

# OpenTheo

## August 9th: 1 Samuel 28 & Romans 9

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Saul and the woman of Endor. The election of grace and God's formation of his people.

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

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## Transcript

1 Samuel 28. In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army.

David said to Achish, Very well, you shall know what your servant can do. And Achish said to David, Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life. Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city.

And Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land. The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa.

When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly. And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by

Urim, or by prophets. Then Saul said to his servants, Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.

And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a medium at Endor. So Saul disguised himself and put on other garments and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night.

And he said, Divine for me by a spirit, and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you. The woman said to him, Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death? But Saul swore to her by the Lord, As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.

Then the woman said, Whom shall I bring up for you? He said, Bring up Samuel for me. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, Why have you deceived me? You are Saul.

The king said to her, Do not be afraid. What do you see? And the woman said to Saul, I see a God coming up out of the earth. He said to her, What is his appearance? And she said, An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe.

And Saul knew that it was Samuel. And he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage. Then Samuel said to Saul, Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up? Saul answered, I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams.

Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do. And Samuel said, Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy? The Lord has done to you as he spoke by me, for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor David. Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day.

Moreover the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The Lord will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines. Then Saul fell at once full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel.

And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night. And the woman came to Saul, and when she saw that he was terrified she said to him, Behold your servant has obeyed you. I have taken my life in my hand and have listened to what you have said to me.

Now therefore you also obey your servant. Let me set a morsel of bread before you and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way. He refused and said, I will

not eat.

But his servants together with the woman urged him, and he listened to their words. So he arose from the earth and sat on the bed. Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly killed it, and she took flour and she kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread of it, and she put it before Saul and his servants, and they ate.

Then they rose and went away that night. In 1st Samuel chapter 28 the Philistines are on the offensive again. They are going to cut Israel in half through the Jezreel valley, through the territory of Issachar.

If they were successful in cutting the nation in two, they would be able to dominate and defeat Israel much easier. We should note the presence of fear throughout the passage. Saul, even though he is the king, has become characterised by fear since his earlier rebellion.

He fears Goliath. He fears David. He is afraid of the Philistines.

And then he is afraid of his own death. As Peter Lighthouse observes, in this chapter there is a movement in Saul from being afraid to very afraid to terrified. Saul's fear is a very important trait to understand what drives him, and most especially as we see that trait in contrast to the courageous faith of Jonathan and David.

It is Saul's fear that drives much of his violence. Faced with the threat of the Philistines, Saul looks for guidance. However, Samuel has died and the Lord isn't answering him in any way.

The Lord isn't answering Saul by dreams, he's not answering him by prophets, and he's not answering him by Urim and Thummim. These are the three main forms of counsel from the Lord. Dreams are especially associated with the king, prophecies with the prophet, and the Urim and Thummim are associated with the priest and the ephod.

The story of Samuel's life began in a period of lack of revelation and with a man lacking in spiritual perception, Eli, and it ends that way too. 1 Samuel 3 verses 1 to 3 tells of a threefold darkness, the lack of the light of the word of the Lord, the dimness of the high priest's eyes, and by implication his spiritual perception, and the lamp of the Lord that was about to go out. Something of this theme resurfaces in verse 6 of this chapter.

Saul's robes are an important part of the story too. Saul's robes, along with his spear, are weapons or garments that symbolise his status and his office. Saul, having given up seeking guidance from the Lord, turns to a medium and he takes off his robes to disguise himself.

Earlier in chapter 19 there was another story of Saul taking off his robes as he lay naked before the Lord and prophesying. Both of these events foreshadow Saul's loss of his

kingly authority, his divestiture. The fact that everything happens at night is also significant.

The night is a time of doom and foreboding, a time when judgement falls and fates are sealed. In various other parts of scripture we see darkness and night and the coming of light used as significant pointers to the character of particular periods. The sun goes down upon Jacob at Bethel and doesn't truly rise on him again until he limps away from the encounter with the angel at the Jabbok.

Similar patterns occur at the Exodus. The sun rises as Israel finds itself on the other side of the Red Sea and the waters come down upon the Egyptians. The woman as a medium was supposed to be expelled from the land.

She was under the ban. And this should help to clue us in on some important themes that are being introduced. Saul comes to the woman with two men in disguise.

The woman declares the report of what Saul had done in cutting off the mediums and the spiritists from the land, much as Rahab declared the news of the victories of Israel and the fear that they occasioned to the two spies who came to her in disguise. Like the spies who came to Rahab, Saul declares that no harm will come to the woman. However the Joshua story is inverted.

The disguised visitors side with the person under the ban, rather than the person under the ban siding with the faithful people of God. Saul has been associated with the King of Jericho already in the narrative, as his daughter Michael delivers David from his hands in much the same way as Rahab delivered the spies from the King of Jericho. However now he seals his union with the doomed Canaanites in the eating of the medium's meal.

Just as the Rahab story has various Passover themes, so the story of the woman of Endor brings such themes to the fore. There is a meal of unleavened bread at night, which will be followed by the death of the firstborn of Israel, Saul, the King. This is a table of demons, and there is ominous foreshadowing of Saul's death, not merely in Samuel's announcement.

It is also important to notice that David's story is being purposefully juxtaposed with that of Saul. Saul suffers a great defeat and will die, whereas David, after initially suffering a great loss, wins a great victory. The dialogue between Saul and the woman replays the story of Genesis chapter 3 and the fall in a number of ways.

In a crafty disguise, Saul challenges the divine command that he had been entrusted with as the husband of The woman repeats the command, but then Saul, like the serpent, flatly denies it. You will not surely die. Samuel then appears to Saul, literally a god ascending out of the earth, and questions him.

Why have you done this thing, Saul? You will surely die as a result, returning to the dust

from which you came. You will be driven forth from the garden of the kingdom, and someone else will take your place. The woman then has a significant interaction with Saul.

Saul, who started off as an Adam figure attacking the serpent Nahash, now ends up as a serpent-like figure, aligning himself with a rebellious woman and tempting her to further sin. This is pretty much the exact opposite of what we see in the story of David and Abigail, where Abigail is the faithful woman who delivers David from sin and temptation. The woman obeys the voice of the serpentine Saul, but now calls on him to eat of her food.

He initially refuses, but finally listens to the voice of the woman and takes of the food that she gives to him. The repeated references to heeding and obeying voices in this context are charged ones. Samuel had said to Saul in chapter 15 verses 22-23, In Saul's Nadir in chapter 28, we hark back to the earlier events of his life.

In chapter 13, Saul's impatience for Samuel led him to disobey God's commandment. In chapter 15, he failed to destroy Amalek, but kept the fatted animals and spared Agag. In chapter 28, Saul resorts to the sin of divination, to which his rebellion was earlier compared.

The heeding and the obeying here is the woman's obeying of Saul's wicked request and the rebellious Saul's heeding of the woman's voice, which seems to echo Adam's sin. In chapter 3 verse 17 of Genesis, The woman of Endor is a fallen Eve alongside the Adamic and serpentine Saul. The fact that the medium is simply the woman throughout allows for the accentuation of her archetypal significance.

Saul is then finally served the fatted animal, much as the gifts sent by Jesse to Saul were David, and David's music in chapter 16 verses 19-23 ironically recall the signs of the kingdom given to Saul in chapter 10. Perhaps the fatted animal also recalls Saul's great sin. A question to consider, in the subtle allusions to the story of the garden and of the fall in the stories of 1 Samuel, what might we learn about the calling of Israel's kings? Romans chapter 9 But it is not as though the word of God has failed.

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring. But through Isaac shall your offspring be named. This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

For this is what the promise said. About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born, and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works, but because of him who calls, she was told, the older will serve the younger.

As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means. For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

You will say to me then, Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will? But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, Why have you made me like this? Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honourable use, and another for dishonourable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath, and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, Those who were not my people I will call my people, and her who was not beloved I will call beloved. And in the very place where it was said to them, You are not my people, there they will be called, sons of the living God. And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved.

For the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay. And as Isaiah predicted, If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah. What shall we say then, that Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is a righteousness that is by faith, but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law? Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.

They have stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. Many people have read Romans chapter 9 and following as a sort of appendix to the main body of Romans.

Romans 1-8 are about the way of salvation, then in Romans 9 Paul teaches about the doctrine of election, and then gets into the question of the status of Israel. While popular in some quarters, this is quite a mistaken understanding of Romans. If we have been paying attention, it will be clear that the issues addressed in Romans chapter 9-11 are absolutely integral to the letter.

In fact, a reasonable case could be made that these are the most important chapters for Paul's argument in the epistle. Here it is important to remember that the epistle is in many ways more focused upon God's problem and God's solution to that, than upon

man's problem and God's solution to that. What do we mean by this? God has to be both just and the justifier.

He has to deal appropriately with sin and maintain moral order in his universe. However, he also desires to deliver human beings from sin and put them in right standing with himself. He needs to keep the promises that he has made to Israel.

At the heart of the book of Romans is not an account of how individuals can get right with a holy God, although Romans clearly addresses those problems. Rather, Romans is about how, in the fullness of time in history, God revealed his saving justice, by which sinful people can be put in good standing with him. How that good standing is not a mere fiction, but is according to truth, being in keeping with judgment according to works on the last day.

It is about how this new people in Christ fulfills the great purpose that God had from the beginning and will involve the renewal of all creation. However, there is one great big glaring problem, and that's Israel. Israel has, for the most part, not responded positively to the gospel.

Indeed, they have generally rejected Christ. Yet Israel receives so many blessings and promises from God, it seems as if God has failed in their case. And if that is the case, everything else is thrown into question.

If Messiah Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel, then how are we to explain this? This is a profoundly personal matter for Paul too. He is in very great distress about the state of Israel. They're his own compatriots.

He even goes to the extent of, like Moses in the book of Exodus, expressing the desire that he be cut off in order that they might be saved. He enumerates all of the blessings of Israel, ending with the greatest of all. From Israel, according to the flesh, came the Messiah, Jesus.

There is also likely an exceptionally remarkable statement here concerning Jesus. Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. If this is the right way of understanding Paul's statement, and there is debate on this point, it is a direct statement of the deity of the Messiah, Jesus.

However, it occurs in a context that heightens the irony. God himself took Israelite flesh, and yet Israel have failed to receive him. In response to this, Paul retells the story of Israel, in order that we can understand what is happening at this juncture in history.

Though many have missed the fact, most of Paul's thought is about exploring the meaning of history, how to articulate the events of history in a meaningful narrative that gives us the means by which to move forward in an appropriate manner. At this juncture of history, following the Christ event, how do we understand that Israel has largely

rejected the Gospel, whereas the Gentiles have accepted it in large numbers? How do we account for this against the background of God's covenant purpose and promise for his people of Israel? This would seem to be incongruous with God's intent to save his people. It would seem to go against the purpose of the covenant.

In response to this, then, Paul tells the story in a way that highlights, for instance, that the Gentiles who had not been seeking God are nonetheless fitting recipients of God's mercy. That this is in keeping with how Israel always was constituted, by an act of pure grace, not on the basis of anything that might mark them out as deserving recipients. Now this is not just a matter of works, it could be a matter of ancestry, or it could be a matter of some other factor, some standing or worth that people could claim before God.

Paul is reading the story of Genesis at this point, and then he moves on to the story of Exodus and elsewhere, but he retells the story in a way that shows that Israel was never established on the basis of its works or its worth, of its keeping of the law, or of its being marked out as the people of the law. What he is talking about here is not primarily earning salvation through merit, although that is an implication of it. Rather, he is challenging anything that might mark anyone out as a fitting recipient of God's grace.

For instance, whether it is birth, or being born to a particular father. Isaac was the one through whom God would call Abraham's seed, not Ishmael, so it is not about birth. Mere descent from Abraham or Israel was never the fundamental basis of Israel's identity as a people.

Well, what about the fact of works, and the way that you are an observant keeper of the law? Well, we can see the story of Jacob and Esau. Why did God choose Jacob over Esau? God says, Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated. Yet this occurs even within the womb itself, before any actions have been performed.

God chose Jacob over Esau, and said that the older should serve the younger. At each point in Israel's history, Israel was constituted on the basis of grace, and of divine election. Of a divine election that was not conditioned upon anything that was done by the human actors.

Now as we read through the story of Genesis, we should recognise this. This is what we see in the story itself. Why did God choose Isaac rather than Ishmael? Not on the basis of anything that either of them did.

Rather, it was divine purpose. It was divine election. It was not based on the choice or the actions of the participants involved.

It was God. Why was Jacob chosen over Esau? Not because Jacob did anything that earned that, because the choice happened before either of them was born. Nor was it on the basis of the natural status enjoyed by the older, because Jacob was chosen rather



than Esau.

Later on we will see that choice reaffirmed, and it is something that is manifest also in Esau's despising of the covenant, and those sorts of things. But that is not the basis for it. It is not that God saw Esau's wickedness and then decided to cut him off from the covenant.

Rather, God's purpose all along was that Jacob should be the one through whom the covenant line would be established. And so the very origins of Israel were established by an unconditioned series of actions of divine grace. This is the way that God forms his people.

And we should notice the asymmetries as we go through this. This is about God's positive action of grace. It is not that there is a symmetrical action of grace and a sort of anti-grace of violent rejection and reprobation.

This is not a double decree in the way that would make one decree symmetrical with the other. And the other thing to notice here is that this is not about salvation primarily. This is about God's covenant purpose of forming his people.

In the New Covenant, we see that it is far more about salvation, because it is the means by which God is blessing and bringing in all peoples. Whereas in the past, this was restricted to Israel. You did not have to be a member of Israel, though, to be saved.

There is no reason to believe that Ishmael was damned on account of his not being chosen, for instance. Indeed, there are reasons why we might think that he was indeed saved. The issue here, though, is who is going to bear the covenant destiny and promise? Who will hold the covenant baton as it is passed down through history? And God always formed his people through an act of unconditioned grace.

As we read through the story, it continues. So it goes beyond Esau and Jacob and into the story of the Exodus. He says to Moses, Notice again that there is an asymmetry here.

It talks about God's choice of mercy, his exercising of mercy and compassion. It does not speak about God choosing to exercise a violent rejection of people. The word for hated in the story of Esau need not bear the weight of violent rejection and animosity.

Although that element may appear later on as the story develops, it just means that God chose or preferred Jacob over Esau, in the sense that he chose him rather than Esau. We see a similar thing in the story of Rachel and Leah. Leah is hated and Rachel is loved.

This does not mean that Leah is violently and viscerally disliked. It might involve a dislike, but that is not primarily what the words mean in that context. The point here then is that God is acting through the unconditioned act of mercy upon people who are unworthy of it.

God's action in grace is always to unworthy recipients. There is no need for God to justify himself in this way. God is not in the position of having to justify himself.

He is exercising pure grace, unconditioned grace, undeserved favour towards people, none of whom are worthy recipients, and all of whom are formed as a people purely out of God's goodness and undeserved favour. Remember, this is the formation of a people, not just the choice of detached individuals. Paul's point here is to discuss the way that God forms his people in history, so that the Romans can better understand why the Gentiles can be brought in, in a way that is in keeping with the way that God always works, and then also how Israel's stumbling can be made to fit in to the larger story of how God works in history.

Abraham, Esau, Jacob, Isaac, Ishmael, these are not just odd individuals who happen to be believers or unbelievers. No, they are the people through whom God was shaping, at its very origins, his people. The choice of Isaac over Ishmael was not just the choice of an individual, it was the choice of a people.

It was the choice of the descendants of Isaac, rather than those of Ishmael. In the same way with Esau and Jacob, it is not that God was choosing this one individual over another individual primarily. It was God determining how he was going to form his people over history.

What sort of people was he going to create? It's the moulding of a people. Notice also that election, as it is described in this chapter, is something that happens in history. The choice of Jacob was declared while he was in the womb.

It's not the same thing as an election in eternity past. God's sovereignty is exercised in history, throughout Israel's history. And this is a point that Paul supports by retelling the story also of the Exodus.

Within the story of the Exodus then, God raises Pharaoh up. This is not the same thing as God making Pharaoh sinful. For instance, in the story of Job, Job is attacked by people around him, and all his people are killed, and we have other disasters that befall him.

It is not, however, as if the people around him were very favourably inclined to Job, and that Job was in this situation where all his neighbours were praying for him and wishing him well and seeking his good, and then suddenly they just randomly turned on him. No, it says that God had created a hedge around him, protecting him. In the same way, when we think about someone being raised up or hardened, when we look at the story of the Exodus, we see that on the one hand God hardens, and on the other hand, Pharaoh hardened himself.

It's a fitting way to see things. It recognises the integrity of secondary causation, that God's causation is not in competition with human causation, and particularly when it

comes to sin, God is not the author of sin. When we read the story of Pharaoh, Pharaoh hardens himself, but as he hardens himself, God is hardening him as well.

Indeed, on many of the occasions when it talks about hardening, it's rather God giving him the power and strength of will so that he can take his stand. God's sovereign direction of Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart are not in competition with each other. Pharaoh is raised up in order to show God's glory, that God, in the act of the Exodus, might demonstrate his power over the false gods and rulers of the Egyptians and deliver his people from the house of bondage.

And to do that, he gives, as it were, free reign to the sin in Pharaoh's life. Indeed, he empowers Pharaoh's will in order that Pharaoh can stand even more surely in his rebellion. He allows him to rise to a fuller stature in order that he might be broken down.

Paul writes, And Paul responds to this with the idea or the illustration of the potter and the clay, something that we find in the Old Testament. The potter and the clay is an important image to attend to. It is not that God creates a blank slate and then writes on it whatever he wills.

The potter-clay image is an image of movement between the potter and the clay. God is shaping real entities in history, real people and real people groups. So, whether he is shaping Pharaoh as a part of the Exodus, whether he is shaping his people through the choice of Isaac and the choice of Jacob over Esau, this is God forming his pottery, as it were, forming his people over history.

And as he forms that people, it is being made into a vessel for his glory. And on the other hand, we have vessels of honour and vessels for dishonour. Paul raises a hypothetical question at this point.

What if God, wanting to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? What is Paul saying here? He is returning to the situation at this moment in time and raising a hypothetical question. What if God, as in the situation of the Exodus, with the design of saving and delivering his people, is allowing the vessels of wrath to exist and, even enduring with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, that he might make known the riches of his glory to the vessels of mercy? We should recognise a number of things about this. First of all, enduring the vessels of wrath is for the sake of the salvation of the vessels of mercy.

It is for the sake of grace that God endures with the vessels of wrath. Likewise, God is not seen as preparing those to the same degree as the others. Those vessels of wrath are hardened, and they are hardened not necessarily through pure divine action upon

them.

They can be hardened through their own work as well. As we read this, we should read it recognising that the background is unbelieving Israel and their rejection of and resistance to the Gospel. What is the purpose of that? Paul is raising the hypothetical possibility that this is perhaps happening in order that God might demonstrate his power.

They are being fitted for destruction, a destruction that ultimately comes in AD 70, as Israel is judged and Jerusalem and its temple are destroyed in God's judgment. That event is the means by which God makes his power known. These vessels of wrath fitted for destruction are not necessarily about vessels of wrath from all eternity fitted for wrath in hell.

Again, it's a historical account. It's about God fitting particular people for destruction within history for a historical judgment. Israel has rejected Christ.

They rejected Christ in his initial mission. And now they have not just rejected the Son of Man, but have rejected the Spirit given at Pentecost that bears witness to the risen Christ. As a result, much of that particular generation will be destroyed.

However, God is currently bearing with them with long suffering in order that he might save his people at this moment in time. And that bearing with them with long suffering ultimately leads to bringing in many Jews and Gentiles. These are the people that God has called.

This new people is led by the Spirit, the people that he has spoken about in chapter 8. And then again, he looks back to the Old Testament story of Hosea. I will call them my people who are not my people, and her beloved who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, you are not my people.

There they shall be called sons of the living God. Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel. In these references to the Old Testament, Paul is once again showing that this is about the way that God has always done things.

The way that God called and established his people at the beginning is the way that he is doing things now in bringing Gentiles in, apart from natural status, works or ancestry. God called Abraham as if from nothing. God formed Isaac through bringing life to a dead womb and preparing Abraham to bear a seed.

None of this is on the basis of merit, on the basis of worth, on the basis of being a fitting recipient of God's mercy. One could imagine certain Israelites protesting. We have the temple, we practice circumcision, we keep the law, we are a people who are marked out by the covenant.

We have all these covenant signs. But in themselves, these do not make them fitting recipients of God's grace. We need to look back through the history of Israel to see at this present moment in time, all are under sin.

God has formed his people from the very beginning through unconditioned acts of grace. It is not based on birth, ancestry, status, standing or worth. Ishmael had Abraham as his father too, but he was not chosen.

It is not on the basis of what you have done. In the case of Esau, Esau was not the chosen one from his very birth, from even within the womb. It is not on the basis of being greater or lesser.

Esau was the older, but he was still not chosen over the younger. And as we look through the Old Testament, again and again we see this theme repeated. That God chooses, establishes, forms his people through the sovereign work of grace.

It is not on the basis of anything that those people might do to merit their standing or their status. And at this moment in time, just as we see in the prophecy of Hosea, God is calling a people who are not a people. Who had been, as it were, not just cut off, but never been a part of the people at all.

And as he is calling them, they are, as it were, not just life from the dead, but life out of nothing. The Gentiles called the people of God are a people formed where there was no people before. Now all of this raises deep questions.

What about God's purposes expressed in his gracious choice of Abraham and his seed? We need not believe that Israel deserved its status to also ask questions like the following. What about God's purpose and commitment expressed in that original act of choosing Abraham? Has God reneged on his purpose and his promise? Has he just abandoned his plan for Israel? Has he just thrown Israel to one side and decided to go on with the Gentiles? These are all questions that Paul is working with and he will continue with them in the next couple of chapters. Paul states the situation at the end of the chapter.

The advent of Christ has led to two effects. Gentiles who had not sought out righteousness, either understood in the sense of God saving justice, setting the world to rights, or righteousness in the sense of good standing with God. Those Gentiles end up perceiving it.

While Jews who pursued Torah observance, marking themselves out as special by the law, they believed that that would lead to them receiving God's saving justice or to enjoy good standing with him, but they didn't even succeed in attaining the Torah itself. They pursued the law in the wrong way, by works of the law, rather than in the way of faith, by which true obedience is established. This is all the result of stumbling over a stumbling

stone, a common theme in the New Testament.

The stumbling stone here is probably both Christ and the faith that corresponds to the receiving of God's grace in him. A question to consider. What are some places in the Old Testament which substantiate Paul's point in this chapter, that God's formation of Israel from the very beginning was apart from status, worth, standing, observance or ancestry?