

# OpenTheo

## February 2nd: Jeremiah 32 & 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

February 1, 2021



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Jeremiah's purchase of the field. The manner of the resurrection.

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

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## Transcript

Jeremiah chapter 32. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem.

And Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah. For Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him, saying, Why do you prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord, Behold, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall capture Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face, and see him eye to eye. And he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I visit him, declares the Lord.

Though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed. Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me, Behold Hanumel the son of Shalom your uncle will come to you

and say, Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours. Then Hanumel my cousin came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours, buy it for yourself.

Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. And I bought the field at Anathoth from Hanumel my cousin, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales.

Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions and the open copy, and I gave the deed of purchase to Beruk the son of Noriah, son of Masih, in the presence of Hanumel my cousin, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. I charged Beruk in their presence, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware vessel, that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

After I had given the deed of purchase to Beruk the son of Noriah, I prayed to the Lord, saying, Our Lord God, it is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them.

O great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds. You have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all mankind, and have made a name for yourself as at this day. You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand, an outstretched arm, and with great terror.

And you gave them this land which you swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey. And they entered and took possession of it. But they did not obey your voice or walk in your law.

They did nothing of all you commanded them to do. Therefore you have made all this disaster come upon them. Behold the siege mounds have come up to the city to take it.

And because of sword and famine and pestilence, the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it. What you spoke has come to pass, and behold you see it. Yet you, O Lord God, have said to me, Buy the field for money and get witnesses, though the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. Behold I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me? Therefore thus says the Lord, Behold I am giving this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he shall capture it.

The Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall come and set this city on fire and burn it with the houses on whose roofs offerings have been made to bail, and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods to provoke me to anger. For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth. The children of Israel have done nothing but provoke me to anger by the work of their hands, declares the Lord.

This city has aroused my anger and wrath from the day it was built to this day, so that I will remove it from my sight because of all the evil of the children of Israel and the children of Judah that they did to provoke me to anger. Their kings and their officials, their priests and their prophets, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, they have turned to me their back and not their face, and though I have taught them persistently, they have not listened to receive instruction. They set up their abominations in the house that is called by my name to defile it.

They built the high places of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom to offer up their sons and daughters to Moloch, though I did not command them, nor did it enter into my mind that they should do this abomination to cause Judah to sin. Now therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say it is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, by famine, and by pestilence. Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation.

I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them, and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul. For thus says the Lord, Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I promised them. Fields shall be bought in this land, of which you are saying, It is a desolation, without man or beast, it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.

Fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed in the land of Benjamin, in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Sheffalah, and in the cities of the Negev, for I will restore their fortunes, declares the Lord. Jeremiah chapters 32 and 33 were likely

added to the original material of Jeremiah's book of consolation in chapters 30 to 31. They develop the theme of the Lord's restoration of his people, of his building and planting his people after the dislocation of captivity.

There will be a return, life in the land will be restored, and the people will flourish, the broken covenant will be renewed, God will dwell with his people once more. The material of the book of Jeremiah is not ordered chronologically more generally. The material of this chapter comes from the last years of Zedekiah, just before Judah fell.

The events of this chapter occurred at the same time as the events described in chapters 37 to 38, during which time Jeremiah was shut up in the court of the God. As Jack Lumbom notes, the conclusion of this chapter neatly parallels the concluding oracles of the preceding chapter, which ended with an oracle on the new covenant in verses 31 to 34, followed by an oracle on the rebuilding of Jerusalem in verses 38 to 40. This chapter ends with an oracle on the eternal covenant in verses 36 to 41, and an oracle on the purchase of the land in Benjamin and Judah in verses 42 to 44.

While chronologically divided, the material of this chapter is closely thematically united with that of the preceding chapters. Like the rest of the book of Jeremiah, thematic ordering generally takes precedence over chronological ordering. Perhaps the detachment of the material of the book from its immediate chronological ordering and context is an indication of the power of the promises and warnings of Jeremiah to speak across various different times.

The power of Jeremiah's words are not restricted to the immediate context to which they were first addressed. The chapter begins with another symbolic action that Jeremiah is instructed to perform. At the heart of the chapter is a prayer of Jeremiah to the Lord, which is followed by the Lord's response.

The context for Jeremiah's prophecies here is given at the start of the chapter. Jerusalem is being besieged, and Jeremiah himself is imprisoned. Jerusalem is surrounded, and Jeremiah is surrounded, and only the latter will ultimately prevail.

We should here recall the words given at Jeremiah's call in chapter 1 verses 15 to 19. For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the Lord, and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me.

They have made offerings to other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands. But you dress yourself for work, arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them.

And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against

the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you. The passage explains why he was imprisoned.

It's a result of Zedekiah's objections to his prophecies. And Zedekiah here repeats all of Jeremiah's prophecies concerning him verbatim. He bears testimony against himself.

Whether this is what the king actually said, or whether the prophecy is put in his mouth by the writer is not clear. Either way, the fact that within the text it is from Zedekiah's own mouth that we hear the judgment against him has a strong element of irony to it. Jeremiah has announced to Zedekiah that he will see the king of Babylon face to face.

He will be brought before him. This actually comes to pass in chapter 39 verse 5. he passed sentence on him. According to the word of Jeremiah, Zedekiah will be taken as captive to Babylon, and he would remain there until the Lord visited him.

The meaning of this visitation from the Lord is not clear. Perhaps it's a reference to some further judgment, perhaps his death, or perhaps there's some element of grace being anticipated here. The Lord can visit both in judgment and in blessing.

Later in the book we'll have indications that Zedekiah's punishment will be mitigated by the time of his death. John Goldengay writes, ensuring that the land would be kept within the family. This law is given in Leviticus chapter 25 verses 24 to 25.

Jeremiah was a member of a priestly family from Anathoth. Although the priests did not receive land with the other tribes, they were granted certain cities and their pasture lands. In Joshua chapter 21 verse 17, Anathoth in Benjamin was one of the cities given to Aaron and his descendants, with its surrounding pasture lands.

As Jerusalem is surrounded by the Babylonian army, Hanumel has presumably fled there from Anathoth. Neither he nor Jeremiah have any access to the field at this point. He is possibly desperately in search of money to buy food and other things to survive the siege, and selling the field is one of the few options left open to him.

Although Jeremiah is imprisoned, he seems to be allowed enough freedom to receive guests, to engage in business transactions and to have access to his scribe Beruk. The transaction is performed in the presence of signatories to the deed of purchase and other witnesses in the court of the god. The deed was written in duplicate, the sealed part secured against tampering with the seal and the open copy accessible for reference.

The deed is then committed to the charge of Beruk, who is instructed in the presence of the witnesses by the word of the lord through Jeremiah. Beruk is to place the sealed and open deeds and put them in a protective vessel to ensure that they would be preserved for a long time. This was a common way of preserving important documents, most famously the Dead Sea Scrolls from before the writing of the New Testament were

preserved to the present day in such a manner.

A significant transaction for a plot of land should remind us of the story of Abraham. Abraham bought a burial plot for Sarah in Genesis chapter 23 from the Hittites. In that case, the cave and field of Machpelah were anticipatory possessions in the promised land.

They functioned as a stake in the territory that the lord would later give into their hand. Even when they were living in Egypt, in the land of Goshen, Jacob was still buried there, waiting for the day when all of his sons would return. Here something similar is going on.

A significant sale of land occurs as a symbol of the awaited return after the captivity that will follow the siege. Jeremiah may not yet enter into possession of the land, but his near kin would be able to claim possession of it using the deed upon their return. All of this is a sign given by the lord that there will be a new dawn after the dark night of exile.

Life will return to the now beleaguered city. Jeremiah's prayer that follows begins with a transitional statement from the purchase of the field and ends with a reference back to the lord's instruction to perform the purchase in the presence of witnesses. The prayer itself opens with a doxological statement concerning God as the creator of all things, and it connects God's creation with his redemption.

This is something that we find elsewhere in scripture. For instance, in Isaiah chapter 45 verses 12 to 13. I made the earth and created man on it.

It was my hands that stretched out the heavens and commanded all their host. I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level. He shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward, says the Lord of hosts.

There are similar connections of redemption and creation in places earlier in the book of Jeremiah, in chapter 27 verses 5 to 7 for instance. It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me. Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him.

All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes. Their many nations and great kings shall make him their slave. The connection between redemption and creation is seen in the way that the language of ecstasy is used of God's creative work.

He acts by his great power and his outstretched arm. This language, familiar from the story of the Exodus, is used again in verse 21 in that connection. The work of God in creation is evidence of his power in redemption.

He is also the God who judges. Jeremiah here alludes to the great statement of God's judgment in Exodus chapter 20 verses 5 to 6. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. Both Israel and Judah suffer on account of sins that can be traced down the line of their generations.

The punishment of the sins of the fathers is visited upon the children, but this is also because the children have continued in the ways of their fathers and not repented. God demonstrated his power in the past in bringing Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land. The language that is used here is again reminiscent of the language that we find elsewhere in scripture, for instance in Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 22 to 23.

Jeremiah ends the prayer with amazement. Something more than the Lord's might is indicated in the sign that he has given him earlier in the chapter. This is a sign that they will be restored even after such a terrible defeat that is imminent.

Verse 17 read, Verse 7 frames the verses that follow as the Lord's answer to this. The language in both verses recalls the statement of the Lord back in Genesis chapter 18 verse 14. The Lord will later revive the now doomed people, bring them back from the grave of exile, reassembling their scattered bones, covering them with flesh, placing them back on their feet and putting his spirit within them so that their hearts are finally set towards him.

He will establish an enduring covenant with them, ensuring that they will not forsake him by placing his fear within their hearts, as their hearts will be set towards him, so his heart will be set toward them. With all of his heart and soul he will establish them. Even though he is now uprooting and casting them away, he will delight to establish and plant them in the future.

As Walter Brueggemann notes, the confidence that the Lord would deal with his people's heart problem, according to the promises of Deuteronomy, placing a new disposition within them towards him. Third, the promise of an eternal covenant held out the hope of a new situation that would not merely introduce a new iteration of the old tragic cycle of grace immediately followed by rebellion. The Lord himself would ensure that the cycle was broken and the covenant would endure.

Fourth and finally, there was the assurance that God would act in his faithfulness to re-establish his people and to do good to them. The chapter ends with verses that reinforce the point of the entire chapter and stress the scale of the reversal that's going to occur. The disaster is juxtaposed with the restoration.

The Lord's future restoration of his people is just as sure as their destruction at the hand

of the Babylonians that are currently surrounding them. The sign of all of this will be the fact that in the very land that has been condemned to desolation, fields will be bought and sold, the normal patterns of life will return and people will be settled once more. Individuals buying and selling parcels of land is an expression of Israel's more general possession of the land once more.

This will be the case not merely in some parts of the land but throughout it. In the land of Benjamin, in places like Anathoth where Jeremiah is buying his field, in places about Jerusalem and in the other urban centers of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the places in the lowlands and the Sheffalah and in the cities in the south and the Negev. Throughout the land in all of its different parts, peace and security would one day be known again.

A question to consider. There is a significant story of a purchase of a field in the Gospel of Matthew and the book of Acts. What is the field and how might reading the story of that field alongside the book of Jeremiah shed light upon what is happening there? 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verses 35-58 But someone will ask, How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as He has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead.

What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, The first man Adam became a living being, the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust, the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust.

And as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the



perishable inherit the imperishable.

Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain. It seems to be that at the heart of the Corinthians' objections there was incredulity about the possibility of a resurrection body, and here in the second half of 1 Corinthians chapter 15 Paul turns to address this point.

Perhaps for the Corinthians such a belief in the resurrection of the body would be seen as a primitive superstition for people who hadn't yet arrived at the recognition of the lower character of corporeality. Paul addresses the seemingly underlying question of the form in which the dead would be raised, disposing with some bad misunderstandings at the outset. The resurrection is not a mere resuscitation of dead corpses in their existing form.

Such resuscitation can be seen in gospel narratives such as that of Jairus' daughter or the raising of Lazarus. Jesus' resurrection, however, is something quite different. It entails a radical transformation.

The body that was sown was the body that was raised, but it was that body having undergone a remarkable transformation. Paul gives the analogy of a seed that is sown. The seed is quite different from the plant that grows from it.

Jesus himself seems to speak of his own death and resurrection in terms of such an analogy in John chapter 12 verse 24. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit. The body that emerges from the sown seed is ultimately a gift of God.

Paul then proceeds to list a number of different forms of physicality in the current heavens and earth, describing variegated creatures and earthly and heavenly bodies in this existing creation. These forms of physicality markedly differ in their standing and glory. Paul is trying to expand the imaginative frameworks that the Corinthians are operating within here.

Thinking in terms of the variety of forms given by God in the existing creation might make it more possible for the Corinthians to consider the possibility of a yet more glorious form in the new creation. In contrasting the great and the varying glories of the heavenly bodies with the lesser glories of earthly bodies, Paul may be giving us an analogy that anticipates the distinction he will draw between the earthly body and the heavenly body later in his argument. You may also have in mind Daniel chapter 12 verses 2 to 3 which employs this very analogy.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. The point isn't that the righteous literally become stars.

Rather the point is that they will have an enduring glory like that of the stars. Returning to the seed analogy which serves to underline the importance of transformation, Paul contrasts the character of the body before and after the resurrection. Its perishable beforehand, its imperishable afterwards.

Its sown in dishonour beforehand, its raised in glory. Its natural beforehand, its spiritual afterwards. These distinctions describe different aspects of the change that will occur.

There will be a changing relationship to the powers of death and decay. There will be a changing status as the raised body will be glorious. There will be changing capacities as bodies of weakness will be raised as bodies of power.

There will be a changing manner of existence as a natural or soulish body of this creation will be raised as a body animated by the spirit of God. In speaking of a spiritual body in contrast to a natural or soulish body, Paul isn't speaking of an immaterial or a non-corporeal existence. Rather he is referring to a new, higher, more glorious and more powerful mode of corporeality.

The mechanics of the change aren't Paul's concern. The fact of it and the ultimate cause of it is what matters. These are bodies given by God.

And if God has created a body suitable for the current natural order, animated by our souls, it is entirely reasonable to believe that there is a body suited to the coming renewed world of the spirit, animated by the spirit himself. Paul proceeds to contrast the first Adam and the last Adam. The first Adam, Paul writes, became a living soul, quoting Genesis chapter 2. A man doomed with his descendants to death and decay.

The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. The first Adam was characterised by an impotence that was subject to death. The last Adam, by sharp contrast, has the power to communicate life, a life of a much higher order.

He is a life-giving spirit, as it is the spirit of Christ that communicates the resurrection life

to his people. Adam and Christ are juxtaposed in order to highlight how sharp the contrast between them is. Christ's character as the last Adam and the life-giving spirit makes clear again that Christ himself is the one who communicates resurrection life and the resurrection body to us.

He is the head and the source of a new humanity. Philippians chapter 3 verses 20 to 21 read, There is an order to this. The natural soul-ish body of Adam comes first, and then the glorious spiritual body of Christ.

Paul's discussion here suggests, I believe, that the advent of Christ was always intended from the beginning. Humanity begun in Adam was always intended to be consummated in Christ. We were created in the image of God so that one day we might be raised to our full stature as humanity in union with the one who is the image of God.

As things happened within God's will, Christ's coming was into the conditions of a fallen humanity and a world subject to the reign of death. But the intent of the resurrection exceeds mere deliverance from sin. Rather, the resurrection is about raising humanity up to the glory for which we were always intended.

The first man was formed of the dust and was bound to the dust, returning to it in death as a result of his sin. The second man is not bound to the dust as the first man was, but is from heaven, reigning in that higher realm. Why does Paul say first Adam and last Adam, but first man and second man? Possibly because there were many Adam-like figures, Noah, Abraham and David among them, but only two human persons who stand as the head and prototype of an entire humanity.

The people who belong to Adam and Christ bear their respective images. In Genesis 5, verse 3 we're told that Adam had a son in his own likeness after his image, Seth. In Romans 8, verse 29, Paul informs the heroes of the letter that Christians were predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son.

The reference to bearing the image of Christ should not be restricted to the future. Paul believes that this transformation is already underway for the people of God and that it should be pursued. 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18, Like the old image, this new image is not merely or even primarily an individual reality.

Paul writes in Colossians chapter 3, verses 9 to 11, As those who are a new humanity in Christ, we are called to be transformed into his likeness. Paul's teaching here has a strong underlying moral force, as we see in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 20 to 24. But this is not the way you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Paul now speaks of the transformation that will occur. Flesh and blood and perishable bodies cannot inherit the imperishable kingdom of God, so something must happen. This something is the resurrection.

Whether or not we die or fall asleep, as Paul puts it, we will all undergo an instantaneous yet radical change. Our raised bodies will be continuous with our current bodies, but they will also be gloriously and permanently changed. This will occur at the last blowing of the trumpet.

The trumpet blast is associated with such things as the year of Jubilee, with the theophanic appearance of God at Sinai, and with the day of the Lord in the Prophets. Earlier in this chapter, Paul spoke of Christ's ascension and the expectation that all enemies will be put under his feet, the last of those enemies being death itself. Now, at the end of the chapter, and the end of the teaching of the main body of the epistle, he returns to this point.

The raising of our bodies from the grave will mark the final and complete victory of Christ over death. He quotes Isaiah chapter 25, of which verses 6-8 read as follows. On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. Isaiah's vision of the Lord's victory over death, and an eschatological feast for all peoples, will find its fulfilment in the final resurrection.

This is of course something taken up in the book of Revelation, in chapter 21, verses 1-4. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more.

Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. The second part of Paul's statement quotes Hosea chapter 13 verse 14, which in the ESV reads, I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol, I shall redeem them from death. O death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? The ESV here is closer to the Septuagint reading, however the verse in question is part of a judgement oracle, which makes it more likely that we are to read the verse like the NRSV does.

Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? O death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your destruction? Compassion is hidden from my eyes. If this is the case, Paul may be purposefully alluding to the passage to reverse its force. In the very words once used to summon the power of death to destroy and judge, its ultimate defeat is now proclaimed.

In the very expressions by which the maw of death was once opened up to swallow a disobedient people, its defanging and head-crushing is announced. The victory over death was dealt with by dealing with its sting, sin, the power of which was the law. This is something that Paul explores in Romans and Galatians especially.

Christ, by dying for our sins, robbed death of its sting and gives us the victory over it, as Hebrews 2, verse 9 and 14-15 put it. But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

The chapter and the body of the whole letter ends with the great but perhaps surprising statement, A question to consider. Looking back through the body of the letter, why might this be such a fitting place to end it?