

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 17 – Year B

RCL Readings¹ – Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9; Psalm 15; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

ACNA Readings – Deuteronomy 4:1-9; Psalm 15; Ephesians 6:10-20; Mark 7:1-23

Seasonal Introduction. The Christian calendar revolves around two principal feasts: Christmas (involving Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany) and Easter (involving Lent, Easter, and Pentecost). Then there is a large section in the middle called ordinary time. This season often focuses on the growth of the Church, ending in a season known as Kingdome tide which concludes with the feast of Christ the king. During this time we read and hear the bulk of the teachings of Jesus in relation to the kingdom of heaven and how we are called to live as disciples of the Messiah.

Common Theme. Faith, love, and relationship are not in conflict with obedience and works. In fact, if our heart is right with God then surely we will show it by how we speak and act. Conversely, if we are constantly speaking in anger, fear, or jealousy and acting with selfishness then how can we possibly think that we have faith and love—a true relationship—with God?

Hebraic Context. The context to the tension between faith and deeds, or loving God and being commanded to obedience, finds expression this week in all our readings, beginning in the wilderness with Moses and ending in the Galilee with Jesus. Obedience has often been problematic in Protestant exegesis because of the pitfalls of our theological arguments against works-righteousness leading to salvation. But let us be reminded that there is no verse in the Bible that says you do not have to obey God's voice.

Obedience is actually a very real part of the relationship with the Lord. That relationship is founded on love and not works righteousness but God wants obedience along with our love. Both our love and our works, or lack thereof, are choices we make every day. There should be no tension between loving God and being obedient to Him.

Moses spent 40 years in the desert with the Israelites and he knew they were a stubborn and disobedient people. He watched them time and again turn towards sin, despite participating in daily miracles and having the presence of the Lord in their midst. Moses knew what it meant to be in a relationship with the living God. He was one of the few people to speak with God face to face.

During his retelling of the Torah, Moses brought the focus of faith to the intention of the heart.² The greatest of commandments comes from Deuteronomy where we are told to love the Lord

¹ Alternate RCL readings: Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Psalm 45:1-2, 7-10

² Some modern Jewish commentators see Deuteronomy not as a fifth book of the Torah but a complimentary commentary on the first four books (For instance, Micah Goodman, *The Last Words of Moses*). This isn't to say Deuteronomy is less important, just written from a different perspective. In Deuteronomy, Moses did not elaborate on the Tabernacle (only mentioning three of the Feasts of the Lord) or the sacrificial system. Instead, Moses spoke about the heart, prayer, and obedience.

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our God with all of our hearts, souls, and strength. The heart is key to the relationship with the Lord. Moses prophesied that exile would befall a disobedient Israel but, even in exile, if the desire was to earnestly seek God then “from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find Him, if you search after Him with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Deuteronomy 4:29) Moses made no mention of sacrifices as part of returning to the Lord. Nevertheless, though we are to love God with our heart this does not detract from the Lord's desire that we obey Him. In similar fashion to Moses, Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

The tension we come to is that God asks us to obey when He knows that we cannot keep the commandments 100% of the time. So why ask if we can't actually do it? And here we return back to Moses in the wilderness in which the focus was (and continues to be) a relationship. In that relationship of love there are still consequences to actions. If you forget God and disobey there are certain negative consequences, but if you remember God—to love Him and obey—then there are positive consequences.

How do you know that you have a heart for God? In Hebraic thought the inward work of the heart is always linked to the outward work of the hands. The psalmist reminds us to have both “clean hands and a pure heart”. This is the foundation of Jesus teaching in the gospel where He tells us that from the heart come forth all kinds of evil.

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9.³ Moses introduced an important principle with the Word of God. He sternly warned the Israelites not to add or subtract to the commandments. Exactly what is intended here is unclear.⁴ ⁵ What is clear, is that Moses told Israel that they should keep the

³ ACNA includes Deuteronomy 4:3-5

⁴ The Samaritans, for instance, only recognize Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy in the Sacred Scriptures—“You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it.” Deuteronomy, as the longest speech in Scripture, was the end of what Moses would command the people of Israel and thus everything after it, according to their argument, would be an addition.

Alternatively, the very next chapter we read after Moses' speech adds, “Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.” This certainly seems to have the same understanding as Jesus, Paul, and even Moses—we should live by the righteous laws of God with a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith.

⁵ There are serious and devoted believers who believe that all traditions are bad—if it's not written in the Scriptures then it is not something to follow. Just as Paul wrote, we should not devote ourselves to “myths and endless genealogies.” This seems like a very simple statement until you note how often family lineage is important in the Scriptures. Genealogies are incredibly important throughout Scriptures: Genesis, Joshua, Ruth, Chronicles, Psalms, Nehemiah, Matthew, and Luke (and many more). They can teach us a lot about our faith. Likewise, both Paul and Jesus happily taught with and from Jewish traditions and lived in accordance with many man made traditions.

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commandments of the LORD. Moses went on to extol the virtues and wisdom of the Torah. No other nation had access to the Word of the Lord like Israel did. The Torah speaks into every aspect of life. It instructs on how to handle agriculture, worship, government, and human interaction.

The law of God is good! But in order for others to understand how great the law of God is, there should be a people who keep them. The Torah is one of the reasons that Israel is a great nation, assuming they follow the Torah.⁶ God did not speak His word so that it could be forgotten and cast aside. Instead the people of Israel were instructed to pass on this divine revelation to the next generation so that none of God's wisdom is lost.

Psalm 15. The Tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant had been raided in the time of Samuel's youth as Shiloh was sacked by the Philistines. It wasn't until Solomon was king that the Temple would be built, but it was David who prepared the material for the Temple and it was David who brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (where he had prepared a tent for it). In Psalm 15, David described some of the character qualities that are required for the worshipper to have access to the presence of the Lord.⁷ People had access to David's tent but one simply could not and should not come before the Lord in an unworthy state.

Jesus used traditions to teach and instruct, such as the wine during the Passover. Wine is not mentioned during the Exodus from Egypt. The addition of 4 cups of wine to the Passover celebration is pure tradition. What we notice is that Jesus did not chastise His disciples for partaking in such tradition but instead used the wine to explain the mystery of the New Covenant. But neither Jesus nor Paul told us to abandon the commandments of God in order to follow these traditions of men, something Jesus specifically taught against in Mark 7:8-9.

⁶ At the beginning of Deuteronomy, Moses reminded the Israelites of their past failings and many rebellions against the Lord (Deuteronomy 1:1-45). Moses had witnessed the consequences of disobedience and urged the people to follow the teachings and instructions of the Lord. Obedience to God without a relationship with the Lord can only go so far. But disobedience led to immediate destruction for many at Baal-peor. Obedience, however, was linked to life, listen and do, "that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you." This was a specific example Moses was giving to Israel just as they were entering the land of Israel and not a promise we can take for ourselves, but it was an immediate consequence for obedience in that time.

⁷ Isaiah 33:13-16 echoed David in Psalm 15 and Psalm 24:3-5. "Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" Psalm 15 and 24 sounds quite pleasant, we can come to the holy place of God but Isaiah made it clear that we are coming to a Holy God—the characteristics that follow aren't optional if we want to meet with God.

Of course, based on these criteria, that would have excluded David. David delighted to come into the presence of God, but he did not lead a blameless life. And neither has anyone else. And yet God wants us to come to His holy hill. God wants us to come into His presence and calls us to do so. Either God gave us an impossible task in order to come before Him or being blameless and upright does not mean that we must be sinless and perfect.

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The characteristics for those who want to come into God's presence involve the heart, tongue, and sacrificial righteousness.⁸ The psalm notes the connection between the heart of truth and walking righteously. The heart of the worshipper and his behaviour are always connected. Thus the qualities that David mentioned were neither intellectual in nature nor ritual but actions. Only someone who does what is right and is walking blamelessly can be in the divine presence. David uses the term "speaks truth in his heart" in Psalm 15:2. David understood that someone who has an upright life is known by the way they speak. Jesus says the same thing in Matthew 12:34, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

James 1:17-27. The epistle of James is addressed "to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" signifying that, for James, the primary recipients were Jewish followers of Jesus throughout the Roman Empire.⁹ The context of the Epistle is that the wider community that James was writing to were apparently undergoing trials.¹⁰ James urged his readers to consider times of testing with

⁸ I Chronicles 15 described the procession bringing the Ark to the Holy Hill (The Temple Mount). David had been reminded that God's order was important—it was only Levites who could carry the ark. The priests and Levites consecrated themselves according to the word of God. But David did not mention being a Levite or a priest as one of the important qualities of a worshipper of God.

Neither did David speak of sacrifices, something we often (incorrectly) associate with the entire reason people would go to the Temple of God. In fact, David didn't mention any of the ceremonial rituals of the Temple or Tabernacle as prerequisites for appearing before God. This is not to say ritual and tradition are bad or have no value. However, what God has always wanted was a place in our hearts and a desire to hear his voice.

⁹ By the late 2nd Temple period, the time of Jesus, the Jewish people were scattered all over the world. The Greek word διασπορά *diaspora* refers to Jewish people who are residing outside the land of Israel and living among Gentiles. However, while the term *diaspora* is Greek, it only appeared in reference to the exile of the Jewish people—the first use of the word was expressly created for this event by the authors in the Greek translation of Deuteronomy 28:25, 30:4; Nehemiah 1:9; and Jeremiah 15:7. The authors of the New Testament, being Jewish, continued to use the word for that express purpose. (Only later, well after classical and Koine Greek were no longer in use, did the term *diaspora* change to a less specific context as it entered French and other scholarly languages of the 19th century. *The Dispersion: A History of the Word Diaspora* by: Stephane Dufoix)

It was within many of those Jewish communities that the good news of Jesus the Messiah first found fertile ground. Regarding the extent of the dispersion, Josephus wrote: "There is no city, no tribe, whether Greek or barbarian, in which Jewish law and Jewish customs have not taken root."

¹⁰ James himself would be martyred in 62 A.D. While Jews (including Christians) would have been persecuted in various ways, the more organized form of Christian persecution that Paul seems to have referenced in his epistles only started in 64 A.D. James may have not only been referencing Roman persecution but also the persecution by Jerusalem leadership that is described regarding Paul's own early actions.

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joy and not with discouragement. The New Testament does not ignore suffering instead finds meaning and ultimate purpose in what happens to people.¹¹

The Epistle of James has long been misunderstood and often been characterized as an epistle that leans towards works-righteousness. However, verse 17 immediately stands against this thinking as James stated that both the perfect gifts and the generous acts of giving—that is, good works—come from God. It is not that people are doing good things to earn salvation but rather God provides the generous activity that needs to be done and the perfect gifts in which to do them. But that doesn't mean we can just hear about God and go on with our lives. A natural reaction to persecution is anger, but the righteousness of God doesn't come through natural anger—He has given us a greater, a perfect gift.¹² We, in response to God's gifts, should produce His righteousness.

Throughout his epistle, James links hearing and doing together with speaking.¹³ In this week's passage, we are encouraged to be "quick to hear, slow to speak".¹⁴ Our first priority should be to hear the voice of God and to listen to Jesus. From our hearing of the teaching of Jesus, we internalize it into our hearts and from there develop the appropriate responses—leading us to good works and good speech.

James will encourage us all to be "doers of the Word"—to live out the message of the gospel. This is congruent with the teachings of Jesus who also says "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God" (John 3:21). James will warn us that unbridled tongues reflect a deceptive heart. In this sense, the tongue is incredibly important. James continues to say that worship without a controlled tongue or proper concern for the poor, the widows, and orphans is worthless. Worship and true religion stem from the heart and are lived out in practical expressions, active love, and good speech. These are

¹¹ James tells us that trials produce in us patience or endurance. The Greek word used is ὑπομονή *hypomonē* which does not carry the meaning of waiting passively but actively steadfast. Steadfast is how the first time the word faith (*emunah*) is also translated in Exodus 17:12. In Romans 5:3-5 Paul finds much meaning in his own trials when he writes; "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

¹² Anecdotally, there are times when I hear more anger from Christians undergoing [even light] persecution than I see active righteousness. And, of course, this would not be a surprise if we relied on ourselves or anyone besides God or thought that God was tempting us with evil. But maybe we should turn all that energy that we use to speak against and be angry towards our government, neighbours, work, family, etc to go visit the orphanage or hospitals. God is for us.

¹³ James will expand on the need to control the tongue in chapter 3.

¹⁴ Both Proverbs and the apocryphal book of Sirach would have been familiar to James, which expresses exactly the same idea, "Be swift to listen and slow to answer" (Sirach 5:11).

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themes seen clearly in the Prophets, such as Isaiah 1:17 and Jeremiah 22:3. They are not new thoughts, just too often forgotten.

Hebraic Context II. When “the Jews” or “the Pharisees and scribes” did something in the Gospels, it can be easy to assume that all Jewish people at the time of Jesus were homogeneous and undifferentiated throughout the Holy Land. However, this is very much untrue.¹⁵ There were some major distinctions between the Galilee and Judea at the time of Jesus. One major difference was the population, particularly in relationship to the Pharisees and Sadducees. Even the Pharisees in the north would be different than those Pharisees found nearer Jerusalem.

The Galilee region was a mixture of Gentiles, Jewish converts from the Maccabean period, and Jews who had resettled the region following the return from exile. In contrast, the southern area of Judea was predominantly Jewish with limited Gentile presence. Conversely, Jerusalem had a large population of Jews who had assimilated some form of Greek and Roman culture into their lifestyle while the Galilee had a large population who looked towards heroes of the past who had fought against foreign culture as their inspiration.

The Galilee was separated from Jerusalem by Samaria and, to a lesser extent but with an impactful influence, the Greco Roman decapolis settlements. There were linguistic variations in both the spoken Aramaic and Hebrew. But more importantly there were some major distinctions in the practice of Jewish faith between the regions. Jerusalem had the Temple with the ruling priestly class (the Sadducees) holding theological sway. Between their modern culture and Temple activities, the Jerusalem elite often thought they must be superior and that the Galileans were lax in their religious observance.

However, the movements of the Sadducees and the Pharisee were often diametrically opposed in Jewish observance and theology. The Sadducees held that only the first five books of the Torah were inspired sacred texts as, incidentally, did the Samaritans. Subsequently they denied the resurrection of the dead.

Meanwhile, the Pharisees took much of the Scriptures in literal fashion and thus believed in the supernatural, the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ and had developed a complex angelology. Only some of the Jerusalem Pharisees allied themselves politically to the Temple leadership by joining the

¹⁵ Just as it would be silly to believe that all British, Americans, Canadians, South Africans, Australians, and/or New Zealanders are the same or to think that all Protestants are the same.

¹⁶ Belief in the Holy Spirit was not developed as much as later Christian theology (particularly not as a person of what would later become known as the Trinity), but the Holy Spirit is mentioned in various *midrashim* and intertestamental writings such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and Apocrypha.

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Sanhedrin. This was in stark contrast to the Pharisees of the Galilee who held no such leadership positions and tended to serve and teach among the local common rural people.

In the Gospels, Jesus fellowshiped with the Pharisees in the Galilee, He ate with them, discussed and debated theology with them, and they even defended Jesus from going to Jerusalem—"At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.'" (Luke 13:31)

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23.¹⁷ The Gospel passage begins with another official delegation arriving from Jerusalem to evaluate the teaching and ministry of the Jesus movement.¹⁸ Instead of disagreements over Scripture or theology, there was a debate over hand washing. Hand washing was a practical question for the Sadducees and Pharisees who worked in and around the Temple, but why would the Pharisees be so concerned about the ceremonial handwashing practices of non-priestly Galilean disciples?

¹⁷ ACNA includes Mark 7:1-23

¹⁸ While John 6 elaborated on the discussion concerning Jesus as the bread of life (John 6:22-71), Mark, referencing the disciples, simply stated, "And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." The Gospel of John also included a large crowd that did not understand about the bread of life while Mark seems to have focused almost solely on the disbelief of the disciples (see also John 6:60-71). Mark switches, in Mark 7, to outsiders—Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem.

There was a difference between the Pharisees in the Galilee and Pharisees from Jerusalem. While the Sanhedrin and Pharisees in Jerusalem maintained hegemony over normative Judaism in the time of Jesus, there were many disagreements with the theology and methods of the Temple leadership of Jerusalem in other parts of the nation. In fact, the Sadducees and Pharisees generally opposed one another, particularly after the massacre of 800 Pharisees, including their families, by King Alexander Jannaeus supported by the Sadducean leadership. The Sadducees held a lot of political power and many Pharisees in Jerusalem were willing to compromise in some areas in order to participate in that power.

Jesus had many arguments with the Pharisees of the Galilee. But intense theological discussions and questioning were common and encouraged in the first century. Jesus also ate with Pharisees, met and talked with them, and, when Jesus' life was being threatened, the Pharisees in the Galilee warned Jesus of the danger.

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God declared that Israel would be a “kingdom of priests” in Exodus 19:6.¹⁹ Part of the pharisaical tradition included the belief that the ceremonial rules and commandments that were prescribed for the Temple service and the priestly elites applied also to the common people. This was a natural extension of the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Obviously hands and food come into contact with each other during preparation and consumption. Uncleanness is passed on via contact and so food that is considered clean to eat could become unclean if prepared by someone with unwashed hands.²⁰ But while the conversation started with questions regarding one specific practice, Jesus expanded the conversation to the entirety of Torah by linking the heart, our actions, and our tongue.

Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah, who condemned worship that does not flow from the heart but is mere lip-service and an empty keeping of human traditions (Isa 29:13). Traditions are not bad in and of themselves and can even be important in preserving many truths, but what is of prime importance is the heart, for it is genuine in its reactions and guides our actions and tongue.

¹⁹ I Peter 2:4-5, 9 and Revelation 1:5b-6 call the people of God a “holy priesthood”, “royal priesthood”, and “a kingdom of priests”. These statements were not independent of common thought in the 1st century. Exodus 19:6, “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” clearly did not indicate that there was no longer a distinct Levitical and Aaronic priesthood, as God proceeded to make a distinction between the Levites, Aaronic priesthood, and people of Israel. (Korah, even though he was from the tribe of Levi, wasn’t allowed to do the things that Aaron was given to do.) However, the practical meaning that Israel was to be a kingdom of priests led to, or more likely was parallel to, an increase in practically following the laws of purity. Stone vessels became popularized throughout Judea and the Galilee in an attempt to minimize the likelihood of becoming unclean as they were thought not to transmit uncleanness as earthen jars would. *Mikvehs* also increased in popularity throughout Israel and particularly in Jerusalem.

²⁰ In most translations, Mark 7:19 reads, “Thus He declared all foods clean.” Because of this, some commentators argue that in this passage Jesus was abandoning the dietary kosher rules of Judaism. However, the Greek Textus Receptus did not include this phrase. Rather, the text is, “καὶ εἰς τὸν ἀφ᾽ ὄρωνα ἐκπορεύεται καθαρῶν πάντα τὰ βρώματα” which, simply translated, is that the food that passes through the body and expunged (in a toilet) is cleansed. The point Jesus was making was not one of whether something was Kosher. He was more concerned with how we act, what comes out of the mouth, much more than whatever we shove into our mouth.

For reference, Jewish prayers also understood that how we live is more important than any dietary restrictions. During the Yom Kippur service, one of the prayers is *Al Chet*, “All Sins”. It is a long litany of wrongdoings with confession, looking to God for forgiveness. While the list tries to include all sins that we must confess, as we have participated in them throughout the year, absent from that list is the consumption of unclean animals—such as pork. Being unclean, in Judaism, has never been a sin.

Dietary rules help the Jewish people understand and make distinctions between groups of people. While wine was prohibited for a distinct group of people, those who had taken the Nazarite vow, it was perfectly acceptable for all other peoples on earth. Likewise Pork, which was not to be eaten by Israel, was acceptable for Gentiles. Another example of distinction was when God specified who the High Priest was and was not allowed to marry, a distinction God did not make with the rest of Israel.

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Jesus called out these Pharisees as hypocrites, for while their outward practice and fine speech might have seemed appropriate, inwardly they were not hearing and following the voice of God in their hearts. Obedience in accordance with one law is of very little use if the remainder of the law is broken.²¹

ACNA Readings

Ephesians 6:10-20. In Ephesians 6 Paul transitioned from the physical world we live in to the spiritual without preamble.²² Paul did not invite the Ephesians to enter the realm of spiritual warfare—they were already in a war. This war was not “against flesh and blood but... against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”²³

The apostle stressed three elements in preparing the community for victory in the ongoing spiritual conflict. The first element harkens back to David as Paul urged the community to be strong in the Lord. In 1 Samuel 30:6 we read that “David strengthened himself in the Lord” when he faced severe stress in body and soul over his battle with Israel’s ancient enemy, the Amalekites. Even at our weakest we can be strong in the strength of God’s might.

The second element is that, once resolute, the community should prepare for war with protective armour.²⁴ Interestingly, the metaphor of the armour of God is not unique to the New

²¹ Being right about a specific doctrine or theology is useless if we turn around and defile ourselves by how we act. What leaves our mouths reflects the desires and intentions of our hearts. We should learn to pay close attention to our own speech as well as our prayers. What we pray often reflects where our hearts are. Are we always praying for God to give us His blessings or even simply things we think are good? With asking for God’s blessing should come thanksgiving, praise, reflection, and the outworking of blessing others around us even as God has blessed us. Otherwise, unfortunately, our many requests might simply be reflecting pride, covetousness, or envy.

²² Too often we separate the physical and spiritual as vastly separate entities. We live in both worlds and they are both the present reality as both the physical and spiritual were created by God.

²³ Sometimes the devil and hell are lost in our modern Christianity as the spiritual things of the world become metaphorical rather than actual reality. Just as we are to become strong in the Lord (the person of God, not simply theology and doctrine) we fight against the devil and spiritual persons—those who fight against God.

The original Greek of the Lord’s prayer entreats the Lord to “deliver us from the Evil one”, not simply against the generic concept of evil. The enemy is real, actively working against God, and we must prepare ourselves accordingly.

²⁴ Paul is not calling for temporal militarism, the image of the armour of God is metaphorical. The reality of spiritual warfare is played out in the world against spiritual forces.

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Testament.²⁵ Isaiah 59:17 is the closest imagery to Ephesians 6, “He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head.”²⁶ Interestingly, it is God Himself putting on the armour in Isaiah while in Ephesians 6, we are strengthened by the strength of God’s might before proceeding to put on the armour.

Paul wasn’t the only writer who read Isaiah and spoke of spiritual warfare, the Wisdom of Solomon 5:17-20 states, “The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armour and will arm all creation to repel his enemies; He will put on righteousness as a breastplate, and wear impartial justice as a helmet; He will take holiness as an invincible shield and sharpen stern wrath for a sword”. Once again, what is used is the armour of God—He is the one who put on the breastplate, helmet, shield, and sword. However, God also armed His creation. We should never forget that we aren’t putting on our own armour, we are putting on God’s armour in order that we can withstand the schemes of the devil.

As an avid student of the Scriptures, Paul was almost certainly familiar with this material and as a Roman citizen he likely also understood some of the armor and military doctrine of the Roman army. Regardless of the reader's understanding of the earlier context, Paul made it abundantly clear to the community of Ephesus how important preparation was. Those in battle were required to put on the “whole armour of God”, wearing only partial defence would not suffice in the coming battle. Only with proper protection can the believer be expected to “withstand in the evil day”.

Finally, the armour of God is accompanied by prayer and supplication. This is the third element to prepare to overcome the adversary. These all work together and they all look to God for our strength, protection, and perseverance. One way to know that we are equipped and ready to engage in Spiritual warfare is to examine our prayer life. An unhealthy prayer life is often the sign for many other issues in our lives and in the life of our communities.

²⁵ Because Ephesians 6:11-17 sounds so familiar to anyone knowledgeable on the Roman armies, many readers would have automatically looked to the equipment and military doctrine of the Roman legion. Paul likely did use some of the terms and equipment people would be familiar with in the Roman empire but he also used phraseology that comes from Isaiah and 2nd Temple literature.

²⁶ Isaiah 11:5, 49:2, and 52:7 may also have influenced 2nd Temple writers regarding warfare against the powers of this world.