

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Deuteronomy 8:7-18

NRSV

This book begins: "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond Jordan ... In the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law [or instruction] as follows ..." The word translated *law* is *torah*, what Jews call the first five books of the Bible. Today's reading is part of that instruction, given as the people of Israel prepared to cross the Jordan into Canaan.

Vv. 5-6 say: "Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child, so the Lord your God disciplines you. Therefore keep the commandments of the Lord your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him", i.e. holding him in awe. Why? Vv. 7-18 explain. While in the desert suffering continually reminded the people of God, when prosperous in the Promised Land they may well forget about obeying him. To ancients, the earth rested on "underground waters" (v. 7). Neither "iron" (v. 9) nor "copper" occurred in Canaan, so this verse must refer to a later time, when Israel extended beyond this land. Another translation puts a slightly different *spin* on vv. 10-16: it begins v. 10 with "When you eat, and are satisfied, you are to bless ... God for what he has given you." Then in v. 12 it says: "Lest when you have eaten ..." and in v. 14: "that your heart become haughty..." Both fit the Hebrew. The people are to remember, in times of plenty, that it is God who brought them out of slavery, led them, and fed them, to test them and ultimately to give them prosperity. It is not by their own "power and ... might" (v. 17) that they will become wealthy, but rather it is God who gives them this power – in accordance with the agreements he made with Abraham, Isaac and Noah.

Psalm 65

NRSV

"All flesh" (v. 2), people of all classes, praise God for the harvest. He answers prayers and forgives. Those *whom he chooses* (v. 4) he brings to worship in the Temple ("your courts", "house"). His "goodness" is his presence there and his gifts, especially rain. He saves us by his actions in the world; all people everywhere hope in him and praise him (vv. 5b, 8b). Vv. 6-8 praise him for his creative act; then he overcame chaos; now he keeps it at bay. Freedom from invasion ("silence ... tumult") makes farming possible. He makes the land fertile (vv. 9-13). The "river of God", the reservoir ancients thought to lie above the firmament, the giant *pudding bowl* over the earth, is the source of rain; he provides it for planting "grain" (v. 13). "Pastures" (v. 12) parched by the sun "overflow" with rain; on the hillsides it helps grapes to grow; the wine from them causes "joy". People blessed by his bounty, and all nature, "sing together for joy" (v. 13).

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

NRSV

During the previous year, Titus started a collection among Corinthian Christians

for the Christians at Jerusalem. Now Paul sends Titus and others, representatives of their churches, to Corinth to carry this letter and to complete the collection. He suggests that the best way the Corinthian Christians can give proof of their love for the arriving delegates is to have the collection ready; they already understand why the money is needed. He is keen that it be a freely-given gift (or blessing) rather than an "extortion" (v. 5), something grudgingly given.

"The point is this ..." (v. 6): if we give generously, God gives to us generously; this giving needs to be done freely, by deliberate voluntary decision, "not reluctantly" (v. 7). "God is able to provide you with every blessing" (v. 8, or grace) so that you may be able to share it. In v. 9, he quotes Psalm 112:9: to give is to have lasting moral uprightness. It is God "who supplies seed" (v. 10) for us; for us, it is an investment, with a high rate of return, for he multiplies our giving, for our benefit, in spiritual riches. Corinthian "generosity" (v. 11) – a "ministry" (v. 12, *leitourgia*, this liturgy, this public and religious act) – will not only help the Jerusalem Christians materially, but will also have spiritual benefit: the initiative of Paul, Titus and the others ("us", v. 11) will cause the recipients to give thanks to God. This act *tests* (v. 13) you: by giving, by putting the "gospel" into practice and sharing with them, you acknowledge God's power ("glorify God"). At the same time, they express their love for you Corinthians ("long for you", v. 14) and pray for you: because of God's freely given gift of love ("grace") to us, the source of our giving. This gift to us is "indescribable" (v. 15) because it transcends the earthly domain, including and involving Christ and the Holy Spirit, the supreme gifts.

Luke 17:11-19

NRSV

Jesus is on his final journey – from Galilee to Jerusalem. He encounters "ten lepers" (v. 12), people who were considered unclean and who had a disease believed to be infectious by touch. They were thought to be possessed by evil spirits and were required to keep their distance. They acknowledge Jesus as "Master" (v. 13, as did Peter when Jesus called him to be a disciple) and seek mercy. Leviticus prescribed that lepers might be declared ritually clean by "priests" (v. 14) if their sores healed. All ten have sufficient faith to go; they are healed on the way.

One, a "foreigner" (v. 18), an alien, *sees*, recognizes, that he is healed both physically and spiritually. He *turns back* (v. 15) to praise God and to thank Jesus, as did Naaman, a Syrian whom Elisha healed. (The word rendered *thank*, v. 16, has connotations of proclaiming God's forgiveness.) To Jews, all *Samaritans* were considered unclean and were despised, both because of their ancestry (they had mixed blood, being the descendants of Jews who were not exiled and of Gentiles the Assyrians resettled in Israel) and because they had their own temple and a variant version of the Scriptures. One leper, the Samaritan, remembers God's goodness, but nine neglect to acknowledge the source of their healing. Finally, v. 19: Jesus says "your faith has made you well", and/or *your faith has saved you*, given you access to the Kingdom. In Jesus' time, healing of physical ailments was much more closely linked to faith in God than it is in the minds of many people today.