

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 16 – Year B

RCL Readings – Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18; Psalm 34:15-22; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69

ACNA Readings – Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-25; Psalm 16; Ephesians 5:15-33(6:1-9); John 6:60-69

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 Kingdomtide 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. Every step we take on this journey to run our race to the end we will face obstacles and difficulties. Some obstacles will be our past history that will try to lure us back to perceived strengths and comforts. We will have to fight the war already taking place in the spiritual realm as the evil one seeks to destroy us. And even the teachings of God and Jesus will be difficult to understand and follow. But if we do look to God, completely dependent on His strength while submitting to Him, we will find life—a life that God will see as being without condemnation.

Hebraic Context. According to the Cambridge dictionary a covenant is a formal agreement or promise between two or more people, or a decision or arrangement between groups or people. In the Scriptures, a common covenant is between the person of God and His creation.¹ Covenants in the Bible are not restricted to the Jewish people as the first time God officially made a covenant in the Scriptures was in Genesis 9:9-10.² There the Lord made a covenant with Noah, who is a Gentile, and also with the animals that were in the ark.

In Jewish tradition the beginnings and ends of themes, stories, and narratives often occur in relation to each other—in the same way, form, and even on the same day. While we often think of humans (and ourselves in particular) as singularly important, the first covenant in the Scriptures involved animals and Hosea (2:18) declared that there will also be a future covenant that the Lord will make with wild animals.

¹ Covenant in Hebrew, ברית, is very similar to that of English. A covenant is, in essence, an agreement—a treaty, alliance, or pledge.

² A word that often appears with ברית, *brit* (covenant), is כרת, *karat*, to cut. Covenants were extremely serious matters and were not to be undertaken lightly. A common thought is that, when a covenant was made, an animal would be killed in order to show how important the oaths were—both financially and because blood would be spilt to verify the covenant. However, not all covenants, even between God and His creation, involved the shedding of blood. Additionally, other words besides “to cut” were used in relation to the creation of a covenant. In Genesis 9:9, the covenant was established, or raised up, מקים. The use of the different words do not strictly correlate to whether blood was spilled or not, as Joshua 24:25 uses the term *karat* yet there was no sacrifice, only the setting up of a large stone as witness.

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Some covenants in the Scriptures can be quite specific and relate to individuals or families. One such example is the covenant of peace that the Lord made with Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron (Numbers 25:12). After Pinchas slew a couple engaged in vagrant, open immorality, God blessed his zeal with an eternal covenant called “a covenant of peace” *בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם*.³ The covenant only applied to Pinchas and his descendants. Additionally, neither Pinchas nor his descendants were required by God to do anything. God simply declared that He would make a covenant and it would be everlasting.

Other covenants resembled agreements between a suzerain (sovereign) and a vassal. These often had certain obligations placed on the vassal and consequences if one, or both, parties reneged on the agreement. Because many covenants had consequences for failure, often in the form of blessings and curses sent by the gods, or God, it could be hard to distinguish between what is unconditional and conditional.⁴ However, God often specified that His covenants were everlasting, starting in Genesis 9 to all mankind and His creation to individuals such as Abraham, Pinchas, and David to small groups of people such as the Levites and Israel.

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18. Following the conquest of the land of Canaan, Joshua gathered the leadership at Shechem and made a covenant with the people.⁵ Just as Moses gathered the people at the end of his life to guide them as they left their wanderings and entered the promised land, Joshua gathered the people together before his own death and the period of the judges began.

Joshua started by reminding the people that their forefathers were pagan. Abraham's forefathers worshipped the gods of Mesopotamia.⁶ Joshua's choice of Shechem wasn't an

³ Here the word used is neither to cut or establish a covenant but simply, *נתן* (*natan*), to give a covenant.

⁴ God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Israel is one that still causes division to this day. God promised that if Israel disobeyed Him then they would be removed (literally vomited) from the land. So surely, the argument goes, this is a conditional covenant. But God also promised to return Israel to the land that He had promised them if they called out to Him. This remains true.

⁵ Shechem was a Canaanite city allocated to the tribe of Ephraim. Shechem was one of the more important Canaanite cities as attested to in both Biblical sources and extra-biblical sources such as Genesis 12, 33, 34, and 37 (both Abraham and Jacob interacted with Shechem long before the Israelites returned to the land God promised to Abraham—which happened first near Shechem) along with Judges 9:1-6 and II Chronicles 10:1 (Shechem was a city where Kings were crowned). Three of the Amarna Letters, EA 252-254, were written by Labaya, ruler of *Šakmu* (Shechem), to the king of Egypt in a political disagreement with Abdi-Heba, ruler of Jerusalem, EA 287. Labaya was also mentioned as being one of the more strident and powerful rulers in the Levant by the king of Gath, far to the south of Shechem, EA 280. Shechem is located just within the city limits of Nablus today.

⁶ There is a midrash in Genesis Rabbah 38.13 which describes a scene in Abraham's youth in which he was working in his father's idol workshop in Ur. In this midrash, while Terah (Abram's father) was away on business, Abraham smashed all the idols except one with a hammer. He then placed the hammer in the hand of the largest remaining idol. When his father returned he demanded to know what happened. Abraham

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accident. It was here, in Genesis 12:6-7 as Abram first entered the land of Canaan, that Abram stopped at Shechem and God came to Abram and promised the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants. It was also here that Joshua, after the first victory in the land that God promised Abram, brought the people of Israel to pronounce the blessings and curses God had commanded them in Deuteronomy 11:26-32 and Deuteronomy 27.⁷

The covenant at Shechem is a little known covenant in the Bible. Perhaps it is because it did not contain any of the flashy signs and wonders that were found in the Exodus or world-shaping events such as with Abram. In this covenant, there was simply a choice on whether to follow God or turn back to the gods that Israel had once followed. Without any coercion the Israelites pledged their obedience to God.⁸ It was here that Joshua professed his oath of loyalty, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”. The people responded with their own voluntary oath of allegiance to God. Unfortunately, while Joshua seemed to have ended his time as the leader of Israel well, the book of Judges shows just how important Joshua’s warning was.

told him that a woman came in to make an offering to the idols. The idols argued about which one should eat the offering first, then the largest idol took the hammer and smashed all the other idols in jealousy. Terah responded by saying that they are only statues and have no knowledge. Whereupon, Abraham responded by stating that Terah denied their knowledge, yet continued to worship them!

A second midrash told how Abraham was delivered to Nimrod because of his refusal to worship the gods but successfully argued with Nimrod over idolatry. And yet, despite Abraham’s cleverness, he was cast into fire. Haran, Abram’s brother, waited to see whether he should agree with Nimrod or Abram. Upon seeing Abram emerge victorious (both in the argument but also Abram coming unscathed from the fire) voiced his agreement with Abram. He too was cast into the fire, but because of his indecision he was only outwardly preserved from the fire. Haran would, according to the story, eventually die from the internal damage from the fire.

⁷ The indication was clear: obedience, such as found in Abram’s choice to listen to the voice of God (rather than the gods of his forefathers) and go to the land God would show him (Canaan), would bring blessing. But if they disobeyed God the land would vomit them out as it had the nations before them. “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and the curse if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your god, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known. And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessings on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.” These are the mountains directly adjacent to Shechem. The very first curse spoken on Mount Ebal was, “Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman.”

⁸ Shabbat 88.5.1 spoke of Israel feeling some coercion at Mount Sinai as they were told to choose between life and death—and that death would be, in that Midrash, immediate. But later, Israel, without such coercion, renewed their promise to follow God such as in Esther. The same would be true here in Joshua 24. While the implications of blessing and curses rose above the people in the forms of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, the choice the people made was entirely their own.

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Psalm 34:15-22. The passage of Psalm 34 began with David reminding us of the watchfulness and attentiveness of the Lord towards His people. In contrast, the doers of evil would also receive the Lord's attention but in its negative sense as God would "cut off the memory of them".⁹ David knew from experience that God is an advocate and helper of the humble and righteous, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."¹⁰

Most people ignore the brokenhearted but God does the opposite, He delights to save those crushed in spirit. This does not mean that the godly do not go through times of trial and danger. David acknowledged that "Many are the afflictions of the righteous". This is a classic Hebraic tension of the walk of faith. God watches and cares for His people, yet the life of the believer is not without its sufferings.

David made a bold statement in the context of this mystery regarding the righteous, "The Lord delivers them out of their troubles." God's deliverance is real but it doesn't always feel true all the time. Perhaps the final words of the psalm are truly apt when David declared that "The Lord redeems the soul of His servants; none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned." It isn't that we won't go through hard times—it is so much greater than that. God will not find us guilty.

The words of verse 20 "He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken" were used in the Gospel of John as a prophetic fulfillment of the death of Jesus and His experience at the cross (John 19:31-37). The Roman soldiers saw that Jesus was already dead and felt no compulsion to break Jesus' legs to ensure death prior to the onset of the Sabbath.¹¹ The use of David's

⁹ To convey the truth of God's activities on earth, David described God with human characteristics—eyes, ears, and face. While God is incorporeal, David's description was not untrue as God is not some force or power. God is personable and, while not nearly accurate enough of a word, a person. God has emotions throughout the Scriptures and He certainly sees and hears the righteous and sets Himself against those who do evil. The Bible often uses symbolic language to convey truth that would be lost if it remained nebulous.

¹⁰ Psalm 34 isn't simply a theological treatise, it was formed from the personal experience and testimony of David. David called out to God and God delivered David—although David still had to struggle against people who lied about him and pursued strife rather than peace..

¹¹ None of the Gospels nor I Corinthians spoke of Jesus' body being broken for us except for a few manuscripts of I Corinthians 11:24 that were used to translate the KJV. Nonetheless, while Jesus' bones were not broken, He was "stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed."

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words does not seem out of context in John 19:36 as David was writing of God's deliverance of the godly.¹²

Of course, this was the opposite of what was happening to Jesus. It is true that the legs of Jesus were not broken, but Jesus still suffered the horrid pain of crucifixion. But Jesus also died in order that those who would be condemned by God might be delivered as ones without guilt.

Hebraic Perspective. At the end of several Jewish prayers, including the *Kaddish* and *Amidah* prayers,¹³ there is a petition in which the worshipper prays *עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמַרוֹמָיו oseh shalom bimromav* “may there be peace in heaven”.¹⁴ Why would someone pray that the Lord would make peace in heaven? Surely the dwelling place of God is already in perfect order and does not need peace. Why pray for more peace when there should already be peace? This short prayer reveals the Hebraic understanding towards Spiritual warfare.

The rebellion against God did not begin on earth, it began in the heavens with the angelic rebellion. But heaven and earth have been connected ever since the creation. The war against God is played out in both the physical and spiritual realms.¹⁵ There is a spiritual side to what happens in the temporal and physical realm and even a spiritual side to physical warfare.¹⁶

¹² During the later 2nd Temple period, the majority of Psalms were viewed with some idea of messianic expectations, regardless of whether the Psalm had any obvious prophetic references. As such, Psalm 34:20, although clearly not about the Messiah in David's writing, was, nonetheless, used in John 19:36 in reference to Jesus' death. In today's hyper-literary analysis, many of the prophecies mentioned in the Gospels (particularly in the Gospel of Matthew) seem like very poor scholarship. However, in the 1st Centuries, they would have made perfect sense as scholars used word association, paradox, and questions to understand the Word of God rather than our modern hermeneutics or systematic theology.

Given the proximity of the Passover to Jesus' death, the close word and calendar association to Numbers 9:12, the direct reference by David in Psalm 34:19-22 regarding the righteous being delivered from the condemnation of God to being without guilt before God, and the eye-witness account of the crucifixion would have made the connection obvious to many Hebrew scholars in the 1st century.

¹³ *Kaddish* is prayed in the Jewish liturgies. It also has a slightly longer version called the Mourner's *Kaddish* which is recited for each day for 11 months after the death of a parent. The *Amidah* is a prayer to God that is recited three times a day, in the morning, afternoon, and evening.

¹⁴ This is a direct quote from Job 25:2.

¹⁵ The Dead Sea community in Qumran believed that during the final battle between the sons of light and the sons of darkness they would fight shoulder to shoulder with angels (1QM, the War Scroll).

¹⁶ Isaiah saw the Assyrians conquer Israel and much of the south. But in II Kings 19 Isaiah proclaimed the judgment of God on Sennacherib, king of Assyria. One of the ways Assyria would be judged would be through the Babylonians while the Babylonians would then be judged through the Medes (Isaiah 13:17). This would happen on earth. But God would also send His angels to do battle. Isaiah 13:4 notes that God is the LORD of hosts, this generally refers to the angelic hosts of heaven—the great army of God. But the LORD of hosts was also going to muster a host for battle from both distant lands and from the end of the

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From David, recognizing the protection of the angel of the LORD to Moses and Isaiah, seeing the angel of the LORD striking the Egyptians and Assyrians, to Paul, who knew that we too wrestle against spiritual powers, we should recognize that God is the king of heaven and earth—His will should be done in the heavens and on the earth.

Ephesians 6:10-20. In Ephesians 6 Paul transitioned from the physical world we live in to the spiritual without preamble.¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸

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.¹⁹ Interestingly, the metaphor of the armour of God is not unique to the New Testament.²⁰ 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.”²¹ 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.

heavens—both heaven and earth. God would also gather the “holy ones” in Isaiah 13:3, Isaiah left a mystery whether these would be earthly, human saints or the angelic hosts.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ Isaiah 11:5, 49:2, and 52:7 may also have influenced 2nd Temple writers regarding warfare against the powers of this world.

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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.

John 6:56-69.²² The teaching of Jesus about eating and drinking his body and blood was a difficult concept for the Jewish followers of Jesus to comprehend, and it remains difficult for Gentile readers to this day. And yet, even though John 6 can be hard to understand, all Christians celebrate the Eucharist. During our time of thanksgiving we aren't simply eating bread and drinking wine, we partake in life in the presence of God—assuming we are listening to the one God sent.²³

²² This is the fifth consecutive week the lectionary has taught on bread and, specifically, the bread of life from John 6. That can seem like a lot of time dedicated to teaching on a single topic. However, today, at the end of the five week series, note that even with Jesus' miracles, authoritative teaching from Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and repetition that many people still did not understand and rejected Jesus—not just those arguing with Him but also many from among His own disciples.

²³ The sacrificial system, as laid out by Moses in Leviticus, was also not a simple mechanic where the one sacrificing did A and result B would come about. God said multiple times that, "to obey is better than sacrifice." Sacrifice, of course, was one of the many commands to be obeyed but sacrifice cannot replace following God. Sacrifice was part of fellowship with God.

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Jesus referenced the passage from Deuteronomy 18:15-22 several times throughout His teaching. The prophet that would come would be a real person—someone raised up from among the people of Israel. The Son of Man has two different meanings.²⁴ Certainly Jesus was born and raised Jewish, carefully following all the torah His Father had given. But Jesus referenced His coming ascension to where He was before—He had come from heaven, the place He had been given dominion over all things, and He would return to heaven.

It is important to understand that Jesus doesn't simply give life. He is the bread of life.²⁵ We are told to believe in the one God sent—that is, Jesus. Those who do not listen to Jesus will be

The majority of sacrifices were consumed by the worshipper (and the majority of those sacrifices were grain, or bread, sacrifices). Eating as part of worship and adoration of God was always part of Jewish life for those who followed God. In fact, all five senses were used in worship of God: from hearing, as parents taught their children the words of God to follow and Levites led the people in worship of God through song, to smell, when God required the Levites to create a special scent that was just for the worship of God, to touch, as families wrote out the Torah on their gates and placed the Torah on their hands and forehead, to sight, as the people saw all the good things God provided, to taste, as the people ate with their families or at the temple (also with their families and the priests).

The place where sacrifice took place was the Temple (or Tabernacle). When you brought a sacrifice to the Temple you didn't only eat with your family or the priest and Levites—you ate in the presence of God. After creating the heavens and the earth, God came to earth to walk and talk with Adam in the garden. After bringing Israel out of Egypt, God declared "And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them." God has always desired to be among His people.

²⁴ Without hearing the specific words that Jesus used it could be difficult to tell if He was speaking of the one with authority spoken of in Daniel 7 (bar Enosh) or just another descendent of Adam (ben Adam) without context.

²⁵ Jesus elaborated on the statement he made in John 6:35, 48, 51 "I am the bread of life" by speaking of His flesh as true food and His blood as true drink. Because of the importance of the Eucharist and the theologies that surround the mystery of Holy Communion, this has caused some debate among brothers and sisters. But ultimately it is the communion that is important—having fellowship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Without communion with them there is no life.

Likewise in Jesus' other "I am" statements such as John 15 where Jesus declared "I am the true vine." If we want to have life, we must abide in the vine in order to have life and produce fruit. When Jesus stated, "I am the good shepherd." He also stated that His sheep listen to His voice—in the same way as John 6:29 references Deuteronomy 18:19.

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sought out by God Himself and investigated.²⁶ And so Jesus' next words should not be overlooked, "There are some of you who do not believe."

The passage notes that many disciples could not work through what Jesus was saying and stopped following him. Jesus knew that His teaching was offensive to some, as He asked, "Do you take offense at this?" Still, that didn't make Him change His teaching. Jesus did not teach to please—He taught in order to give life.

A few heard and understood, at least in part. Had Simon stopped with, "You have the words of eternal life" that would surely have been insufficient. Had Jesus simply been a good teacher, how could He give life?²⁷ Through Jesus' broken flesh and shed blood, we can not only hear the words of life, but through the love and grace of the father, we can have life from the Holy One of God.

Despite the sacred history of the mystery of God desiring to dwell with and in His people this teaching of Jesus remains a difficult concept to grasp. We can be encouraged by the disciples and their courage to remain with Jesus when so many others went away. We can also be encouraged that Jesus' desire to be present with us was strong enough to endure the cross—His body given for us.

ACNA Readings

Psalm 16.²⁸ David mentions two kinds of people, those who declare of God, "You are my Lord" and those who run after other gods. David was often pursued by enemies, he needed to take refuge in God but in Psalm 16, David declared all the good he had. All of that good came from God.

David knew God as, "my Lord." Yes, God was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God was the LORD who met Moses at the burning bush. God was the God of Jesse and Samuel. But God wasn't simply a historical figure from the past, He was constantly working in David's life: preserving Him, giving an inheritance, providing counsel, and showing the way of life.

²⁶ Deuteronomy 18:19, "And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him." Require, דרש, is the root for midrash—the study and exegesis of the Torah. It is the searching out, carefully looking into, and investigation of a matter or person. However, the first time it is used in the Bible is Genesis 9:5, where God will "require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." God's investigation of man's actions should not be something to be taken lightly.

²⁷ As C.S. Lewis pointed out, it would be impossible for Jesus to simply be a good teacher for He was either a liar, insane, or God.

²⁸ Psalm 16 has no immediate history or context. It was simply titled "A Miktam of David." Unfortunately, we don't know precisely what a Miktam is. The LXX translated it as an inscription on stone.

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David, in Psalm 16:10, declared his belief that he would not remain in Sheol. While the full understanding of the resurrection and world-to-come did not seem to be well known in David’s time, several times he seems to have referred to life beyond that on this earth. Paul reminded his listeners, in Acts 13:35, that resurrection was and had been a Jewish teaching and God’s power to raise someone from the dead should not come as a surprise. But David did die, was buried, and rotted in the ground. And so Paul stated that David was talking about Jesus, who did not see corruption.²⁹

Ephesians 5:15-33(6:1-9). Paul stated, “The days are evil”. The world hasn’t changed all that much since the first century. Since the days are evil, how then should we live? “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.” For Paul, both the walk of God’s people and wisdom had a strong meaning.³⁰

Walking, or *halacha*, is the practical living out of the word of God that might seem (at first glance) to be merely theological, historical, or philosophical—it is the practical acting out of the teachings and instructions of God and Jesus. In addition, wisdom wasn’t simply an esoteric principle of the mind. Biblically, wisdom was also to be very practical.

Paul compared wisdom with folly. Folly sometimes acts (always in self-interest), for instance, getting drunk on wine, but folly is also sometimes simply not acting and becoming profligate.³¹ There are many ways to apply wisdom, but here Paul emphasizes three ways to walk with carefully applied wisdom: Being filled with the [Holy] Spirit, giving thanks to God through song, and submitting to one another.

²⁹ During the later 2nd Temple period, the majority of Psalms were viewed with some idea of messianic expectation, regardless of whether the Psalm had any obvious prophetic references. While David seems to have been referring to himself in Psalm 16:10, the way Paul used it in Acts 13:35 in reference to Jesus’ resurrection would not have been a surprise to anyone as it followed common hermeneutic practice of the day.

³⁰ Even though Paul wrote with excellent Greek, Paul himself was Jewish. Not only a Jew, but also a Pharisee who was taught to think in a Hebraic way. Paul did understand Greek and Roman thought and would sometimes use terms and concepts from those cultures but most commonly he brought out concepts from his own Jewish roots.

³¹ Ἀσωτία, debauchery, is an uncommon word in both the Bible and Greek literature in general (only Aristotle, Plutarch, and Athenaeus used it with any regularity). The modern English translation is good in that it largely implies a lifestyle that is filled with food, wine, and sex (none of which are bad on their own) but this is because it is a life that is pulled away from duty and virtue.

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Correct application of our teaching and knowledge redeems the time during these evil days.³² Ceasing to apply these teachings will, inevitably, result in a form of debauchery—doing nothing or even falling back into our former ways as we are pulled away from our duties.³³

Wisdom is connected to understanding the will of the Lord. Foolishness is the opposite of wisdom and thus cannot understand God's will and engages in deeds of darkness. Whether in worship or everyday life we must both understand the will of God and then act on it with thankfulness and humility.

But how should we act on it? We are to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Paul provided six examples of submission and all six examples will likely offend someone.³⁴ ³⁵ Sadly, instead of learning from Paul, many people in the church continuously walk as unwise. The first

³² If we believe we are living in evil days, the natural thing for a Christian to do is act. It isn't to complain, grumble, or sit around waiting for God to either tear everything down or repair everything while we take what benefit we can from this life.

³³ While Paul specifically singled out imbibing too much wine, Judaism generally celebrated the fruit of the vine. Grapes were one of the seven species of the land God had promised Israel and it was generally used to make wine or occasionally grape honey. God brought forth "food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man." Both of which became important in the prayers of the Jewish people in the Kiddush (prayer accompanying wine) and hamotzi (general prayer for food but specifically bread from the earth). God blessed Israel with the gift of wine.

Perhaps it was the Greco-Roman drunken orgies of Dionysius and Bacchus that influenced Paul to single out this particular behaviour in Ephesians 5:18 as something the church should definitely not emulate in their times of worship. Or perhaps Paul was showing what the opposite of walking with wisdom would look like—letting the things of this world and self-interest pull us away from the things we should do.

³⁴ These six examples aren't the only people that should be submitting to one another, they are simply the examples that Paul chose to use. Likely because of the very reason they are argued about so often, they are hard for us to accept.

³⁵ What is submission? To discuss the matter, let me attempt to give you a Hebrew exegetical method called *derech hashlili* (דרך השלילי) which means, "the way of the negative", that is, explaining something by describing what it is not.

Submission does not mean you are less important. Jesus, the incarnate God, submitted Himself to His parents (Luke 2:51). If everyone is to submit to one another in the church, submitting still does not negate hierarchy. Paul wrote to the Ephesians with authority and God still places shepherds over His flock. Submission isn't universal. Wives aren't to submit to someone else's husband, the instructions in Ephesians 5:22-33 are strictly between married couples (and this is also within the body of believers).

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four examples occur within the family: wives, husbands, children, and fathers.³⁶ The final two examples are just as difficult for many people: servants and masters.

Where does the motivation for submission come from? First, it is a practical action that should bring blessing and unity to withstand this evil day.³⁷ But the motive is “as to the Lord”. Christian marriages are not the same as secular marriages. No one should think that they are. God is involved and He makes His dwelling within the sacrament of marriage.³⁸ Regarding marriage, Paul says “This mystery is profound”. The Kingdom of Heaven involves a lot of submitting.³⁹

Jesus is our example of someone who lived a life of authority while still submitting to others. He submitted to His parents and so following His example we submit to God and also to each other in love and service. The Hebrew Bible commands parents to teach their children. It also commands children to honour their parents. Here, Paul quotes the commandment as he urges children to obey their parents and the instruction that they give them. No one seems to need to teach children to disobey—we all seem pretty good at disobedience.

Loyalty involves obedience and submission. If we are loyal to God, we obey him. If we are loyal to our marriage partners, we love them and submit to them. If we are loyal to our parents, we honour, obey, and submit to their instruction. Slaves also must continue the practice of loyalty and obedience. The biblical view of slavery is another one of those long debates with lots of disagreements. The words, “as you would Christ” should add perspective to the issue of loyalty,

³⁶ Even discussing a family as such can be difficult. But as much as we believe that the family is a difficult topic for many in the church today, for many in the church have never had a good family and a few don't even believe in the concept of family as husband, wife, and children, we should remember that it likely would not have been much easier for the people of Ephesus as death was much more common, there were many orphans and widows and, of those with living parents or spouse, many woman (and some men) believed in Jesus while their opposite was still an adamant idol worshipper. Nonetheless, Paul opened up the subject of how to live on earth in submission to one another under God just before he started to speak on fighting against the evil one, also under the power of God.

³⁷ If, as a husband or wife, father or child, master or slave the submission of your opposite towards you does not bring unity and peace then this is something that should be examined in yourself. Voluntary submission to each other is in contrast to forced obedience. Not even God forces us to live in obedience to Him.

³⁸ Paul does not say that women in general are to submit to men in general, nor the other way around. This passage is in the context of a marriage relationship.

³⁹ Again, just because Paul, James, or Peter had authority in the church doesn't mean that others in the church were unimportant. In fact, the deacons were given some authority and yet they specifically served the people who were often thought to be the least important. Jesus taught His disciples this important lesson of service at the Last Supper when He rose and washed His disciples feet. So there can be, and are, hierarchical positions that God chose to implement and we should submit ourselves as such, even as Jesus submitted to His parents. And yes, while Husbands are not told to submit to their wives in Ephesians 5:25-32, the original command in Ephesians 5:21 is to submit to one another.

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slavery, and obedience. Masters and slaves should have a different relationship with each other in the Messiah. That does not mean that authority and responsibility have been dispensed with. Rather, all our relationships with each other should be tempered by the loyalty and love we profess to give God.