

# OpenTheo

## August 10th: 1 Samuel 29 & Romans 10

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Achish sends David back to Ziklag. The Word is near you.

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

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## Transcript

1 Samuel 29. Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek, and the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel. As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, the commanders of the Philistines said, What are these Hebrews doing here? And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years? And since he deserted to me, I have found no fault in him to this day.

But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us.

For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of

the men here? Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances? Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands. Then Achish called David and said to him, As the lord lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day.

Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you. So go back now, and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines. And David said to Achish, But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king? And Achish answered David and said, I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God.

Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle. Now then, rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning, and depart as soon as you have light. So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines, but the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

The story of 1 Samuel chapter 29 occurred a few days before the story of the woman of Endor. In chapter 28 the Philistines have encamped at Shunem. However in chapter 29 they are still mustering at Aphek, 30 miles north of Gath, before moving on to Shunem, 40 miles further, to fight against the Israelites.

Saul was told by Samuel that he would die the next day when he visited the woman of Endor, which further supports the idea that chapter 29 records events from a few days beforehand. The presence of Aphek in the narrative recalls the loss of Israel in battle there, near the beginning of 1 Samuel, when the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines. Just as Samuel's first prophecy confirmed the earlier prophecy that Eli's two sons would die on the same day, so Samuel's last prophecy was much the same, concerning the death of Saul and his sons.

This was a prophecy delivered after his death. I believe that we should regard the appearance of Samuel in the preceding chapter as a genuine appearance, albeit not one summoned by the woman of Endor, who was greatly surprised by it. Near the beginning of 1 Samuel there is a battle with the Philistines, associated with Aphek, where the leader of Israel and his sons perish.

Eli dies when he hears the news of the capture of the Ark and he falls off his chair. There is another such battle at the end of the book, with Saul and his sons perishing on this occasion. The ordering of the material probably heightens the literary contrast between David and Saul at this juncture.

Peter Lighthouse raises the possibility that David's defeat of the Amalekites in chapter 30

may actually have been simultaneous with Saul's defeat by the Philistines in chapter 31. Achish trusts David. David is gifted at deception.

David has, to this point, been playing a very dangerous game in pretending to Achish that he was fighting against Israel, when he was really fighting against other enemies. He was cunning, but he seemed to require divine intervention at this juncture if he wasn't to blow his cover. His language here is probably intentionally ambiguous.

For instance, he speaks of fighting against the enemies of my lord the king. Which lord the king? He had, we should remember, already deceived Achish and his men back in chapter 21, when he feigned madness before Achish. We might also here remember the way that the patriarchs engaged in deception to disguise the fact that their wives were really their wives, and to save their lives from godless kings, who might kill them and take their wives if they thought they were their husbands, rather than their brothers.

In Genesis chapter 12 and 20, God had to intervene to deliver Abraham and Sarah from situations that exceeded their capacity for cunning escape. Here David finds himself in a very tight spot, where the lord needs to provide him with a way of escape, lest he either find himself having to go into battle against Israel, or is distrusted and destroyed by Achish. We should also consider the possibility that Achish has some trust in the lord, and is a god-fearer.

The Philistines had experienced the power of the lord in a number of situations in the preceding chapters of this book, and perhaps some of them were open to belief in Achish has had close interactions with David and has been very impressed by him. Achish swears in the name of the lord in verse 6, and describes David as like an angel of God later on. Perhaps God is also protecting David from having to fight against a god-fearing Philistine.

The Philistine commanders rightly feared what would happen if David turned on them in the battle. David had already enjoyed a reputation as a heroic Israelite warrior. The best way to rehabilitate his tarnished image would be to turn on the Philistines in the midst of the battle as a fifth column.

Mercenaries could always be very dangerous to have around, their loyalties were shallow, and they could betray their masters if the tide of battle turned against them. We see an example of this back in 1 Samuel 14 verse 21. Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time, and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan.

As Peter Lighthouse observes, there is an interesting contrast between Achish and Saul in their relationship to David. David is loyal to Saul throughout, yet Saul treats him as a traitor. Whereas he betrays the Philistines, yet Achish defends him in the very strongest of terms.

Saul once made David his bodyguard before trying to destroy him. Now Achish has made David his bodyguard for life in chapter 28, even while David's loyalties are not with him. The protest of the Philistine commanders gives David a welcome reprieve from having to fight the Israelites without raising Achish's suspicions.

It also saves David from a situation where he would be forced to betray Achish more directly. There are a number of occasions when David needs to be saved by the Lord, from situations beyond his control, from rash judgements, or from traps. For instance, had David actually joined the Philistines in attacking Israel here, his hope of being king of Israel in the future would have been over.

On occasions like this, it is very important to consider the Psalms as part of the story. David is, during these times, constantly praying to the Lord to deliver him from his enemies, to protect him from evil, and to guard his way. Sometimes God acts to deliver David from a sin that he is giving into, as when he stirs up Abigail to intercept David before he attacks Nabal.

Sometimes God acts to deliver David from an enemy he can't easily escape, such as when he raises up a Philistine attack just as Saul is about to capture David. Sometimes he provides David with a way of escape from a situation where David seems cornered, as he does here. These sorts of deliverances can seem just a bit too convenient if we don't pay enough attention to the hand of the Lord within events, and the way that David constantly seeks God's protection and deliverance.

David isn't just being lucky. David is also able to put judgement into the hand of the Lord. The Lord is raising up Achish and the Philistines against Saul.

David doesn't have to fight for vengeance, and to get what he believes is due to him, as the Lord will ultimately achieve the victory for him. In the last couple of verses, there are three references to David leaving early in the morning. Jordan suggests the possibility that there is some allusion to the Passover here.

Saul has had a false Passover in the preceding chapter, with the midnight meal of unleavened bread in association with the declaration of the death of the firstborn, the king of Israel, Saul himself, while David here experiences a deliverance that is sealed in a departure in the early morning. A question to consider, what lessons can we learn about the relationship between prayerful dependence on the Lord and living faithfully and wisely in the story of David? Romans chapter 10. Romans 10.

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven? That is, to bring Christ down. Or, Who will descend into the abyss? That is, to bring Christ up from the dead.

But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith that we proclaim. Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

For the scripture says, Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. For the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world. But I ask, did Israel not understand? 1st Moses says, I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation. With a foolish nation I will make you angry.

Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, I have been found by those who did not seek me. I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me. But of Israel he says, All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.

In Romans chapter 10 Paul continues to address the great question and the tragedy of Israel's failure to receive the gospel message. Israel had not attained to the righteousness by faith, although Gentiles had. Rather Israel had stumbled upon the stumbling stone.

Paul begins by expressing his deep desire that Israel come to know God's salvation, which they were currently rejecting. He addresses the Roman Christians here as brothers. Earlier in chapter 9 verse 3 he spoke of the Jews as his brothers, his kinsmen according to the flesh.

He wants the Romans to join with him in his desire for his fellow Jews' salvation. As in the case of Paul himself prior to his conversion, the Jews are zealous for God, but their zeal is tragically ignorant. They fail to recognize how God has actually acted.

They have been ignorant of the righteousness of God, oblivious to God's act of saving justice enacted in Jesus the Messiah, a saving righteousness by which God justifies the ungodly, bringing people into good standing with himself, without respect to ancestry,

covenant membership, Torah observance or status. Israel, however, has sought to establish its own standing with God on the basis of the Torah, through covenant membership and Torah observance. While the failure of Israel that Paul is speaking about here is a more general failure, it is a failure revealed at a crucial moment, when it really counted, when the Messiah came, Israel dropped the ball.

When God acted decisively in their history, revealing his righteousness, they should have submitted to it, recognizing the surprising manner of God's action in Christ and joyfully receiving it. However, that was not what happened. Instead, they were blind to what God was doing in Christ, and rather than receiving it, they rejected and opposed it in unbelief.

The point here isn't so much that Israel was trying to earn their own salvation, as many have understood it. Rather, Israel perceived its standing with God to be a matter of their own covenant status and Torah observance. In many respects, this was an understandable and reasonable belief.

It wasn't a belief that they could earn salvation, nor was it a belief in the necessity of absolutely perfect obedience. Rather, it was the belief that, when God's saving justice appeared, it would be shown to people deemed more worthy, i.e. Torah observant Jews. Living in a Torah observant way, as a people set apart from the Gentiles, was a good and necessary thing in its time, provided that they never forgot that these things were never the ultimate basis of their standing with God.

That was God's grace alone. However, when God's long-awaited saving justice, the righteousness of God, was revealed, it took an unexpected form. At this point, Israel faced a choice.

Would they submit to what God was doing, or would they continue to insist upon pursuing their standing with God in the way of Torah observance? Would they relate to God on his own terms, recognising the more temporary role that the law was playing in God's purposes? Or would they cling on to a status gained from the law, even when God was establishing his new covenant people on a very different footing? Jesus the Messiah is the goal at which the law always aimed, with everyone who believes enjoying good standing with God on the basis of what Christ has achieved. In Christ, the law arrives at its intended destination, accomplishing its design. The law was never a bad thing to be abolished, but a good thing to be fulfilled.

The problem was not with the law itself, as Paul argues, the law is spiritual. Rather, the problem was always with sinful flesh and its allergic reaction to the law. In Christ, the law can finally achieve its intended goal, as the righteous requirement of the law can be fulfilled in us, as we walk no longer according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

The meaning of Paul's statement in verses 5-11 may not be immediately obvious and has provoked much debate, as many other things in the book of Romans. One of the

more jarring things is the fact that Paul seems to be juxtaposing the righteousness that is based on the law and the righteousness based on faith. However, if this is Paul's intent, he seems to be using the wrong verses to do so.

He alludes to Leviticus 18, verse 5 as the statement of the righteousness of the law. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules. If a person does them, he shall live by them.

I am the Lord. Yet the verses around which he structures his proclamation of the righteousness of faith are taken from Deuteronomy 30, verses 11-14. If we read verses 11-20, we'll get a better sense of the original context.

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven that you should say, Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it. Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say, Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it.

But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.

If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in His ways, and by keeping His commandments and His statutes and His rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him. For He is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Robert Alter, commenting upon the teaching of these verses, remarks that Deuteronomy, having given God's teaching a local place and habitation in the text available to all, proceeds to reject the older mythological notion of the secrets or wisdom of the gods. It is the daring hero of the pagan epic, who unlike ordinary man, makes bold to climb the sky or cross the great sea to bring back the secret of immortality. This mythological and heroic era is at an end, for God's word inscribed in a book has become the intimate property of every person.

The law contains great depths and wealth of wisdom, but it isn't far off from anyone. This word is in the mouths of Israel and can be in their hearts as they memorize it, meditate

upon it, learn its principles of wisdom, delight in it, and sing it forth, and display its principles from the very heart of their lives. Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4-6 describes this sort of relationship with the law.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

The law is at its heart a remarkably democratic document. It isn't written merely for a scribal, judicial or royal elite. It doesn't require the great feats of epic heroes, the deep learning of philosophers, or the wandering of mystical pilgrims.

It is written for the learning, understanding, and practice of every Israelite, from the least to the greatest. It isn't a shadowy and arbitrary set of principles imposed upon them from without, but a book full of rationales, explanations, and persuasion, designed to enlist the will, the desires, and the understanding. God is close to every Israelite, not just to the high priest, the sage, the prophet, or the king.

Now Paul is not a careless reader of the scriptures. It seems strange that he would use a reworked text advocating for the keeping of the law as his clincher text for the righteousness of faith, over against the righteousness of the law. What is he doing here? One thing to note here is that Deuteronomy chapter 30 is the great passage about God's work of grace in the future, the work by which he will restore his wayward people, circumcising their hearts, in verse 6, so that they will love him as they ought, and live.

This is what it will look like when the law finally gives the life it intended, through an utterly unmerited act of divine grace. Perhaps, rather than presenting a great contrast between the righteousness of faith in verses 6-11, and the righteousness of the law in verse 5, Paul is actually revealing a fundamental continuity. So perhaps verse 6 should begin with an AND, rather than a BUT.

The word of Christ that is believed is the divine word that has graciously come near to us, so that we might receive it and have life. The statement of Leviticus chapter 18 verse 5, that the person who does these things will live by them, is fulfilled in the covenant restoring and establishing act of God, by which his word comes so very near to us, entering into our very hearts. Nevertheless, we should notice that even in the fulfillment, there remains a contrast.

The word of the law is primarily a word of command to be obeyed and done. The word of Christ is primarily a word of promise and grace to be believed and confessed. Salvation and the promised restoration of the new covenant, comes with the believing reception of this word of the gospel, the message that Jesus is Lord.

As Richard Hayes observes, Paul has also mixed the Deuteronomy 30 quotation with an



expression found elsewhere in the book of Deuteronomy, particularly in chapter 8 verse 17 and 9 verse 4. Beware lest you say in your heart, my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth. And then in chapter 9 verse 4, Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, it is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land, whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. Paul probably hopes that attentive readers will pick up on these echoes.

Both of these texts underline the sheer grace by which Israel enjoys its standing with God and its place in the land. Likewise, the reception of the word of Christ does not depend upon the great deeds of heroes, the lofty wisdom of sages or the powers of human rulers. In God's action in the gospel, his revelation has come near to us all in a way that reaches directly into our unworthy condition, wherever we may find ourselves.

He doesn't require great feats of bravery, genius or power of us, just the reception of faith by which we can be saved. The law called for obedience as the means of life. However, the law also promised that God, in a great act of grace, would realize the law's intention for a people who are unfaithful and would unavoidably come under the law's curse in their history.

The law was not merely command, but was also promise. And in Paul's movement from Leviticus 18, verse 5 to Deuteronomy 30, Paul follows the shift from command to promise and manifests the fulfillment of the promise that has occurred in Christ. Christ is God's revelation come near to us all, so that the law might be fulfilled and humanity restored in relationship with God.

Salvation is now made accessible for everyone who believes. The promise of the gospel is a universal one. God is the God of all, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Referencing Joel 2, verse 32, who prophesies concerning the great day of the Lord, when the fortunes of Israel will be restored and reversed, Paul declares that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. This also prepares us for some of the points that he will go on to make about Israel in the following chapter. In verses 14 to 15, Paul expresses the Gentile mission in terms of this new covenant fulfillment framework.

For the prophecy of an indiscriminate gift of salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike to be fulfilled, the message needs to go out to Gentiles, which is where Paul's own work fits in. Quoting Isaiah 52, verse 7, he describes the wonderful character of the heralds of the good news, or the gospel, the message that Jesus is Lord, that God is establishing his kingdom in his Son. Yet not everyone who hears the message of Paul's gospel responds with obedient submission to Israel's Messiah and the world's true Lord.

The gospel as the proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus the Messiah is not just a message that we can take or leave. We must bow the knee to Christ, or else stand in

rebellion against him. Just as Isaiah expressed the widespread rejection of his message, so Paul's gospel proclamation is widely rejected, even among Gentiles.

Faith comes from the heard report, and the heard report comes through the word of Christ that has come near to mankind in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. God's revelation of his Son, Jesus Christ, the word that has come near to us, is what drives and lies at the heart of the proclamation of the gospel. Paul quotes Psalm 19, verse 4 in an admittedly rather confusing verse.

As usual, we should pay attention to the context. Psalm 19, verses 1-4 speak of the universal revelation of the glory of God by the heavens. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Perhaps Paul's point here is that no one, not even the Gentiles, are without excuse. While the word of God has come near in Jesus, and the proclamation of the word of the gospel, it is not as if the Gentiles were completely without revelation. God has already spoken to them in the creation itself.

The chapter ends with a statement of the truth that Israel had not been left without warnings of this situation, of the good news of God's kingdom and his saving justice going to the Gentiles, while they rejected it. They should have known. He quotes from Deuteronomy 32, verse 21, and Isaiah 65, verse 1 and then verse 2. In such places, Israel had already been warned by God that as they rejected the gospel, God's grace would be shown to people who had never sought it, ultimately with the effect of moving Israel to jealousy.

Paul is here returning to some of the points with which he concluded chapter 9, and setting things up for the chapter that follows. A question to consider, how does the connection between the promise of Deuteronomy chapter 30 and the call to live by the law in Leviticus chapter 18, verse 5 help us to understand the proper place of the law in the larger picture and story of scripture?