

Mercy amid evil

By [Jennifer L. Lord](#)

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Deuteronomy [speaks of](#) restoration, of the people's return to God and to the land. Over and over again we read that God will prosper those who follow God's laws. Set alongside the story of the merciful Samaritan we can hear the promise of God prospering any merciful act. The "Go and do likewise" of Luke becomes the example of living according to the commandments and decrees of Deuteronomy.

The words of Deuteronomy come from a mixed milieu, but much of the book was shaped from the time after Josiah's reforms of the 7th century BC, which centralized sacrificial practices. Worship became centered in one site, the Jerusalem temple.

But even against this stage, the words of this week's passage speak of God's prosperity dwelling in the *people*. God's blessing action is not only in the temple. It is also in our undertakings, in our bodies, even in livestock and soil. All of this is linked to covenantal obedience on our part. And standing in this covenantal relationship we need not doubt the imminence of God's life-giving commandments: "The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe." The good words of the commandments live in us and through us bear fruit in community, in life. It is the mercy life of the Samaritan.

These claims of Deuteronomy are nuanced through the words of the psalmist, who cries for deliverance from enemies. In other words, standing in covenant relationship with God is not inoculation from all that is shameful or evil in the world. The psalmist pleads with us to be mindful of God's commandments but also invokes God's mercy. The honesty of these words gives us permission to name our grievances to God even as we pray to recall what is most true and right and life-giving in our existence: the ways and steadfast love of God. In the midst of all that is treacherous in life there is hope in the faithfulness of God. Again the word mercy is in front of us: "Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old."

Colossians adds another image to this dynamic. Here are words about bearing the fruit of the gospel in the world and among us. Like Deuteronomy, there is dialectic: the word of God (the fruit of the gospel) is beyond us throughout the world but is also among us and in us. Our own good works bear gospel fruit. In this context, this gospel fruit represents freedom from the forces of enslavement to the cosmos and any demonic powers.

Each passage includes something about good works in the midst of evil, merciful actions in the face of death. The texts interact with each other and speak of truth and good news about the reality of sin and evil and death and the promises of God.

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