follow, life is an adventure full of victories.

*Am I following where Christ leads me on a daily basis?*

### **Holy War — Deuteronomy 2-3, Matthew 5:43-45**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Christ in the Storm*

Christ's life was full of opposition from rulers, from religious leaders, from demonic forces in people's lives. He overcame all of them, and he even showed his power over natural forces. In this sense, he engaged in a holy war against evil and danger, and we follow in this calling to engage in spiritual battle. In Israel's history the wars were literal as well as spiritual, and yet even in these ancient times the law introduced the concept of limits to war.

Edom, Moab and Ammon were Israel's relatives, and the point was made that God gave them their land, just as he was giving Israel land. In contrast, when a proposal of peacefully crossing land and paying for anything used was turned down by King Sihon, they conquered him. Similarly, they conquered King Og and all the resulting land was distributed to several tribes.

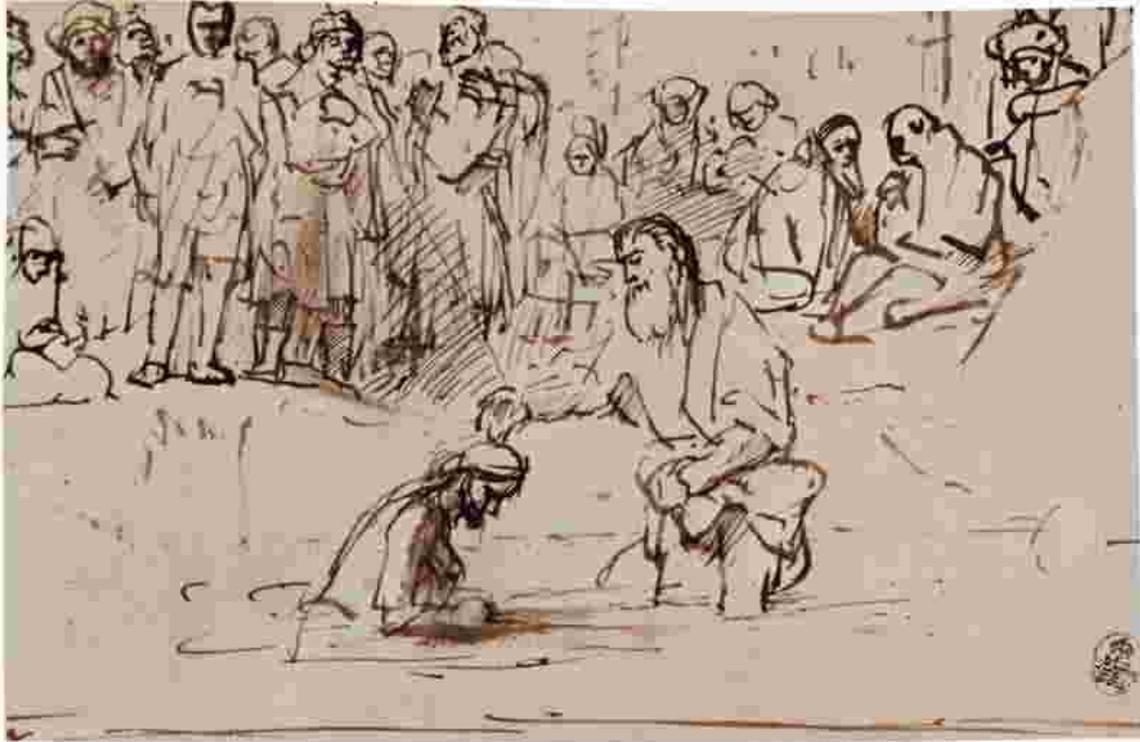
One moral ranking is to say that war for selfish ends, the most common, is the worst. Israel's holy war to defeat immorality was a step up from that. It removed the cruel practices of idolatrous nations, and gave new opportunities to those who had suffered 400 years as slaves.

In the early church the Christians prided themselves on gaining converts by their peace-loving lives. So much so that church fathers thought the prophecies of turning swords into plowshares had been fulfilled. But when Christianity won political power and Christians became soldiers from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the faith was appropriated by the ruler and violence became part of Christendom.

In our time we have had both selfish wars and wars where we can see a moral purpose. But we have also had many effective non-violence movements and diplomatic dialogue which has averted many conflicts. These strategies fit Christ's call to love our enemies and are a moral step up even from war for a just purpose. Our prayers are an important part of engaging in the battles of this world, and while quiet and unseen, prayer is a mighty weapon.

*Am I engaged in prayer to win spiritual victories?*

**Obedience — Deuteronomy 4-5, James 1:22-24**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Baptism of Christ*

Both Moses and Christ highlighted that obedience out of love was the path to pleasing God. God's people are called to obedience to the moral law, but it is to be from the heart, not a superficial and rigid life. While we may not be subject to details of the law that have been fulfilled by Christ or are culturally bound, we still have a responsibility to fulfill the requirement to put God first, to love him, to love our neighbor, to observe the boundaries that are set up by the commandments.

Moses reminded them of the experience of gathering to receive the law. He reviewed the Ten Commandments which described a society based on worshipping a transcendent unseen being who also required justice, something very different from most surrounding cultures of that time. He predicted that when other nations would hear about these laws, they would exclaim over the wisdom and prudence of God's people. To this day we are grateful for what we call our Judeo-Christian heritage.

The hope of living long and prosperous lives in the land could only be fulfilled by this combination of worship and justice. It was easy to fail by worshipping idols, and to fail by allowing injustice, so the ideal was never fully realized. Yet it served as a preparation for the higher ideals of the Kingdom of Heaven. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of the ideals of a beloved community where justice and equality are realized.

The book of Deuteronomy foreshadows Christ's teachings. In these two chapters the fact that God's voice from fire/clouds/darkness spoke and gave them the Ten Commandments is repeated ten times. There was no form to see, but rather a voice to hear. This looks ahead to God's voice at Christ's baptism and transfiguration when the disciples were told to listen to Christ. Christ's teachings continued God's voice to us, and as he left the world he sent the Spirit to continue his voice in our hearts.

*Am I listening to God's voice in scripture and as the Spirit speaks to my heart?*

**Loving God with our Hearts — Deuteronomy 6, Matthew 22:37-39**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, The Return of the Prodigal Son*

Moses and Christ taught us that the primary call to love God puts every other aspect of our lives in order. In this chapter we first hear the call to love God with heart, soul, and strength which Christ called the first and most important

commandment. Following that command and teaching our families to do so is promised as a source of blessing.

The Ten Commandments were repeated in the previous chapter and the first four of those commands flesh out what it means to love God completely. We are not to allow any other god or any other person or any other purpose in life to be above him. He is to be our sole focus. We are not to make imaginary gods to worship and not suppose that an image of something we can see captures him. God promises to lavish his unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love and obey him.

We are not to use his name and then distort who he is by our wrong behavior or our wrong thinking or speaking. We are to dedicate time to think about God, to reflect on his ways, and to rest and appreciate him. For the Jewish people, that day was the Sabbath, and for most Christians it has become Sunday, a day for corporate worship and personal rest.

Christ told us that so much in the law was encompassed in this command to love God. There is no question that mistakes we make become much more clear when we look at them in terms of how we are loving God.

*Is loving God with heart, soul and strength the great desire of my heart?*

**No compromise — Deuteronomy 7, I John 2:15**



Temptation of Christ by Rembrandt

*Rembrandt van Rijn, Temptation of Christ*

The strategy for dealing with the Canaanite nations was to eliminate them; Christ's innovative strategy for dealing with enemies was to love them. Yet even in the New Testament, love does not compromise with the world surrounding us. Christ himself resisted seemingly innocuous temptations from Satan, refusing to compromise.

Loving enemies is compatible with material from this chapter: not intermarrying with those of other faiths, not joining in worshipping other gods, not fearing others, not coveting their riches, and not making objects of worship part of our homes. One can be both loving toward all people, and completely loyal to Christ. Christian hostility today toward people of other religions is completely incompatible with all of the New Testament. The love, humility, fear of God, worship, justice, and obedience called for by Moses are the same qualities that Christ encouraged.

This chapter harshly condemns the idolatrous nations that Israel will replace. But today we recognize we are as idolatrous as the Canaanites and just as deserving of judgement. Christ came to free us from this false way of looking at life and to make us holy, chosen, rescued, faithful, obedient, listeners, relying on God's word, praising, careful, not forgetting, and not being afraid. God in turn loves us with

unfailing love, and blesses and protects us. We can now claim to be people chosen as a special treasure to be his holy people and chosen simply because he loves us.

*Am I living a life of love that does not compromise with sin?*

### **Humility — Deuteronomy 8, James 4:10**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Jesus and his parents return from the temple*

Christ is the most perfect example of humility: coming to earth as an infant, a child obeying his parents, and dying a disgraceful death. Here are three calls to humility. This chapter links humility with testing, saying that their time in the wilderness had the purpose of developing that character quality. There is a practical exhortation that humbling and testing were for their good so they would not think they had achieved wealth with their own strength and energy. Rather it was God who gave power to be successful.

Life repeatedly offers lessons in humility in recurring challenges. In my case these have included relational struggles, illnesses, financial insecurity, a sense of inadequacy in work or ministry, conflicts, concern for my family members and friends, and many more things. Each case is an opportunity to cry out and say, “I need help. I cannot cope with this on my own,” and in that place of dependence God has so often met me whether he intervened to solve a problem or not.

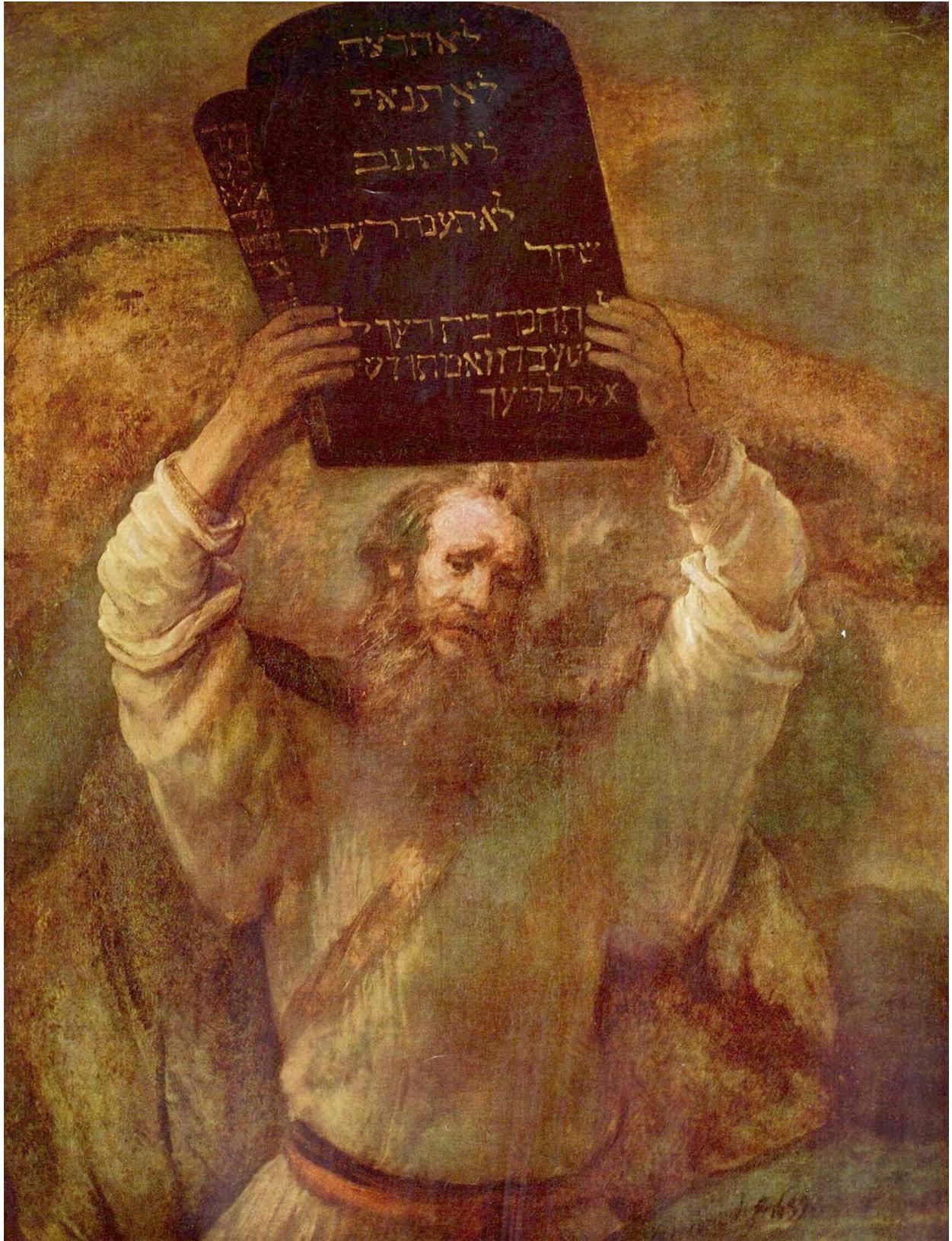
Hopefully, these hard things change me. I learn that I do not know it all, know that I am not able to do everything right, and realize that I rub some people the wrong way. Further, that I make a lot of relational mistakes even in my good relationships. All of these are lessons learned in the time of humbling, and hopefully I will never forget them.

But the chapter promises what is repeated throughout scripture: humility leads to God’s favor. Here the favor is quite practical: lush landscapes, fertile crops,

abundant food, fine homes, savings, etc. Each gift is a reminder to be grateful to the Giver.

*Do I make a habit of humbling myself when aware of my failings?*

**Forty Days and Nights — Deuteronomy 9-10, Matthew 4:2**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Moses Breaking the tablets of the law*

Moses fasted on Mount Sinai for forty days and nights on two different occasions. The first was to receive the Tablets of Stone and covenant instructions. When he descended and saw the people's idolatry, he broke the tablets. His second forty day and night fast was to repent on behalf of the people and plead for mercy.

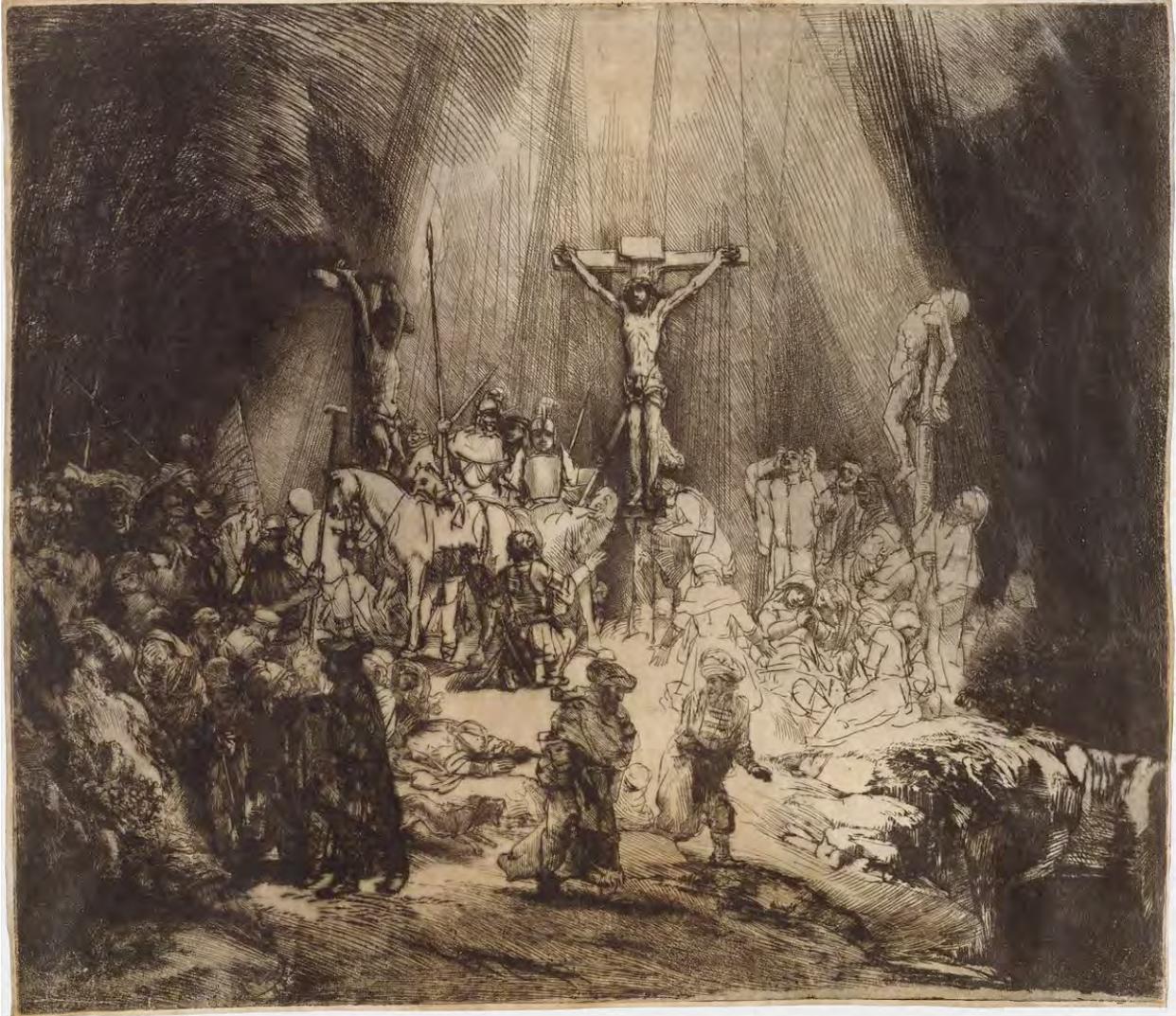
Christ also had two different periods of forty days and nights. The first, fasting in the desert, ended with overcoming Satan's temptation. The second, between the resurrection and ascension, was a time of giving instruction to the disciples.

For us, too, there are two modalities for retreats: they can be times of humbling ourselves or times of receiving instruction. A long history of supervised thirty-day retreats as part of Ignatian spirituality has deepened the spirituality of many. Forty-day devotionals that have helped many people as well. For me, an opportunity to take forty ordinary days and turn them into a time of retreat was a time of deepening my faith.

Moses recalled these retreats in the context of reminding them that God was not favoring them with land because they were good people, but rather because of the wickedness of those they were replacing and to fulfill his promises. This is a good reminder for us to keep our perspective and not suppose that we win God's favor as good people who are devoting ourselves to exceptional time in prayer. We, as they, are recipients of mercy.

*Am I willing to devote extended time to a spiritual retreat to renew my perspective?*

**Christ's Obedience — Deuteronomy 11, Luke 11:28**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, The Three Crosses*

Moses called the people to obey, repeating it seven times in this chapter. Christ was the perfectly obedient one and framed his own crucifixion as an act of obedience. He repeatedly said he was here to do his Father's will, and he urged us to obey. This chapter urged the people to obey by going in to possess the land, to love God with heart and soul, to teach God's love to their children, to receive God's blessings which will be proclaimed in the new land. We see clearly that God wants a love relationship with us.

From the rest of scripture we know how partial their obedience turned out to be. But Christ's obedience was perfect, even to the point of death, and he called us to obey him as a sign of our love for him. There is an emphasis throughout Deuteronomy that obedience is to come from the heart and from love.

In the previous chapters he had spoken to them as though they, children though they had been, had seen miracles and been rebellious in the desert with their parents. But here he says he is not talking to the children who did not see the miracles of the escape from Egypt, and he encouraged them to use those memories to strengthen their courage.

Christ is the living word of God, and the word was to be present to them tied onto their hands, foreheads, doorposts and gates, and taught aloud to their children. For us he is present in similar ways, a constant encouragement to obedience.

The call is to live from the heart, a word that Deuteronomy uses 33 times. Love is repeated 27 times in Deuteronomy. Out of the heart of love comes obedience. Deuteronomy uses the word obey 75 times, more than any other book in scripture, even coming close to the whole New Testament usage (111 times). The emphasis on obedience coming from love and from the heart is central in Christ's teaching as well. We know it is not enough to act right; we need goodness and justice to transform us and flow out of our lives.

*Am I committed to obedience with my whole heart?*

**Worship — Deuteronomy 12, Matthew 2:11**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Simeon and Jesus in the Temple*

Christ reinforced some patterns of worship from the Hebrew scriptures and replaced others. In this section we are told that worship was to take place in a particular place that God would choose — sacrifices, feasting and tithing must take place there. But they are told their pattern of worship would change.

During the conquest, the place was Gilgal. Once the conquest was completed the tabernacle moved to Shiloh and remained there during the time of the Judges. King Saul moved it to Nob near his home in Gibeah where he then killed the priests. It then moved to Kiriath-jearim. All of these places are slightly north of Jerusalem. David moved the Ark to Jerusalem, though the tabernacle remained in Gibeon until Solomon brought it to the new Temple. The establishment of Jerusalem as the place for worship thus took about 350 years.

Christ came when the Temple was firmly established in Jerusalem, but he knew it would be destroyed and worship would be spread all over the earth. He himself replaced the temple, so worship does not have to be done in a particular place or time, but can be anywhere at any time. No longer were people obliged or even able to bring sacrifices to a particular place, since the temple was destroyed. His sacrifice completed that preparatory imagery.

Worship still involves feasting together before God. It still involves offerings and tithes and still requires not worshipping other gods. While location and rituals have changed, the fundamental call to us is still the same: seek God and honor him. The dynamic of change has continued through the centuries of the church and is refreshed by continued creative innovation.

*Is worshipping God a priority in my life?*

**Dangerous Voices — Deuteronomy 13-14, Matthew 7:15**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Christ Teaching*

Moses and Christ both warned that we need to have discernment about what teachers and teachings we believe. The people of God are called to turn away from and repudiate the voices of those who call them to worship something other than God. We need to learn discernment to distinguish God's word from those of others.

In our time, our world is full of such voices, in the form of a constant barrage of information that tells us we need more things. Greed is a constant temptation, surrounded as we are by this cultural noise; a greedy person is compared to an idolater. Other voices whip up political anger and fear, and yet other voices encourage us to just assuage our difficulties with some fun. We even have a vast selection of lies presented as news, widely believed and circulated, even in the context of the fact-checking industry that has arisen to try to stop this.

What is the antidote to falling for idolatrous teaching? Perhaps it is appreciation for the beautiful and good things God has made, appreciation of people, appreciation of experiences, and appreciation of nature. When my heart is full of appreciation there really is no room for either greed or other substitutes for God. But perhaps

the greatest antidote to false teaching is to immerse ourselves in the gospels and truly hear the voice of God in Christ.

*Am I careful to control and evaluate the voices I listen to?*

### **Serving the poor— Deuteronomy 15, Galatians 5:1**



*Tintoretto, Anointing of Christ's feet*

Christ cited a line from this passage, saying the poor would be with us always. But we have often mistaken this to mean that poverty is hopeless, whereas the context says the opposite. Here they were told that if they followed the law the result of productivity, generosity, loans, and loan forgiveness would result in no poverty. (verse 4!) But since people fall into crisis, the result would be a continuous need to address poverty (verse 11)

By the time Christ came, Roman occupation, large landowners, and high taxation had resulted in stratification between rich and poor rather than the egalitarian vision of the law. Slavery was endemic in Roman society with no chance of a return to freedom after seven years. It was in such a context of harsh poverty that Christ affirmed Mary's use of expensive perfume to honor him, rather than selling it to help the poor. Worshipping him mattered so much more than even the important work of alleviating poverty.

In our time we have seen that poverty is not hopeless. The extreme poverty where people live with hunger was real for half the world in the 1950s. But that has been reduced to 10% today and work goes on to reduce it further. Slavery, which so often accompanies poverty is being combated as well. We can look back with shame on

our history of enslaving others with no chance for freedom, and be grateful for the liberation that occurred.

Poverty and enslavement are not hopeless. Christ called us to serve and love those who are poor. But we also must recall as we do that work that loving and worshipping him is even more important.

*Am I committed to work for freedom from want for all people?*

### **Celebrating the feasts— Deuteronomy 16, Luke 2:41**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Jesus and his parents return from Jerusalem*

Christ attended the festivals that prefigured his work. In the gospels many incidents in Christ's life occurred when he attended these festivals prophetic of his future work. One of the first was attending Passover at twelve, staying longer at the temple and worrying his parents.

Many incidents in Christ's life were built around festivals and the gospel of John highlights this.

- Passover     Removed cattle, sheep and doves (John 2:13)  
                  Prophesied to rebuild the Temple in three days  
                  Many believed he was the Messiah (John 3:23)  
                  Galileans believed because of miracles (John 4:45)
- Passover     Fed the 5000 (John 6:4)
- Shelters     Offered living water (John 7:2)
- Hanukkah    Controversy with the Pharisees (John 10:22)
- Passover     Final supper with his disciples (John 13:1)

For Christians, the rhythm of the church year has changed. We celebrate Advent, leading up to Christmas and the coming of Christ; we then celebrate Lent, leading up to Holy Week; and we celebrate Eastertide, leading up to the Ascension. It has also been rewarding for me to experience the Jewish traditions of celebration, particularly as they make clear their connection to Christ. In every case, we are taking ourselves into an observation of time that allows heaven and earth to interlock.

*Do I consciously celebrate sacred time?*

**Judge, King, Priest, and Prophet — Deuteronomy 17-18, Acts 3:22**



*Hans Stutt, Christ's entry to Jerusalem*

In the New Testament, Christ is presented to us as the perfect judge, king, priest, and prophet. In these chapters we are given earthly models of exercising these roles well. Judges are to be fair and depend on multiple witnesses, and judgements of the highest courts are to be respected. Kings are to submit to the law and study

scriptures so they will not become proud, supposing they are greater than their citizens. Priests must sacrifice according to God's law, not the terrible human sacrifices of their neighbors. And prophets must be tested to see if what they say comes true. All of these are earthly copies of Christ.

God predicted through Moses that God would raise up another prophet like him, and Peter applied this passage to Christ. Though there were many other prophets, Christ was the most perfect fulfillment.

Here we see a vision of society with just judges, rulers, spiritual leaders, and prophets that challenge injustice. We also share this social vision and need to recognize that we err if we feel that Christ cares only about our individual relationship with him. We are called to be world-changers in the direction of justice.

*Is justice as presented by Moses and Christ an important goal for me?*

### **Justice — Deuteronomy 19, Romans 11:22**



*Johannes Vermeer, Woman Holding a Balance*

God's people are called to create a society filled with justice, because that is his nature. The New Testament reinforces this by telling us that justice and fairness are in Christ's character. We are inspired to seek these things today, knowing God loves mercy and justice.

But what do we do when we fail? What is the answer when the beautiful community is harmed in some way? In this chapter we have the example of manslaughter. We instinctively know that there is a difference between a death that is an accident, and a death caused with intention. In both cases, though, there has been harm done. The solution of a refuge for those who killed unintentionally is repeated here and elsewhere.

This theme of mercy based on what was in someone's heart helped develop a morality that is not too rigid to take human nature into account, but still balanced the scales, here protecting the one at fault from the natural desire for revenge. Respect for property rights and respect for the need for accurate testimony to determine what truly happened and what the solution might be are also foundational social principles we still respect.

In the case of Christ, he was the victim of malicious witnesses. The religious leaders legalistically tried to fulfill the law to carefully investigate and to have more than one witness, but they accepted testimony from false witnesses who contradicted one another. Christ was thus a victim of the miscarriage of a just system.

The law was not unrealistically idealistic; it set precedents we still use in our own system of justice. Since justice is responsive to what is happening at any point in time, we have to work to keep a sound system in place. When justice fails we need to refurbish our ideals from these texts.

*Do I meditate on what is ethical and just as I see what is done in the world?*

### **Rules of War — Deuteronomy 20, Matthew 26:52**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Flight into Egypt: Crossing a brook*

Christ chose to be a victim of violence and thereby transform it, whereas in the Hebrew scriptures, war was assumed to be inevitable and moral boundaries were placed around it. In our time the level of civilian suffering in war has created a massive refugee crisis, and we are reminded that Christ was a refugee fleeing from an unjust ruler.

The rules for war included compassion for soldiers who could be exempted from fighting if they were fearful or newly married. It required the people to offer peace before engaging in war.

The requirement to destroy the Canaanites was once more repeated. For perhaps 2000 years the consensus of Rabbinic reflection was that these were no longer binding commands since these ethnic groups were no longer identifiable. A position of non-violence became the established view of Judaism, a logical necessity for a stateless people. However, the creation of Israel as a state has once more opened all the questions regarding war. Modern Israel is almost evenly divided: Should they appropriate former land or not? Should they take critiques of other nations seriously? Should they retain the status quo with the Palestinians? Are peace talks viable? States inherently take on violent roles within and outside their borders.

These rules of war have made a positive contribution to formulating what might be just. Nevertheless, it is important to keep the focus that Christ chose to align himself with those receiving violence, even though he was clearly innocent. He raised a standard for us that is more reflected in this statistic than in Israel's nationhood: 22% of organizations that have won the Nobel Peace Prize were founded by Jewish people, though they comprise only a small part of the world population (0.2%).

*Am I known as a peacemaker? Do I have compassion for the civilian victims of war?*

### Holy Living — Deuteronomy 21-22, Matthew 5:21-22, 31-44



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Jesus and the adulteress*

Moses taught profound spiritual and moral principles, but Christ came and took all of them to an even deeper and more demanding level.

#### *Moses*

Cleansing for murders  
Marriage and divorce  
Rights of firstborn  
Rebellious son

#### *Christ*

Reconcile, do not hold on to anger  
Divorce only for unfaithfulness  
Christ is the firstborn  
We are all prodigal sons

Care for property  
Do not mix things  
Sexual purity  
Rights of women

Detach from material things  
Value the heart's purity  
Do not look at a woman with lust  
Compassion for the adulteress

In the law stoning was prescribed for a rebellious, gluttonous, drunkard of a son. Stoning was prescribed for a promiscuous woman. In previous chapters stoning was prescribes for idolatry, death for false prophecy, murder, etc. The idea was to remove these terrible things from the community. Christ offered us a new way to deal with these things: intercessory prayer, loving correction coming from a humble and self-aware heart, and a cry for mercy. We are not to stone others with our words.

We also see a prophecy of Christ's body being taken down and buried the day of his death. This is a cursed kind of death, and is used in the New Testament to say Christ carried the curses of the law for us.

Christ's expectations of us are far more demanding than the law, but his provision for our ability to obey in this way is greater than the law. He lives in us, enabling us to live obedient lives. Even in the midst of my failures, I look up to him and ask for help: "Conform me to your ideals."

The call is to live from the heart, a word that Deuteronomy uses 33 times. Love is repeated 27 times in Deuteronomy. Out of the heart of love comes obedience. Deuteronomy uses the word obey 75 times, more than any other book in scripture, even coming close to the whole New Testament usage (111 times). The emphasis on obedience coming from love and from the heart is central in Christ's teaching as well. We know it is not enough to act right; we need goodness and justice to transform us and flow out of our lives.

*Is my heart changing to be more like Christ?*

**Exclusion and Inclusion — Deuteronomy 23-24, James 1:21**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Boas and Ruth*

Moses and Christ called us to holiness, but Moses emphasized exclusion as the means and Christ emphasized inclusion. Israel was to be apart from nations descended from Lot. The prohibition for Moabites to be part of God's assembly for ten generations was later taken to mean that Moabites could never be part of the community of faith at the time of Nehemiah. In the story of Ruth the Moabite, however, she not only became part of the people of God, her great-grandchild David became king, a picture of grace overcoming exclusion.

Even though Moabites were part of the prohibition, Ruth's story shows grace to a particular woman from that country. Christ redeemed in a way parallel to the story of Ruth and Boaz. Though Ruth's story took place in the time of the judges when people did what they thought right, Boaz attempted to follow God's command of empathy for foreigners, orphans and widows, recalling the people's slavery in Egypt, as a point of common ground to remember being vulnerable. He obeyed the injunction to leave grain in the fields.

Many laws in these chapters require the people to show mercy: they must integrate runaway slaves into their communities, they must not charge interest on loans, newlyweds are exempt from military service, they must not take necessities as security for a loan, wages must be paid daily, justice must be given to foreigners,

and provision must be made for those who are poor. The law is full of mercy and kindness as well as setting up boundaries against wrongdoing, some of which required exclusion.

Christ taught us to overcome exclusion by his acceptance of sinners and tax collectors. The holiness God requires of us means that we must be quicker to identify the sin in our own hearts, rather than looking for sin in others. Our call to a particular tenderness for the vulnerable and marginalized is reinforced here as well as in Christ's teaching. There may be times we or our family need protection and exclusion is the right course. But his call of inclusion is always with us.

*Do I have an open and inclusive heart?*

### **Preview of Ruth — Deuteronomy 25-26, I Corinthians 1:30**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Boaz pouring six measures of barley*

The provision of an economic and social redeemer in the law became an image of the redemption Christ brought us. In these chapters we are introduced to the customs that will be worked out in the story of Ruth and Boaz. The principles reinforce that God sees giving to the poor as a privilege.

Woven in among the laws in these chapters, are seven essential to the story of Ruth:

- 1) One was to leave some unharvested crops for foreigners, orphans, and widows,
- 2) A brother or near relative should marry a widow to continue the family name and maintain property rights. This set up Ruth's request to Boaz for him to be the redeemer.
- 3) The resulting child replaced the deceased,
- 4) Taking off of a sandal was a sign of contempt in Deuteronomy for those unwilling to do this, but by the time of Ruth it was a stylized way of confirming land purchases,
- 5) use accurate scales,
- 6) foreigners were to be included in the harvest celebration, and
- 7) a tithe of the harvest was due foreigners, orphans and widows.

This image of Christ purchasing a right to us, redeeming us, became a foundational metaphor in the New Testament, as did that of his role as the bridegroom and husband. Sometimes we think of Christ's redemption of us in very transactional economic terms. These laws and Ruth's story demonstrated that though the economic provision was critical, the love that established the relationship was even more critical.

*Do I feel the love that made Christ my redeemer?*

### Consequences for Sin or Obedience—Deuteronomy 27-28, Galatians 3:13



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*

Moses promised blessing for obedience and suffering or curses for disobedience. Christ transfigured this by taking the curses of the law on our behalf. There are consequences even today for the list of bad behavior: making idols, dishonoring parents, stealing land, mistreating the blind, sexual sins, secret murder, killing for hire, and ignoring the law. I am most struck by a very common sin mentioned here: mistreating the vulnerable—foreigners, orphans and widows. Perhaps most common of all is the error of dishonoring our parents, and failing to acknowledge our deep debt to them, including for the very gift of life.

Reading the curses is terrifying. Just as with Leviticus 26, they foreshadow tragedy in Israel's future: famine, drought, disease, defeat, oppression, disappointment, material loss, enslavement, conquest, exile. This is depressing, and when we see these consequences in our time we can cry out for mercy.

Once in the land, the people were to read blessings from one mountain and curses from the other. They were to both build an altar and inscribe the law on a monument covered with plaster. Joshua carried this out (Joshua 8:30-35) and later gathered the people to renew the covenant at the same place (Joshua 24:11). Christ is foreshadowed here: in the altar, the law written on the monument, and the spoken word. He took the curses on himself and poured out blessings. Christ repeatedly showed that sin could be forgiven. His repeated demonstrations of mercy came from having taken all the curses and consequences upon himself.

*Am I quick to repent when I see the consequences of sin in my life?*

**The Key to Life— Deuteronomy 29-30, Matthew 25:34**



*Rembrandt van Rijn, Christ and the Woman of Samaria*

Moses renewed the terms of the covenant, reminding them of the history of God's acts on their behalf. It needed to be fulfilled from the heart; desires of stubborn hearts would be seen and punished. When Christ came, he made a new covenant with the blood of his sacrificial death that forgives our sins and changes our hearts.

If they failed to keep the covenant, there was nevertheless hope of restoration if they returned to God. Just as Christ's message was one of repentance, forgiveness, and entrance into the kingdom, both Moses and Christ promised changed hearts, love of God with heart, soul, and mind, success, God's delight in them, life and blessing.

They, as we, have a choice between life and death. Christ has died for us, and lives for us. We choose to love God, obey, and commit ourselves firmly to him. This, as it says, is the key to our lives.

Christ introduced his blessings by saying that the first step is to be humble people who realize they have nothing, but that God's gifts to them are everything. God's people are called to live a wholesome life within the blessings of God.

*Is loving Christ the key to my life?*

**Transition — Deuteronomy 31-32, Romans 15:7-10**



*Marc Chagall, Exhortation of Joshua*

Moses wrote the law and gave it to the priests, and told them to read it aloud every seventh year. Placed in the ark, this provided multiple images of Christ: Moses the prophet, the written word, the ark, priests speaking the word, and doing so at the time of being freed from indebtedness.

When Christ was preparing for his death, he encouraged his disciples that they were ready to take on leadership. Similarly, it was time for Moses's death, and after his compelling and transformative leadership, it was intimidating for his assistant Joshua to have to take his place. But Joshua was now also to become an image of Christ.

For Joshua's difficult task of conquering the land, he went with Moses and God appeared to them in a pillar of cloud at the tabernacle. Three times Joshua was exhorted to be strong and courageous, something repeated four more times in Joshua 1. Clearly these were things he needed in this difficult transition. Weakness and fear would make sense when taking over an unruly group that would have to become unified warriors, and particularly when having lived in the shadow of such a great man for all his life.

Moses' song celebrated that God would avenge his enemies and cleanse the land. Paul transfigured the meaning of this in the New Testament by selecting only the call for the Gentiles to rejoice with his people, placing this in the context of God's mercy for Gentiles. What a remarkable transfiguration of the message of judgment on the Canaanites into the gospel of peace for all people in Romans.

The promise was that God would go ahead of his people and enable them to fulfill their calling.

*Am I depending on God to go before me to fulfill my calling?*

**Moses' Blessing — Deuteronomy 33-34, Luke 24:50-51**



*Marc Chagall, Jerusalem Windows*

Moses' departure from the people foreshadowed Christ's departure in the ascension. It was a moment when both of them offered blessings. In his final song and final blessing, Moses reminded them that God was their king, something that would become more clear in Christ.

Moses then gave a blessing to each tribe full of visual images. Marc Chagall used this imagery and that in Jacob's blessings to create a set of twelve beautiful stained glass windows. The *Jerusalem Windows* are a spectacular visual of this chapter. As people of God, we can apply these blessings to ourselves. Selecting a word from

each tribe we can be alive, strong, loyal, favored, prosperous, just, lion-like, blessed, and secure.l

Moses climbed the mountain and died, still strong at 120, and his people mourned him. His epitaph as one who God knew face to face is beautiful. How reassuring to us today that because of Christ's work, every believer, not just great spiritual figures, can have that relationship of great intimacy with God.

As we consider the life of Moses we are once more struck with what a monumental figure he was, and what an effect he has had on world history. This initially timid leader became one of those we cannot ignore, even today. We are not called to be Moses, but we are called to allow the Holy Spirit to fill us and enable us to completely fulfill our calling and have the impact that we are to have. May his example of faithfully carrying out a monumental and difficult task encourage us to do the same.

*Am I humbly asking God to fulfill his purposes through me, spending "face to face" time with him?*