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Babylon's coming doom. The trespass and the free gift.

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

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Transcript

Jeremiah chapter 50. The word that the Lord spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by Jeremiah the prophet. Declare among the nations and proclaim, set up a banner and proclaim, conceal it not and say, Babylon is taken, Bel is put to shame, Merodach is dismayed, her images are put to shame, her idols are dismayed.

For out of the north a nation has come up against her, which shall make her land a desolation, and none shall dwell in it, both man and beast shall flee away. In those days and in that time, declares the Lord, the people of Israel and the people of Judah shall come together, weeping as they come, and they shall seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with faces turned toward it, saying, Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten.

My people have been lost sheep, their shepherds have led them astray, turning them

away on the mountains. From mountain to hill they have gone, they have forgotten their fold. All who found them have devoured them, and their enemies have said, We are not guilty, for they have sinned against the Lord, their habitation of righteousness, the Lord, the hope of their fathers.

Flee from the midst of Babylon, and go out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as male goats before the flock. For behold, I am stirring up and bringing against Babylon a gathering of great nations from the north country, and they shall array themselves against her. From there she shall be taken.

Their arrows are like a skilled warrior who does not return empty-handed. Chaldea shall be plundered, all who plunder her shall be sated, declares the Lord. Though you rejoice, though you exult, O plunderers of my heritage, though you frolic like a heifer in the pasture, and nay like stallions, your mother shall be utterly shamed, and she who bore you shall be disgraced.

Behold she shall be the last of the nations, a wilderness, a dry land, and a desert. Because of the wrath of the Lord she shall not be inhabited, but shall be in utter desolation. Everyone who passes by Babylon shall be appalled, and hiss because of all her wounds.

Set yourselves in array against Babylon all around, all you who bend the bow. Shoot at her, spare no arrows, for she has sinned against the Lord. Raise a shout against her all around, she has surrendered, her bulwarks have fallen, her walls are thrown down, for this is the vengeance of the Lord.

Take vengeance on her, do to her as she has done. Cut off from Babylon the sower, and the one who handles the sickle in time of harvest. Because of the sword of the oppressor, everyone shall turn to his own people, and everyone shall flee to his own land.

Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now at last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has gnawed his bones. Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, behold I am bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria.

I will restore Israel to his pasture, and he shall feed on carmel and invasion, and his desire shall be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead. In those days and in that time, declares the Lord, iniquity shall be sought in Israel, and there shall be none, and sin in Judah, and none shall be found, for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant. Go up against the land of Merithaim, and against the inhabitants of Picard.

Kill and devote them to destruction, declares the Lord, and do all that I have commanded you. The noise of battle is in the land, and great destruction. How the hammer of the

whole earth is cut down and broken! How Babylon has become a horror among the nations! I set a snare for you, and you were taken, O Babylon, and you did not know it.

You were found and caught, because you opposed the Lord. The Lord has opened his armory, and brought out the weapons of his wrath. For the Lord of hosts has a work to do in the land of the Chaldeans.

Come against her from every quarter, open her granaries, pile her up like heaps of grain, and devote her to destruction. Let nothing be left of her. Kill all her bulls, let them go down to the slaughter.

Woe to them, for their day has come, the time of their punishment. A voice! They flee and escape from the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the Lord our God, vengeance for his temple. Summon archers against Babylon, all those who bend the bow.

Encamp around her, let no one escape. Repay her according to her deeds. Do to her according to all that she has done.

For she has proudly defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. Therefore her young men shall fall in her squares, and all her soldiers shall be destroyed on that day, declares the Lord. Behold, I am against you, O proud one, declares the Lord God of hosts.

For your day has come, the time when I will punish you. The proud one shall stumble and fall, with none to raise him up. And I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it will devour all that is around him.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the people of Israel are oppressed, and the people of Judah with them. All who took them captive have held them fast, they refuse to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is his name.

He will surely plead their cause, that he may give rest to the earth, but unrest to the inhabitants of Babylon. A sword against the Chaldeans, declares the Lord, and against the inhabitants of Babylon, and against her officials and her wise men. A sword against the diviners, that they may become fools.

A sword against her warriors, that they may be destroyed. A sword against her horses, and against her chariots, and against all the foreign troops in her midst, that they may become women. A sword against all her treasures, that they may be plundered.

A drought against her waters, that they may be dried up. For it is a land of images, and they are mad over idols. Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her.

She shall never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations. As when God

overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities, declares the Lord, so no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her. Behold a people comes from the north, a mighty nation, and many kings, are stirring from the farthest parts of the earth.

They lay hold of bow and spear. They are cruel and have no mercy. The sound of them is like the roaring of the sea.

They ride on horses, arrayed as a man for battle, against you, O daughter of Babylon. The king of Babylon heard the report of them, and his hands fell helpless. Anguish seized him, pain as of a woman in labor.

Behold, like a lion coming up from the thicket of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly make them run away from her, and I will appoint over her whomever I choose. For who is like me? Who will summon me? What shepherd can stand before me? Therefore hear the plan that the Lord has made against Babylon, and the purposes that he has formed against the land of the Chaldeans. Surely the little ones of their flock shall be dragged away.

Surely their foes shall be appalled at their fate. At the sound of the capture of Babylon, the earth shall tremble, and her cries shall be heard among the nations. Throughout, the book of Jeremiah has told of the coming disaster from the north, a disaster that, after 605 BC and the victory of Nebuchadnezzar over the Egyptians at Carchemish, comes into clearer focus as that of Babylon.

Now, finally, in chapters 50 and 51, in a lengthy series of prophecies, Babylon's own coming doom is announced. These chapters are a gathering of many different words delivered against Babylon, which serve as the climax of the Lord's judgment upon the world. This judgment had been anticipated back at another hinge of the book, in Jeremiah chapter 25 verses 11-12.

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. In chapter 25, this is followed by an account of the nations to whom Jeremiah must give the cup of the wrath of the Lord.

Babylon is the last to drink. In the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah often seems to be in a position of treachery. In his instruction to people to submit to the yoke of the king of Babylon, the rule of Babylon seems to be identified with the rule of the Lord.

Submitting to the Lord requires submitting to the king of Babylon. This raises theological tensions that pervade the book, and at this point we see something of a resolution of them. Babylon is not finally identified with the Lord's purpose.

When the Lord has finished using Babylon as his means of judging the people of the region, he will then judge Babylon itself. The Lord judging the instruments of his judgment can be seen in places like Isaiah chapter 10 verses 5 to 15, in that case concerning Assyria. Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff in their hands is my fury.

Against a godless nation I sent him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. But he does not so intend, and his heart does not so think, but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations, not a few. For he says, Are not my commanders all kings? Is not Calno like Carthage? Is not Hamath like Arpat? Is not Samaria like Damascus? As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols, whose carved images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols as I have done to Samaria and her images? When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the boastful look in his eyes.

For he says, By my strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding, I remove the boundaries of people and plunder their treasures. Like a bull I bring down those who sit on thrones. My hand has found like a nest the wealth of the peoples, and as one gathers eggs that have been forsaken, so I have gathered all the earth, and there was none that moved a wing, or opened the mouth, or chirped.

Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it? Or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who has not wood. While Jeremiah's stance may have seemed to have been simplistically pro-Babylonian, seeming to mark him out as a traitor at certain points, at this point everything comes into a clearer focus. Jack Lumbum remarks that the judgements here are far more general in contrast to the prophecies against Moab for instance.

Babylon was the greatest city of Chaldea in southern Mesopotamia, situated on the river Euphrates, not too far from modern day Baghdad. Babylonia named the region around the Tigris and Euphrates from Babylon in the north down to the Persian Gulf in the south. Babylon first makes its appearance in the scriptures back in the book of Genesis, as Babel is introduced as the beginning of the kingdom of Nimrod in the land of Shinar, where the tower and the city of Babel are later built.

In Genesis, Babel is a backdrop for the calling of Abram, who, we ought to recall, is called from the general region of Babel, from Ur of the Chaldees. The city of Babylon looms larger than life in the scriptural imagination. Like many of the other nations mentioned in the list of nations to be judged, Babylon was a foil against which Israel's own identity had been formed.

The Neo-Babylonian Empire was closely associated with the Chaldeans, and the

Babylonians have routinely called Chaldeans in Jeremiah. However Nabonidus, the next great king of Babylon after the brief reigns of a few successors to Nebuchadnezzar, was Aramean from Haran, rather than Chaldean. Babylon was invaded by Cyrus the Great in 539 BC, who ruled over the Persian Achaemenid Empire.

This would lead to the end of exile for Jerusalem. Jeremiah is charged in anticipation to announce the downfall of Babylon, and the defeat of its god. Just as the defeat of Ammon was the defeat of Milcom, or the defeat of Moab was the defeat of Chemosh, so the defeat of Babylon is the defeat of Bel or Merodach.

Bel and Merodach are the same god. Bel was the chief of the Babylonian pantheon, another form of the name Baal, and a way of referring to the god Enlil. Merodach is a form of the term Marjuk, a deity famous for his victory over Tiamat in Babylonian creation mythology.

In the Enuma Elish, Marjuk kills Tiamat, a symbol of the primeval chaos waters, and forms the heaven and the earth from her divided body. However now the great god Marjuk is put to shame, his land is being despoiled and made desolate. To this point in the book of Jeremiah we have been told again and again of an enemy coming from the north, and now the enemy that comes from the north, Babylon, faces its own enemy from the north.

A nation will come upon her from her north. What it has done to others, others will do to it. And as Babylon is brought down, the flock of Judah and Israel will be restored.

The Lord describes the condition of his people. Their shepherds had failed them, the kings and the priests had not led them as they ought to have done, and as a result the people had been scattered, their fold had been destroyed, and they had been sent abroad to all different mountains and hills. They had been devoured by wild beasts and enemies.

However the Lord as the true shepherd of his people is going to gather them again. Here we should recall the prophecy of Jeremiah chapter 23 verses 1 to 4. Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, declares the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people.

You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord. As the Babylonians and

others have despoiled and destroyed and devoured the flock of the Lord, they have thought themselves innocent on account of the people's sin. The Babylonians seem to have some sense of the theology of Judah, and the way in which they are being judged for their sin.

We see this in Jeremiah chapter 40 verse 2 to 3. The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, The Lord your God pronounced this disaster against this place. The Lord has brought it about and has done as he said. Because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice, this thing has come upon you.

However, these devourers of the flock will be held accountable. The Lord instructs the remnant of his flock to flee from the midst of Babylon and out of the land of the Chaldeans. For a scattered flock, they will need new leaders.

The Lord here speaks of male goats before the flock, new leaders who will arise from the midst of the Jewish community in exile and lead them back to the land. For Babylon and the Chaldeans, however, their future involves becoming a prey of other nations. Just as they have preyed upon Judah, so they will be made the prey of other peoples.

The plundering nation of Babylon is compared to a frolicking heifer or a lusty stallion. These are animals defined by their power and their desire. In the same way, Babylon has been defined by its might and its proud sense of a lack of any limitations upon its desires.

However, this fertile and prosperous and powerful land will soon be put to shame and made desolate and waste. The Lord will strip her of her inhabitants and make her an object of scorn among the nations. Once again, we have a passage in which the Lord summons people to battle.

This time, though, it's not the Babylonians. It's the enemies of the Babylonians, who are called to come upon her and utterly destroy her. Whereas earlier, Judah was described as a flock that had been failed by its shepherds and led astray and scattered and then devoured by wild beasts, in verses 17-20, the imagery changes somewhat.

Israel is a hunted sheep and rather than focus upon the failure of the shepherds, the focus is upon the external threat of the lions. These lions are the great imperial powers that have dominated the region over the last 200 years. The Neo-Assyrian Empire and then the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire under Tiglath-Pileser III had removed much of the northern kingdom of Israel, especially the two and a half tribes in the region of the Transjordan after they were appealed to by Ahaz of Judah against Pekah the son of Ramaliah. Around 720 BC, Sargon II finished the job, destroying Samaria and wiping out the northern kingdom, deporting much of its population. Sennacherib had also threatened Jerusalem

in 701 BC, although Jerusalem had been spared at that point under Hezekiah.

Although Judah had escaped the Assyrians, they had not escaped the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar had come upon them in 597 BC, in 586 BC and then had deported even further remnants in 582 BC. The Lord is going to bring judgement upon this lion of Babylon, just as he brought judgement upon Assyria.

The Babylonians and the Medes had defeated the Assyrians in 609 BC, spelling the end of their empire and the rise of Babylon in their place. But now Babylon's turn has come and the Lord is going to regather his people. He will restore Israel and Judah to their pasture.

They will be brought back to the land, and not just to the place of Judah, but also to Ephraim and Gilead and the Transjordan. Beyond this restoration to the land, the Lord will deal with the deeper problem, the problem of their sin. The people to be restored to the land will be a faithful people in a way that they were not before.

They will also be a forgiven people. Their old sins will not be brought to mind again. After the return from the exile, for instance, we should note the way that idolatry seems to be largely wiped out.

There is not a general practice of idolatry after the return from exile. That sin, the sin that had heralded Israel being brought into exile and then Judah, was largely eradicated. Verses 21 following are largely a series of taunts against the land of Babylon.

We've encountered several similar passages to this in the other oracles against the nations. It focuses upon the humiliation of this once proud nation and the way that the Lord is the one who is bringing her downfall. The Lord is opening up his armory and equipping her enemies.

The Lord is spurring them on to fight against her and to destroy and eradicate her. The defeat of Babylon will be a demonstration of the vengeance of the Lord. A vengeance that will be declared in Jerusalem.

The Lord is, among other things, avenging the destruction of his temple. The enemies are summoned against Babylon and told to use their full force. We should bear in mind this prophecy against this cruel and violent people when we read the startling verses of Psalm 137 verses 8 to 9. O daughter of Babylon doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us.

Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock. As in the case of other nations, the judgment upon Babylon is specifically associated with their pride. It is also a demonstration of the Lord's power against the predatory nations.

The nations who think that they have Israel and Judah in their clutches and that they

cannot get free. But the Lord is their Redeemer and he will deliver them. The presentation of the power of the Lord as the Redeemer of Israel and also his judgment against the proud nations that oppose him can be seen in Isaiah chapter 47 verses 4 to 11 too.

Our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is his name, is the Holy One of Israel. Sit in silence and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans. For you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms.

I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage. I gave them into your hand. You showed them no mercy.

On the age you made your yoke exceedingly heavy, you said, I shall be mistress forever. So that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end. Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sits securely, who say in your heart, I am and there is no one besides me.

I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children. These two things shall come to you in a moment. In one day the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments.

You felt secure in your wickedness. You said, no one sees me. Your wisdom and knowledge led you astray.

And you said in your heart, I am and there is no one besides me. But evil shall come upon you, which you will not know how to charm away. Disaster shall fall upon you, for which you will not be able to atone.

And ruin shall come upon you suddenly, of which you know nothing. The proud will not survive long before the power of the Lord. The Lord delights to bring down the haughty.

The Lord summons disaster upon the Babylonians, a personified sword that is directed to every single part of Babylonian society. Their inhabitants, the officials, the wise men, the Chaldeans, the diviners, the warriors, the horses and chariots, the foreign troops and mercenaries, and then against all her treasures. Alongside the sword, the Lord summons a drought against her waters.

She will be dried up. Her fertility will wither away. All of this ultimately comes upon Babylon, an account of its pride and its idolatry.

It's a land of images, and they are mad over idols. What will be left? A desolate wasteland populated by scavenging beasts. A place that will no more be populated.

A place that, like Sodom and Gomorrah, will stand as a signal of the Lord's judgement and his vengeance upon those who oppose him in pride. Verses 41 to 46, with which the

chapter concludes, are surprising because they repeat verses that we found elsewhere in the book. In Jeremiah chapter 6, verses 22 to 24, Thus says the Lord, Behold, a people is coming from the north country.

A great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth. They lay hold on bow and javelin. They are cruel and have no mercy.

The sound of them is like the roaring sea. They ride on horses, set in array as a man for battle against you, O daughter of Zion. We have heard the report of it.

Our hands fall helpless. Anguish has taken hold of us. Pain as of a woman in labour.

That oracle was declared against Zion. But now, the same words are being used against Babylon, the one who was acting out that judgement back in Jeremiah chapter 6. This reuse of form and material is not accidental. It is, in its remixing of a former prophecy, underlining the theological point.

What Babylon has brought upon others, the Lord is bringing upon Babylon. We see the same thing in the prophecy that follows. This is again a reworking of a former oracle that we find in chapter 49, verses 19 to 21.

Behold, like a lion coming up from the jungle of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly make him run away from her, and I will appoint over her whomever I choose. For who is like me? Who will summon me? What shepherd can stand before me? Therefore hear the plan that the Lord has made against Edom and the purposes that he has formed against the inhabitants of Timan. Even the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away.

Surely their foes shall be appalled at their fate. At the sound of their fall the earth shall tremble. The sound of their cry shall be heard at the Red Sea.

What Babylon brought upon Edom, Babylon herself will suffer at the hand of another nation. Babylon does not get the final word. The Lord will avenge himself upon her.

A question to consider, how does the delay of almost all the material declared against Babylon to this point in the book change the way that we read the preceding prophecies and understand the place of Babylon within the theology of Jeremiah more generally? Romans chapter 5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass, for if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin, for the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. In Romans chapter 5 Paul steps back and looks at the bigger picture.

Having received good standing with and vindication from God, the alienation and enmity that once existed between us and God has been overcome through the work of Jesus Christ. It is through Jesus that we enjoy the new gracious standing with God that we now possess. In this standing we can also look forward to the future and hope.

While justification is about the present status that we enjoy with God, much of its significance is seen in the fact that it anticipates a greater vindication that awaits us on the last day. Being declared to be in the right with God, to have good standing with Him, we can await the last day with hope and confidence, believing that God's verdict, declared on the basis of Christ's death for our sins and his resurrection for our

justification, will be reaffirmed when we are judged according to our works on the last day. The justification we enjoy on the basis of God's sheer and unmerited grace through the work of Christ is a justification that is a genuine anticipation of future justification according to our works.

Paul says that we have been given access to the realm of God's grace in which we now stand. Grace isn't just a one-time thing, but it is a realm in which we now live and move and have our being. We live our entire lives out of and on the basis of God's grace.

Grace doesn't just begin our standing in Christ, leaving us to our own devices. Grace surrounds and accompanies us on every step of the way. Christian life is a life characterized by suffering, yet as our suffering is part of the larger movement by which we are conformed to Christ and led by God's grace from his declaration in our favour and our justification on account of Christ's death and resurrection to our final vindication on the last day, we can face suffering with joy.

Suffering is a means of our growth in Christian virtue. It produces endurance, and endurance produces deep-down strength of character. This tried, tested and true character yields a depth of hope and confidence in the Lord, an enduring assurance in the Lord's goodness even in the darkest places and hours.

Such hope will not be proved to be futile. We are assured of God's final judgment in our favour by the fact that he has given us his Holy Spirit as a down payment and guarantee. Through the Holy Spirit, the love of God has been poured into our hearts.

The Holy Spirit could here be presented as the personal presence of the love of God within us. However, the Spirit is also the one by whom we are formed in love for God. The gift of the Spirit is a bond of love that goes in both directions.

By the Holy Spirit, God is also conforming us to the judgment of the righteous that he will declare over us in the future. We might have noticed that the opening five verses of this chapter are developed around the Christian virtues of faith, hope and love. When the fullness of time had come, Christ died not for the deserving, but for the ungodly, for the lawless, for those alienated from and at enmity with God.

One could scarcely imagine someone dying for another person who is merely upstanding and righteous. At a stretch, perhaps, one could imagine someone dying for a person who was good, a person who stood out from his fellows for his generous, noble and kind traits. However, God's love for us was demonstrated in the fact that Christ died when we were still sinners and God's enemies.

In Christ, God gave the costliest gift, but this gift was given to those who might seem to be the very least deserving of it. If we were justified by such a costly and utterly unmerited gift, we can have even greater confidence that we will be saved by Christ

from the wrath of God on the last day. If the death of Christ dealt with the sin that alienated us from God, reconciling us to God and giving us good standing with him, how much more will his resurrection life accomplish the full reality of salvation for us? All of this is a cause for confident rejoicing in God.

God is going to carry through the salvation that he has begun in us, bringing it to its full completion. Paul compares the saving work of Christ with the means by which sin first entered the world through Adam. In this section of the chapter, Paul is placing the saving work of Christ in a grand cosmic frame.

The utterly unmerited gift of Christ is the means by which the entire human condition is addressed and reversed. Going back to the very beginning of the biblical story, Paul identifies Adam as the one by whom sin first entered into the world and death as a consequence of sin. This had disastrous consequences for the entire human race.

This is the classic biblical text for the doctrine of original sin and it leads to a number of questions. Why is Adam, for instance, the one by whom sin entered the world rather than Eve? Surely Eve sinned first by taking the fruit. There are a few points to make here.

First, Adam represents the whole race. Adam is the father of us all Adam is the one from whom Eve was formed. Eve does not stand for the whole race in the same way.

Adam committed a knowing trespass. Eve was deceived. Adam was given the law concerning the tree directly whereas Eve received it second hand and the serpent played off her knowledge that she had first hand against the knowledge that she received second hand.

Adam also was the guardian of the garden and the tree. He was the one who was given the law concerning the tree. He was also the one charged to guard and keep the garden and it was his failure to guard the tree to uphold the law of the tree and to protect Eve and the garden from the work of the serpent that led to sin coming.

The buck stopped with Adam and when God confronted humanity it was Adam in particular Adam as an individual who was most specifically charged with the responsibility. How can one man bring sin into the world? First of all Adam is the father of all humanity. He acts on our behalf.

By his act of rebellion against God he brought about the alienation of humanity from God an alienation that we all live out of. As human beings we all live with the consequences of what our forefathers did and in a great many cases we're continuing actively their legacy. After Adam and Eve's expulsion we were all born outside of the garden.

However this alienation is not something merely imposed upon us from without it's written into the very logic of our existence in the flesh. Adam's rebellion is a continuing an active rebellion an active rebellion in us something that's expressed in our very sinful

nature as theologians have termed it. Adam started the story but we are all continuing it.

His first great sin and our continuing sins are all part of a sinful reality all part of a single rebellion. Like father like sons and daughters. Here again it might help to look back at the story of Genesis where the story of the fall is merely the first stage of a series of falls.

The fall is played out again and again and again. Adam's original fall has consequences for everyone. We are all born outside of the garden we're all alienated from God but Adam's fall is also recapitulated played out again and repeated by his offspring.

In all these different situations when God brings people near to himself the fall pattern is played out again. In Genesis chapter 3 the story of the fall is the first chapter of an ongoing story. In the chapters that follow we see that fall being spread out in its effects and its implications.

Cain kills his brother Abel. A logic of vengeance becomes more pronounced in the story of Lamech and his wives. As we move further on into chapter 6 we see that the thoughts and intents of man's heart were only evil continually.

Adam's sin, like ink dropped onto tissue paper rapidly spreads in its effects. Its consequences alienation from God, enmity with God in sin and death. Death is not just physical death.

Death is primarily alienation from God the giver of life. Sin and alienation from God were active in the world between Adam's expulsion from the garden and Moses. However the law brings a different relationship with sin.

Under the law sin becomes much more explicit. It's smoked out into the open as N.T. Wright puts it. Outside of Israel pagans continued sinning in spiritual darkness.

Their sin was not really brought to light. Their sin was not really counted either. The counting of sin is something that happens more when people are brought into God's presence.

In Israel the law involved a constant reckoning with sin under the sacrificial system. Constant reminders of its alienating effects and its transgressive character. Constant reminders of the working of sin and death within the human life and soul.

Paul has argued for the comparability of the work of Christ and the work of Adam. However despite the formal similarities there are radical differences. The trespass of Adam led to the incredible spread of death but the grace of God leads to a much more abundant gift.

The power of the trespass may seem great but the free gift vastly exceeds it in power.

One produces condemnation the sin of Adam. The other the work of Christ produces justification.

One leads to the reign of death over humanity. The other leads to the reign in life of humanity and Christ. The contrast here we should notice is not between death's reign and life's reign but between death's reign and our reign in life.

Jesus as the last Adam and the second man takes the entire destiny of the human race upon himself. The salvation and deliverance that Jesus brings is comprehensive in its relationship to humanity. Christ isn't just salvaging some of the debris left after Adam's sin.

He is forming a completely restored human race in fellowship with himself. Paul isn't teaching universal salvation as some have argued here. Rather he's teaching comprehensive salvation of all in Christ.

Adam's disobedience to his heavenly father constituted his offspring as rebels against God alienated from him and living out of that alienation. Christ's obedience to his father in faithfully carrying out his commission brings us into right standing with God. What role does the law play in this story? The law for Paul came in to increase the trespass.

It's a very strange expression. What might Paul mean? The law for Paul seems to exacerbate the problem and if anything increase the alienation. While the rest of the nations did not directly deal with the Lord in the same way by giving them the law God brought Israel into a relationship with himself in which the more latent force of sin was incessantly inflamed into active rebellion and transgression where sin became so much more sinful where it was impossible to ignore because the law was bringing it to light the problem introduced by Adam the problem common to all of humanity rose to its greatest height and visibility in Israel.

However in the very place of the magnification of the power of sin God's grace was most powerfully revealed just as sin reigned in death on account of Adam's sin God's grace would utterly eclipse it through righteousness through God's saving justice his setting of the world to rights to the end of eternal life all through Jesus A question to consider Paul personifies sin in this passage presenting it as a reigning power. He treats sin's relationship with death sin's relationship with the transgression he speaks of the way that Adam established a living legacy of sin the way that sin is operative within us as we continue that legacy In this and a great many other ways a larger account of sin is just beneath the surface of this passage. If we were to give more attention to and develop in greater detail what Paul says concerning sin in this chapter what might we learn?