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The fall of Jerusalem and the deportation to Babylon. A split 'I' and a bifurcated Law.

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

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Transcript

Jeremiah Chapter 52. Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutel, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libna.

And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For because of the anger of the Lord, it came to the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he cast them out from his presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon, and in the ninth year of his reign in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it, and they built siege works all around it. So the city was besieged till the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war fled and went out from the city by night, by the way of a gate between the two walls, by the king's garden. And the Chaldeans were around the city, and they went in the direction of the Araba. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him.

Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he passed sentence on him. The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and also slaughtered all the officials of Judah at Riblah. He put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains, and the king of Babylon took him to Babylon and put him in prison till the day of his death.

In the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, that was the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar the captain of the bodyguard who served the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, every great house he burnt down. And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem.

And Nebuchadnezzar the captain of the guard carried away captive some of the poorest of the people, and the rest of the people who were left in the city, and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the artisans. But Nebuchadnezzar the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and ploughmen. And the pillars of bronze that were in the house of the Lord, and the stands in the bronze sea that were in the house of the Lord, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried all the bronze to Babylon.

And they took away the pots and the shovels and the snuffers and the basins and the dishes for incense, and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service, also the small bowls and the firepans and the basins and the pots and the lampstands and the dishes for incense, and the bowls for drink-offerings. What was of gold the captain of the guard took away as gold, and what was of silver as silver. As for the two pillars, the one sea, the twelve bronze bulls that were under the sea, and the stands which Solomon the king had made for the house of the Lord, the bronze of all these things was beyond weight.

As for the pillars, the height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits. Its circumference was twelve cubits, and its thickness was four fingers, and it was hollow. On it was a capital of bronze.

The height of the one capital was five cubits. A network and pomegranates all of bronze were around the capital. And the second pillar had the same with pomegranates.

There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides. All the pomegranates were a hundred

upon the network all around. And the captain of the guard took Soraya the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold.

And from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the men of war, and seven men of the king's council, who were found in the city, and the secretary of the commander of the army, who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land, who were found in the midst of the city. And Nebuchadnezzar the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. And the king of Babylon struck them down, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath.

So Judah was taken into exile out of its land. This is the number of the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away captive in the seventh year. Three thousand and twenty-three Judeans.

In the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred and thirty-two persons. In the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Judeans seven hundred and forty-five persons. All the persons were four thousand six hundred.

And in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, evil Meredak king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah, and brought him out of prison. And he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put off his prison garments, and every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table, and for his allowance a regular allowance was given him by the king, according to his daily needs, until the day of his death, as long as he lived.

The book of Jeremiah concludes not with Jeremiah's final words, nor with the great prophecies against Babylon in chapters fifty to fifty-one, but with the historical epilogue of chapter fifty-two. The book of Jeremiah's prophecies conclude in chapter fifty-one verse sixty-four, and what follows here is largely the text of 2 Kings chapter twenty-four verse eighteen to chapter twenty-five verse thirty, with a few variations and additions. A similar inclusion of material from the historical books into one of the prophetic books can be seen in chapters thirty-six to thirty-nine of the book of Isaiah.

Those chapters contain much of the material of 2 Kings chapters eighteen to twenty. The most major change from 2 Kings chapter twenty-five is the exclusion of its account of Gedaliah. Given the treatment of the history of the Judahites after the fall of the kingdom in chapters forty to forty-three, it should not surprise us that it was excluded at this point.

It might seem as if this is a case of a lazy cut and paste from another book, but even

material that seems to be repeated in scripture, as several parts of Jeremiah are even within the book itself, are not detached from their new locations, or straightforward repetitions. In some cases, as in the verses at the end of chapter fifty, the repeating of verses from another context is, far from lazy cutting and pasting, functioning as a sort of subtle theological commentary which attentive hearers should be able to pick up upon. Jeremiah chapter fifty-two needs to be read in the wider context of the book of Jeremiah, where it has been thoughtfully placed.

As we have noted at several points in studying the book of Jeremiah, in light both of internal features of the book and the evidence of the Septuagint version of the book, the book of Jeremiah underwent a series of additions and several re-orderings of its material, before coming down to us in the form that we now have it in our Bibles. We might note the similarity between this chapter and the earlier account of chapter thirty-nine to forty verse six, where the fall of Jerusalem is followed by the release of Jeremiah, much as the fall of Jerusalem is followed here by the release of Jehoiakim. In its current position, the material of chapter fifty-two highlights the way that Jeremiah's ministry was vindicated in his lifetime, the event with which it was largely concerned coming to pass as the enemy from the north came upon Jerusalem and destroyed it.

This chapter also contains some unique material, in the numbers of the exiles in verses twenty-eight to thirty. The material of this chapter likely dates from sometime after five-hundred BC, over twenty-five years after the downfall of Jerusalem. Zedekiah, like Jehoiakim, reigned for eleven years before rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar.

He repeats the error of his predecessor and suffers the same consequences. All of this was discussed in places like Ezekiel chapter seventeen verses eleven to twenty-one, which warned against looking to the Egyptians for an alliance against the Babylonians. He also warned against the covenant that it might stand, but he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and a large army.

Will he thrive? Can one escape, who does such things? Can he break the covenant and yet escape? As I live, declares the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwells, who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant with him he broke, in Babylon he shall die. Pharaoh, with his mighty army and great company, will not help him in war, when mounds are cast up and siege walls built to cut off many lives. He despised the oath in breaking the covenant, and behold he gave his hand and did all these things.

He shall not escape. Therefore thus says the Lord God, as I live, surely it is my oath that he despised, and my covenant that he broke. I will return it upon his head, I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and enter into judgment with him there for the treachery he has committed against me.

And all the pick of his troops shall fall by the sword, and the survivors shall be scattered

to every wind, and you shall know that I am the Lord. I have spoken. One of the strongest themes of Jeremiah's ministry was that the people of Judah ought to submit to the king of Babylon, that as they submitted to the Lord's hand in the king of Babylon, they would be preserved through judgment and the time would come when they would be restored again.

However, Zedekiah and the Judahites broke this word. In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem in response to Zedekiah's rebellion against him. There is a sense of inevitability to the events that follow.

After all of the forewarning, the actual judgment comes upon Judah as a sort of formality. Its fight is futile. The fate is already appointed for the nation.

There is an inexorable movement from Nebuchadnezzar's setting up of the siege works to the final fall of the city of Jerusalem. Nothing can save Judah now. The disaster is in the process of unfolding, and nothing can arrest it.

The siege begins in January of 588 BC and it ends in July 586 BC. Over the 18 months of the siege, famine conditions become severe in the city. We should imagine a situation similar to that described in 2 Kings chapter 6, where people were buying donkey's heads and dove's dung to eat, and even eating their own children.

The city is finally breached, at which point Zedekiah and his warriors try to flee by night, at a place where the besieging army would be the thinnest. They flee east, but are pursued by the Chaldean army, which overtakes them in the plains of Jericho. Zedekiah's escape is short-lived.

His army is scattered and he is captured. He is brought north to Ribla, where Nebuchadnezzar is now based. And there his sons are killed before his eyes, and to ensure that this is the last thing that he will ever see, they put out his eyes.

He is brought in chains to Babylon. With his sons killed, there is seemingly no hope of his restoration of his dynasty. He ends up in prison in Babylon, or, in the Septuagint, the millhouse, subject to hard labour.

We might here think about the story of Samson, who also loses his eyes and is subject to hard labour. In the verses that follow, we are told the year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, in which Jerusalem fell. Now that Judah is being removed from the map, the marking of time moves from the regnal years of Judah's kings to the year of the reign of the kings of Babylon.

The entire temple complex, the house of the Lord and the king's palace, is burned down, along with all of the other great buildings of the city. Solomon's temple, which had been at the heart of the life of the nation of Judah, is no more. As Jeremiah had taught the people so forcefully, they had wrongly trusted in the temple, treating it as if it were a

sort of idol or talisman.

But now it is removed from them. The walls of Jerusalem are broken down. The city is utterly humbled.

Any remnant of its former grandeur is reduced to smouldering rubble. The smaller remnant of the elite and the artisans that had been left after the former deportation are removed. Only some of the poorest are left to work the land.

At the start of the books of the kings, there was the assembling of the furniture of the temple, and in this chapter it is stripped from the house, item by item. It's a tragic mirroring of 1 Kings 7, verses 15-45. The temple is divested of its treasures.

The captain of the guard, Nebuchadnezzar, assembles a representative group of men and various high officers. They are then taken north, up to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, where they are put to death. Although many of the poorer people remain, Judah is now in exile and has ceased to exist as a nation in its own right.

There is no lengthy discussion of the reasons for Jerusalem's destruction here. As the final chapter of the book of Jeremiah, it is already entirely evident to the hearer. There are some added details within this list of the temple furnishings, some surprising variations from the account in 2 Kings 25, but also in 1 Kings 7, where the items are first described.

Most particularly, in verse 23 we read, There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides. All the pomegranates were a hundred upon the net work all around. This is not a detail that we have elsewhere.

Where we read of the pomegranates in 1 Kings 7, verses 20-42, we are not given the number ninety-six. Rather, we read, The capitals were on the two pillars, and also above the rounded projection which was beside the lattice work. There were two hundred pomegranates in two rows all around, and so were the other capital, and also, and the four hundred pomegranates for the two lattice works, two rows of pomegranates for each lattice work, to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the pillars.

It is quite possible that this seemingly extraneous detail is significant, and that the hearer is supposed to recognize some importance in this number ninety-six. Further numbers follow this section, numbers that are not found in the account of 2 Kings. These are the deportation summaries from 597 BC, 586 BC, and 582 BC, from the first attack upon Jerusalem, from the downfall of Jerusalem, and then presumably a third time after the killing of Gedaliah.

The numbers for the deportation here differ from those that we find in 2 Kings. 2 Kings chapter 24 verses 14 to 16 gives the numbers for the first deportation. He carried away all Jerusalem, and all the officials, and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand

captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths.

None remained, except the poorest people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, the king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the chief men of the land he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon all the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the metal workers, one thousand, all of them strong and fit for war.

The discrepancies between the figures in these two accounts could be accounted for in various ways. Who exactly is being numbered? Is it including just the adult males in the account here? Are there certain classes of persons that are not being included? Where are the people being numbered? As they are being brought away from Jerusalem, or as they are arriving in Babylon, or as they are settled in Babylon? It's not entirely clear. I would not be surprised if there is some significance to be seen in these numbers again.

The book ends on a surprising note. There is a brief flicker of hope in the gloom of exile. Thirty-seven years into his exile, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah's nephew and predecessor on the throne of Judah, is released from prison.

He is treated kindly by evil Merodach, and made to sit regularly at the king's table, above the other captive kings in Babylon. He is also granted a regular allowance for his needs. Judah had been told that if they submitted to Babylon, they would enjoy peace.

In his book of comfort or consolation, Jeremiah had also told them that the time would come when the Lord would visit them, he would restore them to the land, and they would prosper there once more. Here, in the darkness of the grave of exile, there is the slightest stirring of the bones. A question to consider.

What similarities might we see between the story of the elevation of Jehoiachin from prison, to the story of Joseph in Genesis? What might we make of the resemblances between these two stories? Romans chapter 7 But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means. Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.

For I would not have known what it is to covet, if the law had not said, You shall not covet. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all

kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good then bring death to me? By no means. It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Now, if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now, if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. Romans chapter 7, especially the second half, is one of the most debated passages in all of Paul's letters. In particular, the identity of the I has been a matter upon which litres of ink have been spilled.

Romans chapter 7 verse 1, in many translations, might seem to be starting a new argument, independent of what came before. However, it refers back to what preceded it. It is still dealing with the issue of the dominion that we come under.

Paul presents the Romans with a framework within which they can better understand what he is talking about. However, Paul's marriage framework needs to be treated attentively, as it is less straightforward than we might initially expect it to be. It has a few unexpected twists and turns.

There is a husband, a wife, and a law holding them together. The husband dies, freeing the wife from the law of marriage, binding them together, and enabling her to marry

another, and enjoy a fruitful union with him. In verse 4, the husband of the previous verse, however, seems to be you.

The term you here seems to be doing double duty. It is both the party that dies, and the party that marries another. How can this be? The answer, it seems to me, lies in statements in the preceding chapter, such as that in verse 6. 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.

The dead husband is the old self, and the body of sin. The husband dies, as we are crucified with Christ. The law bound us to the body of sin in some way, but it does so no longer.

Now we belong to Christ, our new husband. The husband, in both cases, is a form of humanity. The old, fallen, and sinful humanity in Adam is the first husband, while Christ, the second man and the last Adam, is the new husband.

We are the wife in both cases, but we are also identified as the dead husband at various points in the preceding chapter. Paul makes a similar claim in Galatians 2, verse 20. Here, as in Romans 7, the I has a number of different senses.

In some sense, I have died, and in some other sense, I have been released to live a new life, as my I is now associated with Christ. The result of this deliverance is that we become fruitful for God in this new marriage. We formerly lived in the flesh.

For Paul, this term flesh refers to humanity in Adam, humanity that is mortal, rebellious, frail and fallen. The realm of the flesh is also the realm of sin and death's operations. Within this realm, the sinful passions are operative.

They are paradoxically incited by the law itself. The operations of our sinful passions and our members was the bearing of fruit for death. However, now we have been released from bondage to our old husband, to the old man, a bondage that was secured by the law.

We are still servants, but we now serve in the new way of the Spirit, rather than the old way of the written code. Implicitly, Paul might be saying that the law binds us to two different masters. It initially binds us to the master of sin, and then once we've been liberated by Christ, it binds us to Christ himself.

We might also think here of the reality of the new covenant, where the law is written upon the heart by the Spirit. Paul speaks in a similar way in 2 Corinthians 3, where the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Paul's argument to this point raises a difficult question though.

Is the law to blame in this whole situation? The law bound us to the old husband, to the

old self, maintaining us under the dominion of sin and death. Indeed, according to verse 5, the law itself incited the sinful passions. Paul immediately rejects this suggestion though.

The law for Paul is vindicated. It is not to blame for the situation. However, it was the law that truly acquainted him with sin, and enabled sin to come to a fuller expression within his life.

If it hadn't been for the 10th commandment, Paul's acquaintance with the sin of covetousness would have been quite limited. However, as the law brought covetousness to Paul's true acquaintance, sin grew to a much higher, more visible, and self-conscious level of activity and expression than ever would have done apart from the law. Apart from the law, sin is fairly dormant.

It's present, but it's not really growing, developing, or gaining power and dominance. However, when the law arrives, that which was a slumbering and shadowy presence awakes as a dominating monster. The law, which was given at Sinai, changed the expression of sin.

One might also compare this to the situation in pagan societies prior to the advent of Christian faith. In such societies, sin is operative in some sense. However, it is also as if it were slumbering.

Then, when the light of truth comes, suddenly sin is awakened and it starts to display its true power. One might consider, as an illustration, the way that few ancient societies had great qualms about cruel structures of dominance. Racism, for instance, has clearly always been present in the world in various forms and in all societies.

However, Christian truth, in a more particular way, exposed and brought to light the sins of racism for what they were. It woke up the dragon of racism in the process. While racism is clearly present in other cultures, few cultures feel as terrorised by its power as ours do.

As the light of the Gospel woke up and acquainted us with the reality of this sin, it has put us in a position where we feel far more in bondage to it, subject to its power and unable to get free from it. And this is also operative on individual levels. As Paul gives the example of covetousness, the person who knows that it is wrong to covet on account of the law will have a very different relationship to lust than the person who is oblivious to it.

Covetousness and lust are clearly present in us all. But when the law reveals the sinfulness of lust, lust takes on a much greater power over us. While others continue and blithe ignorance of its sinfulness, we might find ourselves desperately struggling in vain to free ourselves from its tightening clutches in our lives.

The purpose of the law is to present the terms of life in fellowship with God. Its intent is to give life. But here we see that its effects are completely different.

It ends up quite against its intended purpose, to bring death. The law, however, for Paul, is holy and just and good. Nevertheless, its coming on the scene leads to our greater subjection to death.

Is this the law's own fault? No, rather it is the fault of sin, which is exploiting the opportunity provided to it by the law, which awakens it from its dormant state. The use of the first person singular in Romans 7, verses 7-25 has aroused many different theories. Historically, debates have generally centred around the question of whether an unregenerate or regenerate person is in view in the passage.

Many have argued that Paul is speaking autobiographically. The helpfulness of this question, however, has been questioned by much recent scholarship. Of particular significance is the work of people like Stanley Stowers, who argue that Paul is employing a rhetorical advice, speech and character, or according to some, that the eye is a sort of generic eye.

A number of suggestions for the identity of the speaker have been put forward. Some argue that it is Adam, others Eve, Gentiles who try to live by the law, or Israel. It seems to me that some association between the eye and Israel more generally offers some more promising ways of resolving the problems.

However, the exact way that the eye and Israel are associated can be a matter of debate. Perhaps Paul is presenting himself as a sort of archetypal Israelite, who stands in some way for the nation as a whole. Perhaps the greatest strength of this approach is the manner in which it does justice to the contradictory character of the eye.

It is in the flesh and sold under sin, yet it delights in the law of God. On this reading, the great transition that underlies Paul's argument is not primarily one from unbelief to belief, but one from the old age of the flesh to the new age of the spirit. In using the eye in this way, Paul can also associate and identify himself with Israel, and not describe her plight as if it were some alien concern.

The change of tense within this section has also played a significant role in determining the identity of the speaker. I believe that change is best understood as a movement from consideration of what happened when the law was first given, to consideration of the ongoing experience of Israel under the law. Verses 7-25 unpack verse 5 of the chapter.

The past tense of verse 5 temporarily situates verses 7-25, until verse 1 of chapter 8 picks up the thread of verse 6 of chapter 7 again. Paul's claim that the law is spiritual in verse 14 is one that he seems to share with his readers. He begins his defence of the law by drawing attention to the imbalance between the law and the eye.

It's an imbalance that exists between spirit and flesh. The law is of the spirit, but he is of the flesh. The flesh-spirit contrast exists between the old humanity in Adam and the new humanity in Christ, and Paul places the law very clearly on the positive side of this polarity, whereas the eye is placed with the Adam, in the negative side.

It is the eye that is fleshly, unable to render the sort of spiritual service that the law calls for. Paul's language here, sold as a slave under sin, seems to rule out that this is a reference to the Christian. Paul has already claimed that Christians are not in the flesh in verse 5, and the description of the eye as sold under sin would seem to contradict many of the earlier statements in chapter 6. Verse 15 helps to explain this.

The sins of the eye in the flesh are unwilling in many senses. The eye does not want to sin, but sins nonetheless. Paul's point here is that the problem does not lie so much at the level of intention, or even instruction in the law, but in the operation of sin that prevents the eye from doing the good thing that it wants to do.

In verse 16, the eye drops any charges that might be levelled against the law. The law is neither evil, nor the cause of my death. The eye readily acknowledges the goodness of the law, and intends that very good itself, but it lacks the power to actually perform it.

In verse 17, we see that there is another shadowy actor in the drama, sin. It is sin that frustrates the good intentions of the eye. The claim being made is not that human beings are not responsible for their actions, but that the eye has been overcome by sin.

It's almost like a demonic possession. In verses 18 to 20, Paul rephrases what he said in verses 14 and 15, in language that's coloured by what he has said in the verses between. Underlying Paul's point here is the claim that, as N.T. Wright puts it, what indwells someone is what gives them power to perform that which otherwise they would want to do, but remain incapable of.

That which is good, the law, in verse 17, has no dwelling in the eye, due to the mismatch that exists between the spiritual law and the fleshly nature of the eye. The law is like good food given to a sick person. It cannot heal the person, but it just causes them to throw up.

Verse 19 is largely a repetition of the second half of verse 15. The difference is that, as Douglas Moo puts it, the good that is willed and the evil that is done are made explicit. Paul underlines his point in verse 20.

His concern seems to be to exonerate both the law and the eye. Verses 21 to 25 serve to sum up what has been discovered about the state of the eye and the law. The law here, it seems to me, refers to the Jewish Torah.

Questions about the Torah have been central to the entire discussion of the chapter to this point, and it would be highly confusing if Paul were to use the word law in a different

sense here. Faced with the choice between good and evil presented by the law, the eye finds itself drawn to the evil rather than to the good. Paul then goes on to unpack this.

We see a split occurring within the eye. On the one hand, the eye delights in the law of God according to its inner man. On the other hand, it encounters rebellion against this law in its members.

The split between the members and the inner man should not be regarded as a sort of natural anthropological dualism, as some split within the human person that just exists on account of nature. Rather, it is an unnatural split brought about by the operations of sin. I don't think it's inappropriate to recognise in this some of our own struggles with sin in our lives.

Where it can feel as if we're split in two, we're fighting against ourselves. There is some force within us that we're battling against. The split within the eye most probably looks back to the start of the chapter, where we saw that the word you was made to do double duty.

In the story of Israel, you can see this delight in the law of God. You can see it in the Psalms and elsewhere. However, while there is this delight in the law of God and this desire to perform it, on the other hand, sin is whipped up and sin and rebellion are excited by the law.

In addition to the split in the eye, the law also splits into two. So on the one hand, you have the law of God, and on the other, you have, in the words of Wright, its shadowy doppelganger, the law of sin. On the one hand, the law is the good, God-given law.

On the other hand, the law is that which binds us to death and has become the base of operations for sin. The law of sin has already been identified in verses 1 to 4 of the chapter and in verse 20 of chapter 5. The law of God is that which is increasingly coming into focus in Paul's argument. The vindication of the law of God over against the law of sin will finally be made explicit in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 8. It has been Paul's purpose in this chapter to show that the law taken over by sin had paradoxically been part of God's intention in giving it, to prepare for dealing with sin in the flesh of Jesus, and yet that the ultimate purpose of the law, the giving of life, will also be achieved through the work of Christ and the Spirit.

He concludes this section with a great cry of despair. The state of the eye is summed up. The law is not at fault, nor ultimately is the eye itself.

However, the eye is unable to escape from the death grip that the law grants to sin. The more that the eye struggles, the more that it is overpowered. The source of the problem is identified as the body of this death, the state of being flesh and fleshly, and being bound up in the solidarity of sin.

The paradigmatic Israelite eye is unable to attain the spiritual law and its promise of life. Rather, it finds itself bound in death, with no idea of where deliverance might come from. Paul concludes his analysis with an anticipation of the answer to the plight of the eye, to humanity in Adam, bound by the law.

His exclamation of thanksgiving looks back to verse 21 of chapter 5 and forward to verse 3 of chapter 8. Paul proceeds to sum up the argument of the chapter, expressing the split that has occurred in the eye, and also the bifurcation of the Torah. He describes the breach that has been caused in the eye on account of sin. The mind has become alienated from the actions of the members of the body.

The mind longs to fulfil the law, but it finds itself incapable of doing so, given the power of sin and the death of the fleshly body. Now that the plight of the old man faced with the law has been diagnosed, Paul is able to move on to the next chapter to reveal the remedy, and to demonstrate the manner in which the intention of the law to give life and the intention of the eye to gain life can both finally be realised. A question to consider.

The split of the eye in the concluding half of this chapter, and the split of the law, should remind us of the marriage framework with which Paul began the chapter. That framework too involved a split. A split between the eye that has to die and the eye that is freed to be married to another.

And also a split in the law. A split between the law that binds me to sin and death, and the law that is the new way of the spirit. How can reading the second half of the chapter in light of the first few verses help us better to understand both?