

I Samuel 15 - Handout

When we met last, we studied chapter 14 where we saw two powerful lessons:

- Faith in God brings victory
- Foolish words bring trouble

We saw how Jonathan moved forward with faith in God while Saul sat under a tree. Jonathan brought victory to the Israelites through his faith and trust in God's promises. Saul on the other hand made a couple of foolish oaths that led to the people standing up and saving Jonathan from death.

Today we are going to study chapter 15 which is the last of three chapters devoted to the reign of King Saul, all of which focus on his military efforts. In these chapters we see the answer to the question: Why did God reject Saul as king of Israel? In chapter 13, we saw how Saul lost the opportunity to have a lasting royal dynasty. In chapter 14, he lost the opportunity to route the Philistines as well as the respect of his own people. Now we are going to see him lose his kingdom.

The rest of I Samuel will take us through the gradual decline of Saul, and the rise of another to take his place.

Verse 1

Samuel tells Saul that God had sent him to anoint Saul king over Israel and its people.

Therefore, what? _____

Verses 2-3

Who does the Lord say He will punish? _____

What are we told he did? _____

The Amalekites were Israel's enemies to the south. They were the first people to oppose the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt (Exodus 17:8-16). They are portrayed as terrorists who preyed on weaker opponents and showed no regard for God. God had promised to extract vengeance against them on some future day when Israel was established in the Promised Land.

Exodus 17:14

"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly wipe out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."

Deuteronomy 25:19

"So it shall come about, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies in the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, that you shall wipe out the mention of the name Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget."

What is Saul told to do in verse 3? _____

Destroy everything he has:

- Do not spare him (Amalek)
- Put to death men, women, child and infant
- Put to death ox, sheep, camel and donkey

What are your thoughts on God's instruction to Saul here?

The Amalekites were a cunning and cruel race of people. Their religious and moral practices were incredibly vile. They were ruthless beyond measure. They would come up at the rear of camps and kill the weakest women, children and elderly. They would kill for the simple pleasure of taking their goods rather than for protection or future security. They were known as the most cruel and cowardice band to have existed at that time. They killed whenever, however and whoever they came across, but they particularly hated and sought after the Israelites, and had attacked them many times over a three year period. History also tells us that the Amalekites required any and all living offspring to avenge any nation or group that attacked them.

It's important to note that the Amalekites had many chances to repent and become better people. Look at how much time would have passed between when God told Moses He would wipe the Amalekites out and when He actually does it. It seems that the only way to end this vicious cycle that the Amalekites had going against the Israelites was to wipe them all out.

This battle evidently happened about 25 years after Saul began reigning, which was 23 years after God rejected Saul's dynasty, following Saul's disobedience at Gilgal. Thus Saul apparently served as king for about 23 years between God's rejection of his dynasty (ch. 13) and God's rejection of him personally (ch. 15).

Verses 4-5

We are told Saul counted the people.

How many foot soldiers did he have? _____

How many men of Judah? _____

What are we told Saul did to the city of Amalek? _____

A wadi is a valley, ravine, or channel that is dry except in the rainy season.

Verse 6

What does Saul do? _____

Why does he do this? _____

Verses 7-8

What does Saul do? _____

Who does he capture alive? _____

What does Saul do to everyone else? _____

Verse 9

What are we told Saul and the people do to Agag? _____

Saul's motivation for sparing Agag has been disputed. It seems to be a vain attempt to display a royal slave which was a common practice in the ancient Near East.

What else did he spare?

- Best sheep
- Oxen
- More valuable animals
- Lambs
- Everything that was good

Notice what it says after that - "they were unwilling to destroy them completely"

But what did they do to everything that was despicable and weak? _____

Verses 10-11

What does the Lord say to Samuel? _____

Why?

- _____
- _____

Notice the reason for God's regret. It isn't because God felt like He made a mistake in calling Saul, but because of Saul's own actions.

What is Samuel's reaction to this? _____

Verse 12

What report does Samuel hear the following morning?

The village of Carmel was about eight miles south and a little east of Hebron. The monument Saul set up honored himself, not God who gave him the victory.

This monument seems to support the thought that Saul saved Agag as a trophy of his triumph.

Verses 13-15

What does Saul tell Samuel he has done? _____

How does Samuel respond? _____

Saul responds that he took them from the Amalekites and that the people spared the best to do what with them?

What would make Saul think that offering a sacrifice from that which he was supposed to destroy would be a good idea?

Do you think he actually kept the animals for sacrifice to the Lord or is he just thinking quickly on his feet when confronted by Samuel?

Verses 16-19

What does Samuel say he wants to inform Saul about? _____

How is Saul described in verse 17? _____

Insignificant in his own eyes; yet he became the head of the tribes of Israel. Remember back when Saul first encounters Samuel while looking for his donkeys? Remember how genuinely humble he was and how he talked so insignificantly about himself?

For what had the Lord done? _____

What does Samuel remind Saul about in verse 18? _____

What does Samuel ask Saul in verse 19? _____

Saul did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Verses 20-21

What is Saul's response to Samuel? _____

First of all, he completely contradicts himself when he says he completely destroyed the Amalekites, because he just admitted keeping Agag alive.

Secondly, who does Saul say took some of the spoils? _____

Back in verse 9 though it says Saul and the people spared Agag and the best animals. Saul is the king. The people aren't going to do anything he doesn't allow.

Why does Saul say they kept the choicest things? _____

"Your God" is an interesting choice of words here. There almost seems to be a disconnect there between Saul and God.

Notice how we again see this partial obedience by Saul and him failing to take responsibility for his sin. It was the people who took the spoils. It was for a worthy purpose that he kept the animals alive - so he could sacrifice them to the Lord.

Look at verse 11 again and what the Lord says - "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned his back from following Me and *has not carried out My commands.*"

Look again at what Samuel says in verse 19 - "Why then did you *not obey the voice of the Lord?*"

There is no partial credit given here. Partial obedience is still disobedience. It's really just disobedience made to look acceptable.

Just a side note - it becomes obvious that Saul doesn't destroy all the Amalekites because we are going to see David have to deal with them in chapter 30 and again in II Samuel.

And do you remember Haman? He's the one who tries to wipe out all the Jewish people in the days of Esther. He was a descendant of Agag (Esther 3:1), the king that Saul spares. And now for some major irony - In II Samuel, we find out that an Amalekite claims to deliver the final thrust of the sword that ends Saul's life.

Verses 22-23

Samuel now goes on to enlighten Saul.

What does he say the Lord takes more delight in? _____

Sacrifice is unacceptable if it becomes simply a deception for real submission to God's will.

What does Samuel say about rebellion? _____

Divination is a search for knowledge and counsel that ignores the word and counsel of God. Departure from God's will (rebellion) presumes to control the future course of events just as divination does.

What about insubordination? _____

Failure to carry out God's will (insubordination) puts the insubordinate person in God's place and therefore is a form of idolatry. We cannot serve God through methods of our own choosing.

Listen to verse 22 again:

"Does the Lord have as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice, and to pay attention is better than the fat of rams."

Samuel is again very clear with Saul - there is no sacrifice that he can offer God that outweighs or substitutes his obedience to Him.

Psalm 51: 16-17

"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, O God, will not despise."

These words were spoken by David after Nathan confronts him after he commits adultery with Bathsheba.

The best sacrifice we can bring to God is a repentant heart.

In Dr. Constable's commentary he says,

"What is the difference between obedience and sacrifice? Sacrifice is one aspect of obedience, but obedience involves more than just sacrifice. We should never think that we can compensate for our lack of obedience to some of God's commands by making other sacrifices for Him."

Why would we think that offering God something He doesn't need could in any way make up for withholding from Him that which He wants - our obedience?

Since Saul has rejected the Lord, what does Samuel say the Lord has done?

Saul has not only lost his dynasty (chp 13), but now he has lost his right to serve as king.

Verses 24-25

What does Saul do now that he hears this irrefutable statement of rejection against himself? _____

Is this true repentance? He confesses, but doesn't seem to repent. That seems to be the crux of his problem. We can admit we did something wrong, but that doesn't mean we are sorry for it.

Why does Saul say he did what he did in verse 24? _____

One of the commentaries referred to this as a self-serving confession. He seems to be saying what he needs to say to try to get back into Samuel's good graces.

What does he ask Samuel to do? _____

Verses 26-29

Will Samuel go with him? _____

Why not? _____

We are told that Saul reaches out and grabs Samuel's robe and it tears.

What does Samuel say? _____

Who will it be given to? _____

What are we told about the Glory of Israel? _____

Verses 30-31

What does Saul ask of Samuel again? _____

So Samuel followed him and Saul worshiped the Lord.

After everything Saul has done, he wants Samuel to honor him. He wants the people to see him in a good light. He still hasn't really repented.

There are different thoughts as to why Samuel relented and went with Saul:

- Maybe because Saul was still the king.
- Maybe he went out of concern for Saul or out of concern for the nation if it became known that the Lord rejected him.
- Maybe Saul's confession of sin moved Samuel to be gracious and go with him.

Verse 32

What does Samuel do? _____

How are we told Agag comes to him? _____

Verses 33-35

What does Samuel do? _____

We are told Samuel went to Ramah and Saul went to his home at Gibeah. We see how the relationship between the two is broken. This ending of their relationship seems to be signifying the end of Saul's reign as king. Technically, he will continue as Israel's king for many years, but his legitimacy is now gone. He is king in name only because he has disqualified himself as God's representative.

What are we told in verse 35? _____

This chapter ends on such a sad note. Samuel mourns for Saul and the Lord regrets making Saul king over Israel. Nobody wanted Saul's story to go like this.

Now the question becomes, what can we learn from this?

Disobedience was a huge theme in this chapter.

- It puts the fear of man in the place of the fear of God.
- It elevates pleasure in things above pleasure in God.
- It seeks a name for itself instead of a name for God.
- It consults the wisdom of self instead of being satisfied with the will of God.
- And it sets more value on the dictates of self than on the dictates of God and thus attempts to dethrone God by giving allegiance to the idol of the human will.