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January 26th: Jeremiah 25 & 1 Corinthians 10

January 25, 2021



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Judgment upon the nations. Learning from Israel's negative example in the wilderness.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Jeremiah chapter 25. The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Jeziah, king of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Jeziah the son of Ammon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, But you have not listened.

You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the Lord persistently sent to you all His servants the prophets, saying, Turn now every one of you from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever. Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm.

Yet you have not listened to me, declares the Lord, that you might provoke me to anger

with the work of your hands to your own harm. Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste.

I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands. Thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them. So I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me drink it, Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, a hissing and a curse, as at this day. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, his servants, his officials, all his people, and all the mixed tribes among them, all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod, Edom, Moab, and the sons of Ammon, all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastland across the sea, Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who cut the corners of their hair, all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mixed tribes who dwell in the desert, all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of Media, all the kings of the north, far and near, one after another, and all the kingdoms of the world that are on the face of the earth.

And after them the king of Babylon shall drink. Then you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Drink, be drunk, and vomit, fall, and rise no more, because of the sword that I am sending among you. And if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, You must drink.

For behold, I begin to work disaster at the city that is called by my name. And shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, declares the Lord of hosts. You therefore shall prophesy against

them all these words, and say to them, The Lord will roar from on high, and from His holy habitation utter His voice.

He will roar mightily against His fold, and shout like those who tread grapes against all the inhabitants of the earth. The clamor will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord has an indictment against the nations. He is entering into judgment with all flesh, and the wicked He will put to the sword, declares the Lord.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold, disaster is going forth from nation to nation, and a great tempest is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth. And those pierced by the Lord on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented or gathered or buried, they shall be dung on the surface of the ground.

Wail, you shepherds, and cry out, and roll in ashes, you lords of the flock, for the days of your slaughter and dispersion have come, and you shall fall like a choice vessel. No refuge will remain for the shepherds, nor escape for the lords of the flock. A voice, the cry of the shepherds, and the wail of the lords of the flock, for the Lord is laying waste their pasture, and the peaceful foals are devastated, because of the fierce anger of the Lord.

Like a lion He has left His lair, for their land has become a waste, because of the sword of the oppressor, and because of His fierce anger. In Jeremiah chapters 25, 26, 35 and 36 we have material related to the reign of Jehoiachin. All of the chapters open with a dating during his reign, both 25 and 36 to the fourth year of the reign, which was clearly an important year in the ministry of Jeremiah.

It was also the year that Babylon defeated the Egyptians at Carchemesh, and the first year of Nebuchadnezzar. The power dynamics of the region are changing, a great tempest is rising in the north, and Jeremiah foretells where it will lead. The chapter anticipates the latter part of the book of Jeremiah, where judgment oracles concerning the foreign nations are contained.

These oracles are placed after verse 13 in the ordering of the Septuagint. The synchronization of Babylonian and Judahite chronology here anticipates the fact that Judah's life will soon be measured by the times of Babylon. Jeremiah here begins his address to the people by speaking about his 23 years as a prophet to them.

The year now is about 605 BC. He has faithfully delivered the Lord's word to them for over two decades, but without positive response. Within this testimony we can hear something of the pain and the difficulty of his vocation.

He had been charging them to turn back to the Lord and praying for them to be restored, but now the dark cloud that heralded the storm of their doom was rising on the northern horizon, and their judgment seemed inevitable. And it was not just Jeremiah, the Lord

had persistently sent prophets to them, and they had all been rejected. He had given a consistent and a long-term witness.

The message was one of turning back from evil ways and false gods and returning to the Lord, so that they would enjoy peace and security in the land as a result. However, they failed to respond. They provoked the Lord to anger, and his judgment would come upon them as a result.

The result is the judgment from the north that Jeremiah foretold at the outset of his ministry. The enemy, now identified as Babylon, would be sent against them. Startlingly, Nebuchadnezzar is described as the Lord's servant.

Although he is the enemy, he is doing the Lord's work here. And the surrounding nations are also caught up in Judah's judgment. We might think of the beginning of the book of Jonah, where the unfaithfulness of the Israelite prophet leads to a storm that all of the people on his ship suffer from.

In Jonah that storm is, among other things, a sign of the judgment that comes upon the whole region as a result of Israel's sin. It will be shaken up by the advent of the Assyrians. Here a similar thing will happen as a result of Judah's sin.

The great enemy from the north would come, and all of the people in the surrounding region would suffer. The language of desolation that we find elsewhere in the book recurs here. He will devote them to destruction and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

He will banish the voice of mirth, the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. The land is going to become a ruin and a waste. We've heard all of these expressions before, but every time they're repeated they sink in somewhat deeper.

Graciously, with this declaration of the final judgment upon Judah, there is also a hope of life beyond it. The light at the other end of the tunnel is the promise that they would serve Babylon for seventy years. After that period, there will be judgment upon Babylon and release for the nations that have suffered under him.

Even though God is currently using Babylon as the rod of his judgment, judgment still awaits it. In verse 13, Jeremiah presumably is given a vision in which he is to act as the Lord's cup bearer for the cup of his wrath to the nations. God is hosting, as it were, a banquet of the nations, and he is using Jeremiah as his instrument of judgment.

The imagery of the judgment cup of the Lord is one that's found on several occasions in scripture, in both the Old and the New Testament. The cup is one that produces intoxication. Scholars differ over whether we should see the intoxication as a result of the cup being poisoned or as a result of excessive drinking.

Whichever of the two it is, the cup has as its intent a drunkenness that belongs to judgment. The drinking is not a test, as in the test of jealousy in Numbers chapter 5. It actually ministers the judgment. Uses of this imagery can be found in places like Ezekiel chapter 23 verses 31 to 34.

You have gone the way of your sister, therefore I will give her cup into your hand. Thus says the Lord God, you shall drink your sister's cup that is deep and large. You shall be laughed at and held in derision, for it contains much.

You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, a cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria. You shall drink it and drain it out and gnaw its shards and tear your breasts, for I have spoken, declares the Lord God. Also Isaiah chapter 51 verse 17.

Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering. The list of the nations to be judged begin with Jerusalem and Judah and with its kings and officials. Judgment begins with the house of God, it begins with the chief city, it moves on to the other cities, it focuses especially upon the king, the highest authority of all, and then moves on to the officials.

From Jerusalem and Judah however we move out to other nations. Pharaoh the king of Egypt, his servants, his officials, all his people and all the mixed tribes among them, all the way down the classes of Egypt, all of them will come under the Lord's judgment. The kings of the land of Uz, presumably in the area of northern Arabia, all the kings of the land of the Philistines, the cities of Philistia mentioned here exclude Gath which had already been destroyed.

Philistia was to the west of Judah on the Mediterranean coast. Edom is next. Edom was the brother nation of Israel, the descendants of Esau.

After Edom, moving from the south to the north of the Transjordan, Moab and then Ammon. The kings of Tyre and Sidon, southern Phoenician coastal cities in modern day Lebanon, are the next in the list. They are associated with the kings of the coastland across the sea, the Mediterranean colonies of the Phoenicians in places such as Carthage.

Next in line are the Arabian peoples, Dedan, Tima, Buz and the kings of Arabia, followed by the kings and the sheikhs of the various desert and nomadic peoples. Zimri is next, possibly associated with Arabia but we don't know exactly where it was. The kings of Elam were in the east of the Tigris, opposite the south of Babylon.

The Median kings and associated people are listed next. Then all of the kings of the north are mentioned, the rulers of the lesser peoples. All of these people shall be made to drink the cup of the Lord's judgment.

He's shaking up the entire world. And then finally the king of Babylon shall drink. The pattern of Judah first, Babylon last, is a pattern that is borne out in the foreign oracles with which the book concludes.

The word used for the king of Babylon in verse 26 is Shishak. This is what is called an atbash. An atbash works by replacing the first letter of the alphabet with the last letter, the second letter with the penultimate letter, the third letter with the antepenultimate letter and so on.

The word Shishak corresponds with Babel. Scholars differ over whether at this point it is intended just as wordplay or whether it is intentionally cryptic. The kings have no choice, they will suffer this judgment.

Jeremiah is a minister of the word of judgment and it is effective through him. Once again we might think back to chapter 1 verses 9 to 10. Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth.

And the Lord said to me, Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. The idea that the word of the Lord through the prophet is an effective means of judgment and not just a reporting on the Lord's judgment can also be seen in places like Hosea chapter 6 verse 5. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.

The conclusion of the chapter contains a number of different oracles strung together. The Lord is going to roar like a lion from the heavens. He is going to threaten the sheep of the fold.

He will shout as people treading out grapes. The imagery of treading out grapes is found on several occasions in scripture. At many points it's an image of God's judgment.

At some points it's an image, as in Revelation, of God gathering in faithful martyrs. As elsewhere in scripture perhaps we should see some connection between the treading out of the grapes and the preparation of the wine of the Lord's wrath. This is a judgment that's going forth on all flesh.

The Lord is entering into judgment with the world. There's going to be a sort of political earthquake throughout the entire region. When things finally settle a very different world will exist.

A great and terrible storm is rising. It will affect every one of the nations. It is a storm brought up by the Lord and its result will be utter devastation throughout the various lands.

This section began with the Lord roaring from on high and at the end talks about the Lord being like a lion that has left his lair going out on the hunt. The threat of the Lord roaring against the fold is now extended to be a threat upon the shepherds. The kings of the nations, their shepherds, are going to be left bereft of their flocks.

The Lord is going to lay waste their flocks and their pastures. No place of refuge or escape exists. A question to consider.

How can the example of the vision given to Jeremiah here help us to think about the way that the messenger of the Lord's words participates in the authority of the message that he is delivering? 1 Corinthians chapter 10. For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we may not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were.

As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people.

Judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel.

Are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons, and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.

You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke

the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up.

Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.

If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner, and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you, without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, this has been offered in sacrifice, then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience. I do not mean your conscience, but his.

For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Although it is easy to miss when we read the chapters as detached units, 1 Corinthians chapter 10 continues the argument that has been going on since chapter 8 of Corinthians.

This is all Paul's discussion of eating food sacrificed to idols, and that might surprise us when we read these verses ahead, but yet, as we look back, it should make more sense. It is in the background of the beginning of the chapter, and will come back to the foreground by the end. Paul has just been talking about his own example, his example in earning his own keep, rather than placing a burden upon the Corinthians, as he was entitled to do.

Now it seems Paul's argument takes a sharp turn, and goes into seemingly unrelated territory. He talks about the experience of Israel in the wilderness. He begins by talking about all our fathers.

The story of Israel is the story of the church. He's writing this to Gentiles in Corinth, not just to Jews. As the people of Christ, we are the children of Abraham.

We're also, perhaps more surprisingly, people who stand in the same line of history as those who failed in the wilderness, as the unfaithful ones who perished and were judged. All of our fathers were under the cloud. All of them passed through the sea.

The cloud was God's visible presence with them. The pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night. The sea was the Red Sea through which they passed, and were delivered from the Egyptians.

They were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Baptism into Moses is a strange way of talking about the Red Sea. Yet Paul seems to be using this in a rather

strong sense.

What could he mean by baptism into Moses? If we look at the beginning of the story of Exodus, Moses himself is drawn out of the water. He's named for being drawn out of the water. He's drawn out from among the reeds, and Israel is later drawn out from the reed sea.

His deliverance is connected with his birth narrative, and Israel is brought out of the sea as part of its event of birth, as the firstborn of the Lord. What happens first to Moses happens to his people. In the crossing of the Red Sea, the people are brought into Moses' experience, the experience that Moses had before them.

Moses had previously gone to Mount Sinai, experienced and met with the Lord there, and then he's going to lead the flock of the people to the mountain, and then he's going to meet with the Lord there again. They're going to enter into his experience. In the same way, when we are baptized, we are baptized into Christ.

His story becomes our story. We are baptized into his baptism in the Jordan, declared to be God's beloved sons and daughters, set apart for mission. We are baptized into the baptism of his death.

We are buried with him in order that we might be raised with him in the future. His spirit baptizes the church at Pentecost, so that as we are baptized with his spirit, we can share in the blessings of his ascension. In the crossing of the Red Sea, Israel also came under the leadership of Moses in a new way.

At the end of chapter 14 of Exodus, we're told that they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses. That was the consequence of the experience of the Red Sea, and Moses here is implicitly functioning as a Christ figure, as a type of Christ to come. They were baptized into Moses.

They also ate the same spiritual food, referring to the manna. In speaking of spiritual food, Paul might have in mind things such as Psalm 78 verses 23 to 25. Yet he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven, and he rained down on the manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven.

Man ate of the bread of the angels. He sent them food in abundance. They also drank the same spiritual drink.

Here he's referring to the water from the rock mentioned in Exodus chapter 17 and Numbers chapter 20. And the rock that followed them, he says, was Christ. Now this is a very strange claim to make.

In this passage, Paul might be alluding to intertestamental traditions of reading the story of the Exodus and joining some of the dots and filling in some of the gaps. Yet when we

look at the original text, there are legitimate connections to make. The Lord is described as the rock.

In the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 24, this language occurs on several occasions. How could one have chased a thousand and two have put ten thousand to flight unless their rock had sold them and the Lord had given them up? For their rock is not as our rock. Our enemies are by themselves.

Verses 30 to 31. In the original account of striking the rock, the Lord is associated with the rock in a very powerful way. In Exodus chapter 17 verses 5 to 7, And the Lord said to Moses, Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.

Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Masa-a-Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, Is the Lord among us or not? Putting these things together, it is not inappropriate to speak of the rock that followed them.

In Numbers chapter 20 there is again the rock that is struck, albeit now in a different location. Rather than thinking of a literal rock that's moving around, we should think about the Lord as symbolically associated with the rock, communicating himself to his people at various specific rocks that all represent him as the one rock. What is the point of all of this section? Paul is telling the story of Israel in a way that shows clear connections between their story and the story of the church at Corinth.

The children of Israel had a baptism, the baptism of the crossing of the Red Sea. They had the presence of the Spirit in the cloud that accompanied and led them, and they had the supper in the spiritual food that they ate of the manna and the spiritual drink of the rock. Paul is showing deep correspondences between events across history here, and he's making a strong claim.

He's not merely drawing parallels in form between an Old Testament fleshly deliverance and a New Testament spiritual deliverance. He's making a far stronger claim than that. He's arguing that the Old Testament deliverance was a spiritual deliverance.

The problem, however, was that the people were fleshly. If the Corinthians think of themselves as spiritual people, they should learn a lesson or two from the Israelites, who had all these spiritual blessings and yet made nothing of them. Now, from enumerating the spiritual blessings received by the Israelites, Paul turns to speak of the ways in which they failed.

They sinned with the golden calf. The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to

play in Exodus chapter 32. They sinned with Baal of Peor in Numbers chapter 25, and a very great number of them died.

There were fiery serpents in Numbers chapter 21, and they put Christ to the test. This is perhaps one of the more arresting claims made here. They weren't just testing the Lord, they were testing Christ himself.

The Corinthians might think themselves spiritually above the Israelites, but yet the Old Testament Israelites had Christ in their midst too. Christ was the angel that led them on the way. Paul also refers to the grumbling of the people.

This could refer to a number of different events, such as the terrible litany of events of grumbling that we have in Numbers chapter 11 and following. Many of those who grumbled were destroyed by the destroyer. The destroyer is referred to in Exodus chapter 12 verse 23 as the one who slew the firstborn of Israel in the Passover.

And all of this is an example for us. The connections between the two stories, the fact that Christ was with them, the Spirit was with them, they had all these spiritual blessings, sets them up as examples that we can learn from. In this case as cautionary examples.

There is a similarity between the Corinthian situation and that of the wilderness generation. They are both awaiting salvation. In the new covenant Christ has brought his people out, but he has not yet brought them in.

Christ has inaugurated the last days, but the Corinthians must faithfully follow him into the promised land of the age to come. And they must beware of being presumptuous or overconfident. Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

The Corinthians are acting as if they reign like kings already, as if they had already attained all these blessings, as if they had already arrived at their destination. But they are compromising in exactly the same areas as the Israelites in the wilderness. They're compromising with sexual immorality, they're desiring evil, they're testing Christ by their disobedience, they're grumbling and engaging in dissension, and they're compromising with idolatry.

God can test his people, but when he does, he provides ways of escape and doesn't overwhelm them. Being tested by God does not pose the same sorts of dangers as testing God does. When God tests us, he does not test us to destroy us, but to prove us, to bring us into a greater maturity and into a fuller possession of his good gifts.

Having retold the story of Israel in the wilderness in this way, Paul brings his argument back to its primary point in verses 14 to 22. He presents three different types of meal in parallel. The Lord's Supper, Jewish sacrificial meals, and pagan sacrificial meals.

And all of these meals are about forging bonds of participation. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a participation in the body and blood of Christ. It's a means by which we are made one with him and with each other in his body.

The celebration of the sacrificial meals of Israel was a way of participating in the sacrifice of the altar and enjoying fellowship with God. Paul, while he does not believe that the idols are anything, the idols aren't real gods, there is only one true God, and all other so-called gods are either imaginary or created beings. However, even though the idols aren't real gods, this doesn't mean that there is nothing there at all.

Rather, the pagans are sacrificing to demons. They are participating in the table of the devil himself. Here Paul is alluding once again to the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 32, here to verses 16 and 17.

They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. This clinches Paul's point.

In referring to this, the story of Israel that he has just retold makes a lot more sense. Israel had all these spiritual blessings, but they entered into participation with false gods and suffered as a result. And the proud Corinthians, who despite all their boasts have a lot more in common with the children of Israel than they might suppose, are in very great danger of doing the same thing.

He concludes this section by asking, are we stronger than he? You Corinthians, you think that you are strong, you think that you can eat of the food of idol feasts with impunity, but yet are you stronger than God, the God who judged Israel for the very same thing? Seen in this light, the supposed strength of the Corinthians is ridiculous. Why does Paul argue as he does? Why does he present this argument, which seems to be the clincher at this point, rather than leading with it in chapter 8? Partly because idol food could be encountered in a number of different contexts. Idol food could be encountered in the meat market, where you might eat food that had previously been part of a pagan ritual.

Idol food could also be encountered in an actual pagan celebration, or in a meal dedicated to some idol. It seems as though the so-called strong Corinthians were involved in both practices, and Paul speaks in different ways to these different situations. In verses 23 until the first verse of chapter 11, Paul brings his argument into land.

He returns to the Corinthian statement, all things are lawful, that slogan which we previously saw in the second half of chapter 6, and he moves now from an emphasis upon our own rights to one of helping and building up our neighbour. All things may be lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things may be lawful, but not all things build up.

And he presents a principle by which we can enjoy freedom. Eat anything in the meat market, without asking questions. As the psalm declares, the earth and everything in it belong to the Lord.

While purposefully participating in pagan meals is wrong, the idol is nothing. The food offered to the idol is still a blessing from the Lord's hand. As Paul argues elsewhere, nothing is unclean in itself.

Abstracted from the end of idol worship, the food of the marketplace is good. And there's a break with kosher laws here as well. Eating marketplace food and eating with gentiles, these were not things that the Jews would have done.

Paul, however, now makes clear that there are occasions when, although we might otherwise be at liberty to eat, we must refrain from eating for the sake of another person's conscience, presumably that of a weaker Christian. Rather than acting in a way that would lead the weaker Christian into sinning against his or her conscience, his or her moral confidence, the stronger Christian should refrain. They should give up their rights for that time, just as Christ gave up his rights and prerogatives for us.

Paul is not denying that the strong have freedom to eat idol meat in these settings, but he is arguing that there is a principle that is more important than that of freedom. They must refrain when the greater concern of the weaker brother's spiritual well-being comes into view. The emphasis in 1 Corinthians is on the responsibilities of the strong, who seem to have been the more assertive party in Corinth.

In Romans 14-15, both the weak and the strong are given responsibilities towards each other. The weak should not judge the strong in their exercise of their freedom. Paul's earlier treatment of the all things are lawful statement in chapter 6 ended with the positive injunction to glorify God in your body, and here he concludes with the duty to do all to the glory of God.

The principle is not all things are lawful, but do all to the glory of God, and this will be achieved by taking constant consideration for others and their well-being, prioritising their salvation and their up-building over your own freedom. A question to consider, how might Paul's use of the example of Israel in this chapter be instructive for us in our reading of the Old Testament?