

The Passion Series

OIL ON CANVAS, ALTA PINAKOTHEK, GERMANY

REMBRANDT HARMENSZOOM VAN RIJN

1606 - 1669

The Painting

- Carefully study each of the four paintings in this collection.
- How does Rembrandt capture these moments in history on canvas?
- Rembrandt uses light and dark to create a sense of emotion and tension. Observe and describe the people in the lightened portion of each painting... in the darkened portion of each painting.
- Look closely at each painting. Rembrandt can be found in two of the paintings. Can you find him?
- Since Rembrandt did not live at the time of Christ's crucifixion, why would he have painted himself into these two scenes? What attitude is he communicating about his spiritual condition? What does this suggest about you and me?
- Describe the meaning of Easter to a relative or friend using *The Passion Series* as your starting point.

The Principle

The Bible was very important to Rembrandt and many of his works reflect a Biblical theme. His *Passion Series* includes seven paintings, all with black frames, oval at the top and with gilt carved leaves all round. It took more than 15 years to complete the entire series. Four of the seven paintings are included in this study. The visual impact of these four paintings is almost overwhelming. Each, in a dark and shadowy setting, explode with dazzling light. Rembrandt, by placing himself in *The Raising of the Cross*, clearly understood that it was his personal sins that crucified Christ. It was just as if Rembrandt himself had been there. In *The Descent from the Cross* we find Rembrandt again. In both cases Rembrandt is taking an active part in this the most significant event of all history.

Read the Biblical text for each painting as you continue to study each one.

The Raising of the Cross (1632-1646) — Matthew 27:29-56

The Descent from the Cross (1632-1633) — Mark 14:42 - 45

The Resurrection (1635-1639) — Matthew 28:1-7

The Ascension (1635-1639) — Luke 24:44-53

The Painter

One of the clearest examples of a painter working from a Biblical worldview is Rembrandt. His life shows that he understood Christ as Lord of all life. Dr. Francis Schaeffer says of Rembrandt: "There was no need for him to slip into the world of illusion... he could use God's world and its form in his paintings." He was standing in the stream of Reformation thought and his works reflect these ideas. The bold portrayal of the Biblical moments are seen as unidealized actual happenings in real space-time history.

As one of the world's greatest masters, Rembrandt left a priceless body of pictures, unequalled for their eloquence and compassion, their deep understanding of mankind, and the sheer beauty of their execution. The basic elements of Rembrandt's painting - his superb brush stroke and bold handling of color, his insistence on spiritual insight, his dramatic use of light and shadow - set him apart from all other painters.

