

# OpenTheo

## February 21st: Jeremiah 51 & Romans 6

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### Alastair Roberts

Babylon is fallen! No longer slaves to sin.

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

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## Transcript

Jeremiah chapter 51. Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon, against the inhabitants of Lebkemi. And I will send to Babylon winnowers, and they shall winnow her, and they shall empty her land when they come against her from every side on the day of trouble.

Let not the archer bend his bow, and let him not stand up in his armor. Spare not her young men, devote to destruction all her army. They shall fall down slain in the land of the Chaldeans, and wounded in her streets.

For Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the Lord of hosts. But the land of the Chaldeans is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel. Flee from the midst of Babylon, let everyone save his life, be not cut off in her punishment.

For this is the time of the Lord's vengeance, the repayment he is rendering her. Babylon

was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, making all the earth drunken. The nations drank of her wine, therefore the nations went mad.

Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken. Wail for her, take balm for her pain, perhaps she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she was not healed.

Forsake her and let us go, each to his own country. For her judgment has reached up to heaven, and has been lifted up even to the skies. The Lord has brought about our vindication.

Come, let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God. Sharpen the arrows, take up the shields. The Lord has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it.

For that is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance for his temple. Set up a standard against the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong. Set up watchmen, prepare the ambushes.

For the Lord has both planned and done what he spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon. O you who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures, your end has come, the thread of your life is cut. The Lord of hosts has sworn by himself, surely I will fill you with men, as many as locusts, and they shall raise the shout of victory over you.

It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens. When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses.

Every man is stupid and without knowledge. Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of delusion.

At the time of their punishment they shall perish. Not like these is he who is the portion of Jacob, for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance. The Lord of hosts is his name.

You are my hammer and weapon of war. With you I break nations in pieces, with you I destroy kingdoms, with you I break in pieces the horse and his rider, with you I break in pieces the chariot and the charioteer, with you I break in pieces man and woman, with you I break in pieces the old man and the youth, with you I break in pieces the young man and the young woman, with you I break in pieces the shepherd and his flock, with you I break in pieces the farmer and his team, with you I break in pieces governors and commanders. I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea before you for your very eyes for all the evil that they have done in Zion, declares the Lord.

Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, declares the Lord, which destroys the whole earth. I will stretch out my hand against you and roll you down from the crags and make you a burnt mountain. No stone shall be taken from you for a corner and no stone for a foundation, but you shall be a perpetual waste, declares the Lord.

Set up a standard on the earth, blow the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations for war against her, summon against her the kingdoms, Ararat, Minai and Ashkenaz, appoint a marshal against her, bring up horses like bristling locusts, prepare the nations for war against her, the kings of the Medes with their governors and deputies, and every land under their dominion. The land trembles and writhes in pain, for the Lord's purposes against Babylon stand, to make the land of Babylon a desolation, without inhabitant. The warriors of Babylon have ceased fighting, they remain in their strongholds, their strength has failed, they have become women, her dwellings are on fire, her bars are broken, one runner runs to meet another and one messenger to meet another, to tell the king of Babylon that his city is taken on every side, the forts have been seized, the marshes are burned with fire and the soldiers are in panic, for thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, the daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor, at the time when it is trodden, yet a little while and the time of her harvest will come.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon has devoured me, he has crushed me, he has made me an empty vessel, he has swallowed me like a monster, he has filled his stomach with my delicacies, he has rinsed me out. The violence done to me and to my kinsmen be upon Babylon, let the inhabitant of Zion say, my blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, let Jerusalem say. Therefore thus says the Lord, behold I will plead your cause and take vengeance for you, I will dry up her sea and make her fountain dry and Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant.

They shall roar together like lions, they shall growl like lions' cubs, when they are inflamed I will prepare them a feast and make them drunk, that they may become merry, then sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake, declares the Lord. I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams and male goats. How Babylon is taken, the praise of the whole earth seized, how Babylon has become a horror among the nations, the sea has come up on Babylon, she is covered with its tumultuous waves, her cities have become a horror, a land of drought and a desert, a land in which no one dwells and through which no son of man passes, and I will punish Bel in Babylon and take out of his mouth what he has swallowed, the nations shall no longer flow to him, the wall of Babylon has fallen.

Go out of the midst of her, my people, let everyone save his life from the fierce anger of the Lord, let not your heart faint and be not fearful at the report heard in the land, when a report comes in one year and afterward a report in another year and violence is in the land and ruler is against ruler, therefore behold the days are coming when I will punish

the images of Babylon, her whole land shall be put to shame and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her, then the heavens and the earth and all that is in them shall sing for joy over Babylon, for the destroyer shall come against them out of the north, declares the Lord. Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel, just as for Babylon have fallen the slain of all the earth, you who have escaped from the sword, go, do not stand still, remember the Lord from far away and let Jerusalem come into your mind, we are put to shame, for we have heard reproach, dishonor has covered our face, for foreigners have come into the holy places of the Lord's house, therefore behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will execute judgment upon her images and through all her land the wounded shall groan, though Babylon should mount up to heaven and though she should fortify her strong height, yet destroyers would come from me against her, declares the Lord. A voice, a cry from Babylon, the noise of great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans, for the Lord is laying Babylon waste and stilling her mighty voice, their waves roar like many waters, the noise of their voice is raised, for a destroyer has come upon her, upon Babylon, her warriors are taken, their bows are broken in pieces, for the Lord is a God of recompense, he will surely repay, I will make drunk her officials and her wise men, her governors, her commanders and her warriors, they shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake, declares the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts, thus says the Lord of hosts, the broad wall of Babylon shall be leveled to the ground and her high gates shall be burned with fire, the peoples labor for nothing and the nations weary themselves only for fire, the word that Jeremiah the prophet commanded Saraiah, the son of Nariah, son of Masih, when he went with Zedekiah king of Judah to Babylon, in the fourth year of his reign, Saraiah was the quartermaster.

Jeremiah wrote in a book all the disaster that should come upon Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon, and Jeremiah said to Saraiah, when you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, and say, O Lord, you have said concerning this place that you will cut it off, so that nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate forever. When you finish reading this book, tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, and say, thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her, and they shall become exhausted. Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

The prophecy of Jeremiah ends with an extended series of prophecies against the nation of Babylon. Throughout the book, Babylon has been the great threat from the north that is going to come upon Judah and the rest of the nations of the region, and now at the very end, Babylon is going to be made to drink the cup of the Lord's judgement too. The Lord will be behind the judgement upon Babylon, just as he will be behind the judgement upon Judah.

The prophecies here might largely date from before 594 BC, just before Sariah is sent to Babylon by Zedekiah. The Lord will raise up an enemy, a destroyer against Babylon. Lebkemi, mentioned in verse 1, is an atbash of Chaldea.

An atbash is a sort of code by which the first letter of the alphabet is replaced by the last, the second letter of the alphabet by the penultimate letter of the alphabet, the third letter of the alphabet by the antepenultimate, and so forth. There is another instance of this in verse 41, where Babylon is spoken of as Shishak. It does not seem likely that this is being used as a way of disguising the identity of this place.

More likely it's being used as a form of wordplay. The new term that stands in for Chaldea could be translated heart of my adversaries. The prophecy describes the routing of the army of Babylon and of its population.

This judgement occurs on two accounts. The Lord has not rejected his people and he's going to act on their behalf, on behalf of Israel and Judah. In addition to this, the sin of Babylon, the proud city, has grown great and the Lord is going to bring judgement upon them on account of their guilt.

Seeing the judgement that's about to come upon this city, the people are warned to flee from her, presumably the exiles in her midst. Earlier Babylon was the means of the Lord's judgement. Babylon was the golden cup of the Lord's judgement that he made the nations drink.

But now Babylon is going to have to drink the cup of the Lord's judgement. The language here might remind us of chapter 25 verses 15 to 17. 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. And then again in verses 27 to 29 of that chapter.

Then you shall say to them, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, drink and 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. Like Egypt and Judah before her, Babylon is a nation searching for healing, for balm, and yet there is none to be found.

The nations exiled within her cannot heal her and they must all flee to their own country. Her judgement is about to fall upon her and they should not be around when that occurs. The great announcement of the fall of Babylon is also found in Isaiah chapter 21 verse 9. And behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs.

And he answered, fallen, fallen is Babylon and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground. More famously, this imagery is developed in the book of Revelation, referring to the city of Jerusalem and a symbol of the great city that stands against the Lord. In chapter 18 verses 1 to 8. After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory.

And he called out with a mighty voice, fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues. For her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds.

Mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed, as she glorified herself and lived in luxury. So give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see. For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire, for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.

The destruction of Babylon is also the vindication of the people of the Lord. It is the deliverance by which they are declared to be his people. As they return to Zion, they will declare the great deliverance that he has wrought.

The Lord summons an army against Babylon, more particularly the army of the Medes. A number of scholars see this as anachronistic. Babylon was not actually taken over by the Medes so much as by the Achaemenid Empire.

This was a Persian empire led by Cyrus the Great, who had already taken over the Median Empire, an empire to Babylon's north, that enjoyed power concurrently. In later parts of scripture, however, in the Book of Daniel and also in the Book of Esther, the Medes and the Persians come as a pairing. In the Book of Daniel it's Darius the Mede that takes over Babylon.

If we identify Darius the Mede with Cyrus the Great, as many commentators have done, then we might consider the way that Cyrus himself is connected to the Median royal family. That connection might explain why he is called Darius the Mede, but might also further explain why referring to the Medes here may not be entirely inaccurate. This destruction will be the very end of Babylon.

Babylon is described as the one that dwells by many waters, the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates, the many canals and lakes and other things in the region. Later, in the Book of Revelation, Babylon the Great is described as sitting upon many waters. The Lord, not being able to swear by anything greater, swears by himself.

The army that he will bring against Babylon will be like a swarm of locusts that will utterly cover their land and declare victory over them. Verses 15-19 are largely a repetition of verses that we find in chapter 10 verses 12-16. In that chapter they are a declaration of the power of the Creator God against the false and weak idols who cannot act to save their people.

The Lord is the one who created all things, controls all natural forces. He is also the covenant God of Jacob, the one whose inheritance is Israel. He will demonstrate his power over his creation as he delivers Israel, which will also prove his faithfulness.

Polemics against idols are an important trope within the prophets in the context of such promises of redemption. Such deliverances, which fulfil the promises and the predictions of the Lord, are a means by which he demonstrates his character, his power and his providence, and proves that he is unique as the Creator God. We see things like this in Isaiah chapter 40 verses 18-25.

To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness compare with him? An idol? A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot. He seeks out a skilful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move.

Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in, who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you liken me? That I should be like him, says the Holy One.

And then also in places like Isaiah chapter 44, verses 10-17, who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified, they shall be put to shame together.

The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the holes. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails.

He drinks no water and is faint. The carpenter stretches a line, he marks it out with a

pencil, he shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house.

He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak, and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man.

He takes a part of it and warms himself. He kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it.

He makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire, over half he eats meat, he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire.

And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, Deliver me, for you are my god. The futility of idolatry will be proved in the day that the Lord brings down the great power of Babylon, just as he has proved his power over Chemosh and Milcom.

He will also prove his power over Bel or Marjuk. Babylon was the means of the Lord's judgement, earlier described as the cup that the Lord used. In verse 20 Babylon is described as the Lord's hammer and weapon of war, much as the Lord used Assyria as his axe in the Book of Isaiah, so the Lord used Babylon as his hammer.

The Lord lists a number of the things that he will achieve with Babylon. Breaking nations in pieces, destroying kingdoms, horses and riders, chariots and charioteers, men and women, the old man and the youth, the young man and the young woman, shepherd and his flock, farmer and his team, governors and commanders. I think Jack Lumbom is right in seeing a chiasmic structure here, or a book-ended pattern.

Once the Lord has finished using this hammer, however, Babylon and the inhabitants of Chaldea will be repaid for what they have done. Babylon is described like a mountain destroying the whole earth, but its own mountain will be destroyed in the years to come. It will be utterly torn down beyond rebuilding, not a stone left upon another.

Once again the Lord summons the army against her. Northern kingdoms that are part of the Median Empire that will later become part of the Achaemenid Empire are going to be assembled as part of this great attacking host. They will desolate the land of Babylon which will be powerless to resist them.

Their boundaries will be breached, their defences overcome. They themselves will be made like a threshing floor, trodden underfoot in judgement, trampled beneath the boots of an invading army. Babylon is described like a great monster that has swallowed up Judah.



The Lord is going to avenge the blood of his people upon this great beast. They are destined for a destruction, like lambs being brought to the slaughter. Their judgement will be such a signal one that they will become a byword and a horror among the nations.

The other nations will see what has befallen them and they will become an object of hissing and derision. Just as Lebkaimai was used for the Chaldeans in verse 1, in verse 41 Babylon is referred to as Shishak which is another Akbash code word. This city was once the praise of the whole earth.

All were in awe of her. Vast territories were under her thrall. In verse 36 the Lord described making her sea dry.

In verse 42 sea imagery is used in a different way. The sea has come up and is going to overwhelm Babylon. She is going to be swamped by other nations.

As we've seen before the punishment here is not just upon a people, it's upon their false god. Their god Bel, otherwise called Enlil or Marjuk is going to be punished and humiliated. He's going to have to disgorge the nations that he has swallowed.

From the belly of this slain monster the Lord summons forth his people. The downfall of Babylon at the hand of this army from the north will be heralded by a united chorus of celebratory voices from heaven and earth. All joined in rejoicing over the downfall of this city.

This judgement occurs because the Lord is avenging his people. Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel. As the exiled Judahites see this disaster fall upon Babylon, thoughts of Jerusalem should come to their mind.

They should remember the way that they were dishonoured and ashamed. They should remember the way that Babylon had come into the holy places of the Lord's house and should recognise that what is befalling Babylon at this point is the fulfilment of the Lord's judgement upon her. The Lord bringing upon this great city what is due to her.

Her deeds are returning upon her own head. The city gives up the greatest of cries as she's been destroyed and then all is silent. She's laid waste, made desolate and no one will dwell in her again.

This is all declared by the king, the Lord of hosts, the one who has the power to bring this judgement upon Babylon and can predict it all in advance. The chapter and the body of the book ends with a colophon. The details contained in the colophon are listed by Lumbum.

The name of the scribe, Saria the son of Neriah, son of Masir. The date, the fourth year of Zedekiah. The source, the words that were written by Jeremiah toward Babylon.

The reason for making the copy, for a public reading in Babylon, the place where the text should be deposited in the middle of the Euphrates. The curse that will come with it. Thus shall Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her and they shall become exhausted.

Lumbum further observes a number of very striking parallels between this and the scroll that was written by Beruk, the son of Neriah, back in 605 BC. That was written in the fourth year of Jehoikim. This is written in the fourth year of Zedekiah.

There is political unrest on the international scene. There has just been the battle at Carchemish. In 594 there has been rebellion in Babylon.

There is a decision made to prepare a scroll of Jeremiah's Judah prophecies and then there is a decision made to prepare a scroll of Jeremiah's Babylon prophecies. There is a member of a scribal family who writes the scroll from the prophet's dictation and both of them come from the same family. They are both sons of Neriah.

The scribe later makes a public reading of the scroll and after the reading the scroll suffers a sort of destruction. It is burned in the fire by Jehoikim in the winter palace in chapter 36 and after Sariah reads the scroll in Babylon it is sunk in the Euphrates. Both might be symbols of the destruction they speak of.

And then finally in both cases after delivering these prophecies Jeremiah steps back from public life for a period of time. In the final edition of this book this colophon becomes the end of the entire book save for the historical epilogue of the final chapter but this is the ending of the prophecies of Jeremiah. A question to consider, the prophecies concerning the fall of Babylon in this and the preceding chapter become paradigmatic in scripture.

Particularly in the book of Revelation this image of Babylon the Great fallen is taken up and applied to another city. Why might the fall of Babylon be so paradigmatic? Why might the prophecies concerning its judgement be taken up and applied to different situations in the future? How does the judgement upon Babylon spoken of in these chapters anticipate a much greater and more final awaited judgement? Romans chapter 6 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him.

For the death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions.

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law, but under grace? By no means.

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, leading to sanctification.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6 begins with the question of how we are to respond to the abounding of grace in the place where sin abounded, a point that Paul made at the end of chapter 5. If the blackness of human sin occasions the most dazzling manifestations of divine grace, couldn't an argument be made for continuing in the domain of sin, so that the radical character of God's grace might be even more apparent? If God justifies the ungodly and the greatness of his grace is most apparent in this, why should we ever leave the domain of sin? In the previous chapter Paul spoke of opposing reigns, the reign of sin in death and the reign of grace through righteousness leading to eternal life. God's grace bursts into the realm of sin's power like a blinding light, but its effect is to release us from that realm and to bring us into another realm, the realm of grace, where it reigns through righteousness.

If grace delivers us from the realm of sin, so radically that we are described as having died to it, continuing to act as if we lived in the realm of sin would be to empty grace of

meaning, it would be like the freed slave that continued to grovel before his old master. The Christian has experienced a transition from the old realm of sin's reign in death to the realm of the reign of grace in righteousness leading to eternal life and this transition is enacted in baptism. In baptism we are united to Christ and his death so that we might also share in his resurrection life.

In the present by moral newness of life, by the work of the resurrecting spirit and in the future as our bodies themselves will be raised to eternal life. Many people get nervous when Paul speaks about baptism in this way. Some have argued that Paul cannot be speaking about actual water baptism.

His statements suggest salvation by baptism. He must be talking about some inner spiritual baptism. However for Paul these things are not detached from each other.

Entrance into the new realm of life in Christ occurs through baptism. How then are we to make sense of this? The first thing to consider here is that baptism is an integral part of the larger movement of turning to Christ. An analogy might help.

When an old king dies, the next in the line of succession immediately accedes to the throne. The throne is never left vacant. However while the accession to the throne is immediate in some senses, there is a process by which it is proclaimed, formalised and put into full effect.

The coronation of the new monarch can occur months after the accession. In the case of King Edward VIII in the UK there was never a coronation as he abdicated beforehand. In Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's case the coronation was 14 months after the accession.

She was the queen months before the coronation, but her coronation was not an afterthought. When people think of Her Majesty the Queen becoming queen, it is probably the coronation that comes to their mind. King Edward VIII's entry into kingship, however, was abortive, not least because there was no coronation ceremony.

The coronation is the ceremonial formalisation and glorious manifestation of the new reign, and baptism is not dissimilar. Entrance into the new life of Christ is both instantaneous and a process, a process of which baptism is the great formalisation and enactment. Conversion without baptism for Paul would be seen as incomplete, a failure to enter into the full reality of what God has given us in salvation.

Like the coronation of a new monarch, baptism ceremonially enacts the reality of the transition in a way that symbolically manifests the meaning and significance of what is occurring. It brings the transition into its full effect, bringing the baptised person into full and public communion in the Church. A coronation is a public and dramatic manifestation of the reality of what has and is taking place in acceding to the throne, assuring the newly crowned monarch of their full and true possession of the authority

and dignity of the throne, and displaying the reality of the glory of the new monarch to both the kingdom and the wider world.

Baptism again is much the same. It is a seal of the transition to us, assuring us of its reality, of the firmness of Christ's promises to us, and of the unreserved dedication of our lives to which we are summoned. It also manifests our transition to the Church and the world, calling them to treat us differently from here on out.

Paul speaks of baptism as actually accomplishing something, of bringing us into possession of new life. Is Paul teaching some magical doctrine of baptism? Not at all. Ceremonies can effect remarkable changes.

Two single people can walk into a church, go through a ceremony, say some words, exchange rings, and come out as a married couple. Now the two persons could conceivably go through the ceremony and leave the church, go their separate ways and never interact again. Everyone could continue to treat them as if they were still single, and the wedding would be a fairly empty charade.

Although formally their status would have changed, in actual fact little else had. The efficacy of a wedding ceremony is in large measure found in the fact that the participants live and view themselves in a very different way afterwards. The efficacy of the ceremony is largely prospective.

It anticipates the couple confirming the meaning of the ceremony in living new lives after it, new lives that are lived in terms of what occurred in the ceremony. Although a couple may fail to live out the reality that a wedding ceremony ushers them into, many do fail in this way. A wedding does not bring one into an ambivalent status.

It anticipates a positive response, and the person who fails to live faithfully in the newness of married life empties the wedding of its meaning. Baptism is much the same. Baptism formalises, ceremonially enacts, and seals to us our entrance into the privileges of sons and daughters of God.

Its efficacy is mostly prospective. It anticipates our actual living out of the new lives into which we have been brought. Paul wants the Romans, and us, to look at our baptisms and to live out the meaning of what God has declared concerning us in them.

The expectation is that baptised Christians will be living lives of a markedly different character. The baptised Christian who is going on living as he did before is violating the meaning of his baptism. For Paul, our baptism anticipates and assures us of future resurrection.

In baptism our bodies are marked out as bodies to be raised in glory on the last day. Our baptisms call us to look at our bodies differently. God has claimed our bodies, in all of their weakness, frailty, mortality, unshapeliness, ugliness and indignity, for the glory of

his heavenly kingdom.

Our bodies now belong to the realm of grace. Our bodies are to be released from the dominion of death, from the shame of sin that we feel when we are exposed to others' gaze, or experience a sense of violation on account of things that we have done with, or others have done to, our bodies. We have been set free, and God wants us to enter into the full experience of that freedom, as his grace reigns in the realm of our bodies, through his saving righteousness, until that great day when we are re-clothed with glorious bodies, like our saviour Jesus Christ, and God's deliverance is consummated in our enjoyment of life eternal.

This transition, however, is one that only occurs through union with Christ. We are delivered as our bodies are united with his body, as his death becomes our death, as our old man is crucified with him and laid to rest in his tomb. As Christians we exist as people between death and life, people caught in the tension between Christ's death and his resurrection.

Our lives play out in this realm. Our release from sin through union with Christ has been proclaimed in baptism, and now we live in anticipation of its full realisation on the last day. Christ no longer lives in the realm of the dominion of death, he has overcome it.

If we are united with Christ and his death, a reality ceremonially enacted and sealed to us in baptism, we need to think about ourselves very differently. We are simultaneously dead and alive. While we still have one foot in the realm of death and have mortal bodies, yet we already experience the new life of the resurrecting spirit within us.

Recalling the fact of our baptisms, by faith we are to reckon what they declare to be true of us. Henceforth we are to consider ourselves very differently. Considering ourselves dead to sin and alive to God involves no longer habitually living in terms of the reign of sin as puppets of our passions.

Being set free is of little meaning if we still continue to turn up for work for our old master every day. Likewise, the new life of grace is something that we are called to live out. You can't have new life unless you are actively living it.

For Paul this living out of new life is focused on the realm of the body. We must cease offering our bodily members as instruments for unrighteousness and must instead present ourselves to God as those raised to new life with our members as instruments of righteousness. There are sacrificial overtones that we might recognise here.

In Romans 12.1 Paul urges the Roman Christians to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. This sacrificial presentation of the body, powerfully symbolically enacted in baptism, is confirmed in lives of Christian obedience. The sacrificial paradigm that Paul employs in Romans chapter 12 is not so explicit but it is no less present in this chapter.

We are called to present our members, to offer our bodies like sacrifices to God. And the grounds for this exhortation are found in our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. The sacrificial overtones in Paul's statement are to be seen not only in his use of the term present but also in the notion of presenting members.

Sacrifices were offered to God in a dismembered form. This is also priestly in character. Priestly initiation involved the symbolic devotion of limbs and organs to God's service, with the blood placed upon particular parts of the body.

By speaking of the presentation of our members, our limbs and organs to God, Paul accords a greater prominence to the body. What we present to God is not just our actions, not just our agency, nor even yet ourselves as agents, but our limbs and organs themselves, in their givenness and objectivity. All of this presents a sacrificial model for Christian obedience.

In Christian obedience we confirm in practice the offering of our bodies which occurred in baptism. Paul's grounding of Christian obedience in the limbs and organs of the body also creates an extremely tight connection between person and action. By acting righteously I am presenting my limbs and organs to God, a membering of the sacrifice of my whole self.

John Berkeley draws attention to a further importance of the body within Paul's account of ethics in Romans, highlighting the way that Paul locates the operation of sin and its defeat within the body. He writes, It is precisely in his or her corporeality that the believer is simultaneously dead and alive. It is not for nothing that Paul here uses military language, weapons, since the body is the critical site of resistance.

The very location where sin once had most visible sway, and where its grip still draws believers' bodily selves towards death, is now the location where the newness of life breaks through into action, displaying in counterintuitive patterns of behaviour the miraculous Christ-life that draws their embodied selves towards the vivification or redemption of the body. Some scholars have spoken about the notion of a habitus. A habitus is our basic embodied orientation towards life, our dispositions, perceptions, sensibilities, our ordering structures, our tastes, our styles, our bodily skills and our habits.

A habitus is what we have learned by body, those things that have become second nature to us. Paul, John Berkeley suggests, had a sense of this when he spoke of the body of sin. He writes, He seems to have a sense that the body has been commandeered by sin, such that its dispositions, emotions, speech patterns, and habitual gestures are bound to systems of honour, self-aggrandisement, and license that are fundamentally at odds with the will of God.

The Christian life of obedience that Paul expresses is a life that begins with and in the

body. The bodily habitus of sin has to be unworked, and a new righteous bodily habitus instilled in its place. And baptism is the place where this training of our bodies most clearly begins.

Berkeley writes again, One could hardly imagine a more effective demonstration of this rescue than the physical rite of baptism, which Paul interprets as a transition from death to life, performed on and with the body. Henceforth believers give themselves over to this new life, as alive from the dead, inasmuch as they present their organs as weapons of righteousness to God. In other words, they are committed to instantiate a new embodied habitus.

This training of the body is almost invariably a social matter. Our bodies are trained as they are incorporated into a larger social body. No one is born as a native of such a community, nor can we simply choose to be natives.

We must all be formed into natives through the inculcation of a particular habitus. This is a slow process where we take on the character of new people. Baptism is a first step in the process of forming the habitus of the Christian faith within us.

At the point of baptism, our bodies are written into the larger social body, incorporated into it. This formation of the individual body through the social body is alluded to in Romans 12 verse 1, which speaks of presenting bodies - plural - as a living sacrifice - singular. Our individual bodies are rendered sacrificial as they are made part of the many-membered body of Christ.

It is a matter of great significance that baptism brings us into the social body of the visible church. The movement of the body into the life of the church - a movement whose first major step occurs in baptism - is an essential part of Christian training and the process of conformity to the likeness of Christ. Without baptism's process of incorporating us into the body of Christ and the bodily training that follows it in the visible church, the pedagogical process of conforming us to Christ would be extremely limited and the most fundamental part of ourselves would not have been offered to God.

In baptism our limbs and organs are set apart for God's service. This divine claim upon our bodies is a founding principle of Christian ethics - it is one of the chief reasons why Christian obedience should be properly understood as sacrificial. Baptism manifests and initiates a reorientation of the body and its members.

It incorporates us into a new social body. Indeed, it is a practice that forms the social body itself - the body of the church - and it does so in order that we might, through its co-option and training of our bodies - in liturgy and rituals, in practices and forms and in relations - that we might begin to think, to desire, to perceive, to be disposed and to relate differently - that we might learn to live as natives of the body of Christ. Baptism then not only expresses the sacrificial principle that grounds Christian imperatives, it



also begins to instil in us the sacrificial habitus by which we will fulfil them.

Sin's dominion over us – a dominion that imposes understanding, is strengthened by the law – has ceased. We now live in the realm of grace. However, our release from the realm of sin and death has to be lived out as we present ourselves as servants to a very different master.

The story of the Exodus, for instance, a story that had its great transition in the crossing of the Red Sea, was a story of moving from the oppressive service of Pharaoh to the dignifying and glorifying service of the Lord. We must make a similar movement. We make a mockery of our release if we carry on living our old way of life.

For Paul, slavery and freedom are paradoxically interrelated. Freedom from sin is discovered in obedience from the heart to the teaching that we have been placed under, and in becoming slaves to righteousness. This is a willing slavery to God.

And we often think of freedom as living without a master, and living without any law or standard. For Paul, true freedom is obedience from the heart to a new, good master, who liberates us from the cruelty of other masters, not least the mastery of our own passions. Freedom, for instance, can be found in authorisation.

The Israelites enjoyed a much higher status when they were made servants of God, a kingdom of priests, not just allowed to fend for themselves in the wilderness. They came under the more direct rule of God, but that rule was one that authorised them and gave them authority, not just one that placed them under authority. Likewise, there is freedom to be found through obedience to a standard.

The person who learns the standards and the principles of a musical instrument to the point that they can play as a virtuoso is far freer with that instrument than the person who observes no standards or principles, and ignorantly treats the instrument as if no training were required to play it. The point of obedience from the heart is important. The law is written on the hearts of the people of God in the New Covenant.

No longer is the law just an external master, something that we resist and rebel against. Rather, it should be something that we willingly obey from the heart, something in which we find true freedom. The old slavery that we were in was one that escalated.

We might recall the progressive stages of giving people up in Romans 1. It was a movement into greater levels of impurity and lawlessness, leading to more dreadful degrees of dishonour and bondage. However, as we present ourselves to a new master, the vicious cycle is replaced by a virtuous one. As we present our members as slaves to righteousness, it leads to sanctification, to our being set apart for God's presence and service.

The old slavery seemed to promise a sort of liberty. It declared that we were free from

the demands of righteousness and God. However, the true nature of that supposed freedom was disclosed through its progressive outworking.

It yielded the fruit of shame. It led to bitter consequences in our lives as we reaped its fruit. It led to bondage to our passions.

It led to the breakdown of our relationships. And ultimately, its outcome was death. However, while we are replacing one form of slavery with another, in becoming slaves of God rather than slaves of sin, the two forms of slavery could not be more different.

And the difference is ultimately revealed in the radically different outcomes that they have. Slavery to God ultimately leads to the honour and the glory of being set apart for God, in contrast to the old shame and the tyranny of our old master. Slavery to God, instead of yielding death, ultimately leads to eternal life.

And Paul returns to the conclusion of chapter 5 in the final verse, wrapping up the entire argument of the chapter. There are two contrasting ways, the way of sin and the way of grace. Sin pays wages.

The natural outworking of sin is death. However, grace operates in a very different way. It isn't wages, but a free gift, a superabundant gift, nothing short of eternal life itself, and it's given to us in and through the Messiah, Jesus our Lord.

If we receive this gift, let us live in it. A question to consider, what are some practical ways in which we can more fully express the corporeality of our presenting our bodily members to God in Christian service?