

Proper 25
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

This chapter is an appendage to the Song of Moses (31:30-33:29) and accomplishes several tasks: It fulfills the promise of the land (verses 1-4); it narrates the death and burial of Moses (5-8) as well as the mourning time involved. It also affirms Joshua's succession to Moses' place (9), and it ends the whole Pentateuch with a colophon or epitaph concerning the uniqueness of Moses and of the revelation God gave him (10-12). These twelve verses then prepare the reader for the long Deuteronomistic History that will follow in Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. While Moses was indeed the greatest of the prophets, he has died and Israel must step into its own uncertain future without him.

Psalm 90: 1-6, 13-17

This *community lament* inaugurates the fourth of the five books in the Psalter. The psalm reminds us of the poetry of Job in the psalmist's complaint that God's righteous anger at Israel's sin is incommensurate with that sin because of the disparity of power and life span between Creator and creature.

OR

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

The Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) is a separate source within the Priestly Writer's great law book. Although the Priestly Writer (P) composed his work in exile during the middle of the 6th century, the Holiness Code (H) must be an earlier body of priestly regulations that stem from the period of the monarchy before the Exile in 586 BC. The theme of the code is well expressed in today's reading: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." (NRSV) As 19:9-18 makes clear, Israel's holiness is not only a matter of keeping the laws of clean and unclean but also of acting justly with neighbors and providing for their needs. The remarkable prohibition against grudges (verses 17-18) includes the equally remarkable commandment to love neighbor as self (19:18). Here the law code goes well beyond what law courts could enforce to deal with the matter of intentionality.

Psalm 1

The scholars of the royal court's school in Jerusalem composed *Wisdom psalms* to help young pupils understand and apply the fundamentals of honesty, modesty, and right-dealing to every aspect of their lives. Although these psalms were not composed for the Temple, as were the other psalms of the Psalter, they came to be part of Israel's treasury of sacred songs during the exile in Babylon while the Temple stood in ruins.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Because Paul must deal with the serious pastoral problem that afflicted the community in Thessalonica by gently correcting the errors that led to their distress (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11), he now makes it clear that he is not chiding them for their errors by comparing his fruitful visit to them with the abusive visit he suffered in Philippi. (See Acts 16:11-40.)

Matthew 22:34-46

Rabbis often gave summaries of the Torah as heuristic principles that a simple person might use to comprehend the essence of God's commandments. Matthew's Gospel, following Mark 12:28-31, has Jesus make his summary in the words of the Torah itself (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). This answer is unremarkable in its Jewish context, but the same cannot be said of the question Jesus put to the Pharisees as to whose son the Messiah might be. Because Jews considered the Messiah to be a king in David's line, the Pharisees answered reasonably enough, "the son of David." Jesus then quoted Psalm 110:1 in which God calls the king "my lord." On the assumption that David was the author of Psalm 110, Jesus inquired as to how David could have addressed his own son as "my lord." The Pharisees had no answer, showing the superiority of Jesus's wisdom over theirs.

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