

Old Testament Windows Session Three

In the Old Testament, God's presence and God's elusiveness are in tension.

Read Genesis 28:10-22.

Discuss: Why was Jacob's dream in this chapter so important to his spiritual development?

Much of human life is reflected in Jacob's dilemma— torn between wanting a God who is free and one who will stay in one place. This duality is also seen in the transition from tabernacle to Temple— from the impermanent structure where God's spirit dwelled in the desert and the ornate building constructed in Israel's new home in Jerusalem.

How much of God's promise to Jacob in vv. 13-15 is also God's promise to you?

Leviticus 19

Almost 1/3 of the first five books of the Bible consists of laws which cover everything from crime to property to sexual behavior to human relationships to holidays. The early rabbis tallied 613 "principles and precepts"; "365 being prohibitions equal in number to the number of days in a year, and 248 being mandates corresponding in number to the bones in the human body" (Babylonian Talmud).

Mary Douglas, in her book Purity and Danger, says that the words—"I am the Lord"— are like precious jewels, scattered around the pages of the chapter— decorations that catch your breath when you encounter them. She points to the chapters before and after Lev. 19, drawing attention to the fact that what people do for God is paralleled by how Israel is to treat her neighbors.

Martin Buber writes that the command to love one's neighbor (Lev.19:17) ends with that pronouncement— "I am the Lord"— because God is telling those of us who read it how to interpret those words. Buber writes that the Hasidic rabbis heard God saying. "You think that I am far away from you, but in your love for your neighbor you will find Me; not in his love for you but in your love for him." (On Judaism)

When Jesus was challenged by the experts on the Law to give and answer for what Scripture was all about, he quoted Lev. 19: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself."

Why do you think he chose that response?