

Message #15

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Life of David

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DAVID, SAUL AND THE NEED FOR BAILOUTS

1 SAMUEL 28

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

The big news on the coronavirus front this week was that Congress passed a \$2 trillion bailout package. It is hard to imagine that kind of number. This comes as a result of a realization of the economic damage that the current shutdown has created. This money is supposed to go to big companies and small companies and state and local governments and health institutions and to most of us individuals. We can expect to get \$1200 each.

The federal government is clearly trying to do the right thing. It is rather amazing to find almost unanimous bipartisan approval for anything in Washington. But it is difficult to know how all of this is going to turn out. We have no precedent for anything like this pandemic. Everyone is looking forward to a bailout.

Most of us as individuals have other challenges we face where we would like to get a bailout. It isn't always financial bailouts we are looking for either. It may be health bailouts or relationship bailouts or spiritual bailouts.

The passage before us today involves two prominent characters who find themselves in desperate straits and who are needing bailouts. We are going to look at how they got into their predicaments and what lessons we can learn about their pursuit of bailouts.

I.

In our study of the life of David we have arrived at 1 Samuel #28. In the first two verses we find that DAVID'S CHOICES LEAD TO A NEED FOR A BAILOUT, which is Roman numeral one in my outline. We have seen that the Lord appointed David through the prophet Samuel to replace King Saul. Saul had played

fast and loose with God's directions and had lost favor with God. David rose to prominence as a result of his defeat of the giant Goliath and his successful military leadership which followed.

Saul begins to suspect that David is his divinely intended replacement, and he becomes jealous. He sets out to kill David. We have seen that David has had two opportunities to take out Saul during the king's pursuit, but he has resisted the temptation. Saul initially acknowledges his wrongdoing, but he keeps returning to his pursuit of David.

David has acquired 600 men plus women and children. He is responsible for their care and protection and direction. This constant life as a fugitive becomes wearing and stressful. We saw last week in #27 that David finally caved in to this pressure and brought his clan over to the Philistines. King Achish of Gath welcomed him into his country and gave him the town of Ziklag in the south of Philistia. David sustained his clan by undertaking raids against nomadic tribes of the desert. He told Achish that he was attacking Judah and its allies. But it was all a lie. Now he is going to encounter a major problem because of his choices.

In v. 1 of 1 Samuel #28 we read, **"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.'"** The Philistines have become aware of Israel's weakened condition. They know that David was a leading Israelite general and has now come over to their side. Perhaps David himself has told Achish about King Saul's erratic behavior. It seems to be a good time to attack Saul and his forces.

So Achish informs David that it is time for he and his 600 soldiers to join up in a battle against his countrymen. David finds himself in sudden need of a bailout. Can he really attack his own people? He is supposed to be king of Israel some day. How is this going to look on his resume--- successful Philistine general who helped kill hundreds of Israelites in battle against King Saul? We usually call such behavior the mark of a traitor.

But if David does not join in this attack, what consequences will he face? Achish did not ask if David would like to help him. This was a command that it was time for this band of Israelites to join the fight. To refuse to help would mean harsh consequences. David could decide to turn against the Philistines in battle, but that was a very risky proposition. The Philistine army was much larger and stronger than the relatively small band that David had, and it was likely that they were going to defeat Saul's army. David and his men also had wives and children in Ziklag. The Philistines would think little about wiping them

out if disloyalty was suddenly discovered in David. David was in big trouble here. He was in desperate need of a bailout.

He got himself into this situation by going over to the Philistines. He didn't consult the priest who was with him in making that decision. He didn't use the Urim and Thummim, the sacred dice that were used to determine direction from the Lord. He apparently didn't ask for godly advice from people around him. He caved in to the pressure for immediate relief from the pain that he was feeling. But this led to lies and coverup, and now it was all coming back to haunt him.

Verse 2: **“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.’”** According to v. 1, Achish literally said, **“Know that you and your men are to go out with me in the army.** Now David uses that same Hebrew verb and says, **“You will know what your servant can do.”**

The meaning of that promise is ambiguous. Achish assumes that it is a promise of loyalty, an assurance that David and his men will fight hard for the Philistines. I have my doubts that David has figured out what he is going to do. The narrator has simply presented the dilemma with which David is faced. It is the result of his own doing. It is the result of a failure to trust God. So now he needs a bailout.

Some of the bailouts that we need in life are due to circumstances beyond our control. Such is the case with the coronavirus pandemic. But some of them are due to our own bad choices. We spend too much. We don't save. We don't take proper care of our health. We mistreat people. We neglect the family. We choose wrong priorities.

II.

David's situation is left hanging as the text moves to consider King Saul's situation. In vv. 3-7 we find that **SAUL'S CHOICES LEAD TO A NEED FOR A BAILOUT.** Consider v. 3: **“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.”**

Samuel is the prophet who anointed Saul to be the first king of Israel. Initially he supported Saul and tried to help him to be successful. He was King Saul's means of hearing from God. But Saul screwed up, and Samuel told Saul that his kingdom would be torn from him. Saul began to see David as a threat to

his position. He was jealous. He set out to kill him. In doing this he was opposing God and His word. Yet Saul knew that Samuel was God's prophet, and now Samuel was dead.

There is one other observation which v. 3 makes, which relevance will soon become evident. We are told that mediums and necromancers had been removed from the land. A medium and necromancer is one who supposedly contacts the dead in behalf of the living. It was, and is, part of the broader field of the occult.

The law that God gave to Moses at Mt. Sinai had something to say about that. In Deuteronomy #18 vv. 10-12 the children of Israel were told, **"There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes, or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord."**

According to Leviticus #20 v. 27, **"A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them."** Apparently King Saul has been faithful to that law in getting rid of these people involved in occultic practices.

Back in our text v. 4 informs us, **"The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa."** The Philistines are seeking to cut off the northern part of Israel from the southern part of Israel. There was a major trade route that ran through the middle of the country in the Jezreel Valley to the Jordan River. The Philistines had superior technology, including chariots, which were useful in flatland like this. They also had iron weapons and instruments whereas the Hebrews were still living in the Bronze Age.

Geographically the Philistines were at Shunem, which was on the north side of this Jezreel Valley, and the Hebrews were about ten miles south along a mountain ridge at Gilboa.

According to v. 5, **"When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly."** There is a pun, or wordplay, going on here in the Hebrew text. "Saw" and "to be afraid" have the same consonants. It is only the vowels which are different.

Saul's reaction to the military situation is fear. He recognizes that the Philistines are the dominant force. At times in the past, Samuel had provided encouragement and instruction. He is gone. David had been a key general for Saul in the past. Now he is gone. He has lost his connection with the Lord, and he knows it.

Verse 6: **“And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets.”** How is a good Hebrew going to hear from the Lord? Joseph and later Daniel had divine dreams. Samuel was the only prophet whom we know about who gave divine direction to Saul. Often it is priests who would provide divine guidance. But we saw earlier that King Saul massacred the village of the chief priests, because he wrongly thought that they were conspiring with David. The only one who survived the murderous rampage went over to join up with David. He brought the Urim and Thummim with him.

The Urim and Thummim were the sacred dice that could be used by the priests to get direction from God for yes and no questions. The Bible scholars think that they were two sided stones with white on one side and black on the other. If both stones came up white, the divine answer was understood to be yes. If both came up black, the answer was understood to be no. If one was white and one was black, it meant that God wasn't talking to them. It is possible that Saul had new Urim and Thummim made. But if that was the case, whoever had the role of chief priest was not getting a yes or no answer from the Lord. God was silent.

According to v. 7, **“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 En-dor.’”** Saul is desperate for some kind of bailout. God is silent. So he will turn to the occult. But this is a direction that has been condemned by God.

In the midst of the coronavirus epidemic we are looking for a bailout from the government. Unlike Saul and David, we are facing a situation that is not directly the result of any bad choices that we have made, unless this is some kind of divine judgment upon the whole world, which is possible. The danger in our country is that we sometimes treat the government like God. We expect government to meet all of our needs. We expect government to take care of our health needs and our financial needs and our needs for protection and security. We expect government to embrace and promote our lifestyle choices. We can make government into an idol, a false god. But idols always disappoint in the end. Only the true God can meet our deepest needs.

III.

In vv. 8-19 we find that SAUL MAKES A WRONG CHOICE FOR A BAILOUT. Verse 8 tells us, **“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.’”** En-dor, where this medium was located, was to the north of Shunem where the Philistines were camped out. So Saul had to go around and behind the Philistine lines. The possibility of encountering Philistines was part of the reason for the disguise. Then also a medium was not going to be inclined to help out the king who was responsible for removing most of the occultists from the land.

Verses 9 & 10: **“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.’”** The woman is understandably suspicious. Saul is bound by the Lord and His law to get rid of all of the mediums in the land. Now he is binding himself to the same God not to harm her. Obviously his moral compass is out of whack.

Look at v. 11: **“Then the woman said, ‘Whom shall I bring up for you?’ He said, ‘Bring up Samuel for me.’”** So now we find out what Saul’s game plan is. Samuel has been this man’s main connection with the God of Israel. He wants a bailout from Samuel.

Verse 12: **“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.’”** There is considerable uncertainty and a variety of interpretations about what is happening here. John Calvin and Martin Luther and Augustine all thought that this was a demonic illusion. In other words, this was some kind of demonic spirit that was not really Samuel. It was pretending to be Samuel. There is, however, no hint in the text that this is anyone but Samuel. The message that this being gives is consistent with what we might expect Samuel to say. There is nothing about it that would direct King Saul to turn away from the true God.

Notice also the reaction of the medium. She is shocked by what is going on. I suspect that this woman, like so many occultists in our day, was usually involved in fakery. After Harry Houdini’s mother died in 1920, he set out to investigate supposed mediums. In 1923 he took time away from his magic show to tour the country and give lectures about the fakery that mediums and supposed diviners used in their seances. He never found anything that he believed involved the supernatural.

This is not to say that demonic forces could never be involved in occult practices. In Deuteronomy #13 vv. 1-3 the Lord declared to the Israelites through Moses, **“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”** The Book of Revelation describes a coming time, often referred to as the Tribulation, in which the Antichrist and his minions will be involved with real demonic forces.

My suspicion is that it was not demonic forces involved here. This was actually Samuel who appeared to this medium. How did she recognize that it was Samuel? In #25 v. 1 we were told that all Israel showed up for his funeral. This guy was famous. This recognition, in addition to the request for Samuel by this man and his two friends, plus the fact that King Saul was known for being especially tall enabled the woman to put things together and figure out that this was indeed King Saul in disguise. The actual success of her seance plus the realization that it was the king standing before her who had ordered the removal of occultists from the land put her in great fear.

Thus we read in v. 13, **“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.’”** In a few places in the Old Testament the generic word for “God” is used to describe important people.

Verse 14: **“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.”** Saul wanted some assurance that she really saw Samuel. Her description of his distinctive robe convinced him that he was the real deal.

Verse 15: **“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.’”** Saul may not see Samuel, but he apparently hears his voice.

Samuel’s comment about being disturbed by Saul’s request may partly be an indication that no representative of God’s people should be resorting to mediums. Perhaps it is an indication that Saul has already been given enough information about God’s will. He has been opposing it for a considerable length of time. It is perhaps like a church member going to a pastor or other church leader and asking

what they should do when they already know that they are engaged in wrong behavior. They just don't want to change. Saul has refused to repent and do what is right.

According to v. 16, **“And Samuel said, ‘Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy?’”** Samuel is not God. He is merely God's spokesman. Why should Saul expect divine help when he has been opposing God's revealed will and has been trying to kill the one who has been appointed to replace him?

Verses 17 & 18: **“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.”** Disobedience is the main issue. Disobedience to the revealed will of God too often puts us in need of a bailout.

This is actually the first time in the Biblical text that Saul is specifically told that David is God's intended replacement for Saul. This is a reassurance to the readers that David is still going to take the throne. It is also an indication that David is somehow going to be bailed out of his situation.

Then in v. 19 Samuel says: **“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.”** This sounds like the real Samuel. He is still making predictions about the future. It is interesting that in his position beyond the grave he has some awareness of what is happening on earth.

Samuel says that Saul and his sons will be with him in the next day. Does that mean that Saul and his boys will simply be dead like him in the next day? Or does it mean that Saul and his sons will be with him in heaven, or in what Jesus in His day described as being in Abraham's bosom? Perhaps Saul was a genuine believer who was under divine discipline. Certainly his son Jonathan has exhibited godly behavior and genuine trust in the true God.

I would like to think that the bad choice of a bailout by Saul is something that Christians would not be tempted to choose today. The Pew Research Center has been known for its detailed analysis of the opinions of Americans, especially in regard to religious issues. It conducted a survey of American adults in December of 2017. It found that 41% of American adults believe in psychics, 33% believe in

reincarnation, and 29% believe in astrology. Even more disturbing was their finding that 33% of Americans who identify themselves as evangelicals believe in psychics, 19% believe in reincarnation, and 18% believe in astrology.

People facing ruin will too often turn to desperate measures. Adolph Hitler and his Nazi friends were known for their dabbling in the occult. In April of 1945 Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels called Hitler's bunker in Berlin with wonderful news. He reported that Franklin Roosevelt was dead. He also declared, **"It is written in the stars. The last half of April will be the turning point for us."** Astrological predictions were that the hardest blows for Germany would come in the first few months of 1945, especially in early April. But the Nazis could look forward to overwhelming victory in the second half of the month. (Cornelius Ryan, *The Last Battle*, p. 318) By the end of April, however, Hitler had committed suicide.

IV.

In vv. 20-25, which is Roman numeral IV in my outline, we learn that SAUL REALIZES THERE IS NO BAILOUT. Verse 20 says, **"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."** Perhaps Saul has simply had a loss of appetite, given the situation that he is facing. Some scholars claim that fasting was the necessary prerequisite of getting an answer from necromancers.

Verses 21 & 22: **"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.'"** The woman takes charge of the situation. It is ironic that she is condemned by virtue of her forbidden occupation. Yet she steps to the fore here to care for the condemned man.

The chapter concludes in vv. 23-25: **"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 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."** This morsel of bread becomes a big meal. Fattened calves were eaten only on special occasions.

In 1 Chronicles #10 v. 13 we are provided with a divine evaluation of Saul's actions. The text reads, **"So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance."** What Saul did here was part of the basis for God's judgment. He looked for a bailout in the wrong place. That choice contributed to his earthly doom.

Saul had a life of unrealized promise. He started out well, but he did not take his relationship with God seriously enough. His life too soon became all about himself and his position. His involvement in this last meal is a reminder of another man who started out well but who also had a life of unrealized promise. Judas Iscariot became one of Jesus' disciples. He experienced the power of God. He was granted power to perform miracles. But at the Last Supper he went out into the darkness and betrayed Jesus.

The most important thing that we can do to make sure that we are on the right side of the God who is there is to trust in His Son. The Bible tells us that Jesus was God who became man. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He rose again from the dead to show that He really was God. His death on our behalf paid the penalty for our sins. If we will put our trust in this Jesus and what He did for us, we will receive the gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

V.A.

Consider lastly HOW WE SHOULD DEAL WITH THE NEED FOR A BAILOUT. First, there is the responsibility to AVOID THE NEED. The bailout in the news this week is financial in nature. We are tempted to regard the federal government as our savior. It is tempting to many to rely upon government to meet our needs. But our federal government makes a bad example. Uncle Sam overspends by trillions of dollars. He spends money that will eventually have to be paid back by our descendants.

Some of us get into financial difficulty by following the federal government's example. We too often go into debt to meet our wants and not our needs. When a crisis like this strikes, we have little saved up upon which we can rely.

The Book of Proverbs has simple advice that is good for all of us. In Proverbs 21 v. 20 we are told, **"Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling, but a foolish man devours it."** In other words, the wise man stores up and saves financial and material resources. The foolish person just spends and spends with little thought given to saving for tough times.

In Proverbs #6 vv. 6-8 we find a similar bit of wisdom: **“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.”** The wise person works hard and plans for the future. He or she saves for the time of need.

There are other kinds of bailouts that we humans need. Some of them are moral and spiritual in nature. As with David and Saul, the violation of God’s rules and principles, His revealed will, usually puts us in need of a bailout. Too often we look for the easy way out. But our sins have a way of catching up to us.

B.

The second aspect of dealing with the need for a bailout involves TURNING TO GOD. The reality is that all of us humans are sinners. We never follow God’s revealed will perfectly. We all mess up. So we all need a spiritual bailout. That involves the issue of the Gospel, which I have just described. Even as Christians, we follow God’s directions imperfectly. So we have an ongoing need for His forgiveness. Fortunately we have a perfect Heavenly Father who loves us and is always there to forgive us and offer us grace and mercy.

Then also we encounter some situations that are beyond our control and that are not the result of any misdeeds on our part. Such is the case with the coronavirus pandemic in which we all find ourselves. This situation and the difficulties which David faced as a fugitive are partly designed by the Lord to grow our faith, to mature us as Christians. Our responsibility is to make sure that we are keeping the God of the Bible as our ultimate object of faith. May the Lord help us to do that.