

1 Samuel 15
September 11, 2022

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What are factors that drive a person to disobey God? What comes to mind? [Let people engage]

Transition: You have identified key drivers behind why any of us choose to disobey God. We are getting ready to see an example of Saul, who disobeys God. And it comes with severe consequences. Let's read the story, and then we'll process it.

BOOK:

The Lord Rejects Saul as King

15 Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. ² This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. ³ Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.' "

⁴ So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim—200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 men from Judah. ⁵ Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. ⁶ Then he said to the Kenites, "Go away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites.

⁷ Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, to the east of Egypt. ⁸ He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. ⁹ But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves (or grown bulls) and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

¹⁰ Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹ "I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the LORD all that night.

¹² Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal."

¹³ When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions."

¹⁴ But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"

¹⁵ Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."

¹⁶ "Stop!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night."

"Tell me," Saul replied.

¹⁷ Samuel said, “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸ And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.’ ¹⁹ Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?”

²⁰ “But I did obey the LORD,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. ²¹ The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.”

²² But Samuel replied:

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD?
To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king.”

²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned. I violated the LORD’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them. ²⁵ Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD.”

²⁶ But Samuel said to him, “I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!”

²⁷ As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. ²⁹ He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.”

³⁰ Saul replied, “I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God.” ³¹ So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

³² Then Samuel said, “Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites.”

Agag came to him confidently, (or him trembling) thinking, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.”

³³ But Samuel said,

“As your sword has made women childless,
so will your mother be childless among women.”

And Samuel put Agag to death before the LORD at Gilgal.

³⁴ Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. ³⁵ Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

True confession involves more than saying "I have sinned"; it means repentance and true sorrow for sin.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Sa 15). Victor Books.

God would give Saul one more chance to prove himself, this time by utterly destroying Israel's old enemies, the Amalekites (Deut. 25:17–19; Ex. 17:16). But Saul did not obey the Lord: he kept the best of the spoils for himself and failed to kill Agag, the king. God told Samuel what Saul had done, and the burdened prophet prayed all night. When Samuel approached Saul, the king lied to him and told him he had obeyed God's Word. Just about that time Saul's sins found him out, for the animals began to make noise. Once more, Saul resorted to excuses: "They" (the people) saved the animals, but "we" (himself and the leaders) have utterly destroyed the rest. Then Samuel delivered God's message to the rejected king: Saul had lost his early humility (9:21) and became proud and disobedient; he had rebelled against the Word of the Lord and had tried to make up for his disobedience by sacrifices (vv. 21–23). Saul had substituted saying for doing (15:13); excuses for confessions (15:15 and 21); and sacrifice for obedience (v. 22). He was too quick to criticize and blame others; he was unwilling to face and judge his own sins.

When Samuel was about to leave Saul, the king confessed his sins, but his confession did not impress the prophet (vv. 24–27). True confession involves more than saying "I have sinned"; it means repentance and true sorrow for sin. As Samuel turned away, Saul held to his robe and ripped it, and Samuel took this as a prophecy that the kingdom would be torn from Saul and

given to another (David). Verse 30 reveals that Saul was more concerned about what the people thought than what God thought; he wanted a good reputation, but he did not want true character. Samuel worshiped with Saul, and then killed Agag as the Lord had commanded, but this was the last time Samuel walked with Saul. Saul had lost his best friend; he had lost the Lord's blessing; he had lost the kingdom. From now on, he would be on a dark, winding road that would end with him becoming a castaway and being slain by one of the very Amalekites he had refused to destroy (2 Sam. 1:13).

Merrill, E. H. (1985). 1 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, p. 447) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

15:1–8. Long before the time of Saul, in the days of the wilderness wandering, Israel had been savagely attacked from the rear by **the Amalekites**, a deed the Lord had promised to avenge someday (Ex. 17:8–16). The time had now come, so **Samuel** commanded Saul to **destroy** the Amalekites **totally**, that is, to “place them under the ban (*hērem*) of holy war” (1 Sam. 15:3; cf. vv. 8–9, 15, 18, 20–21; Deut. 20:16–18; see comments on Josh. 6:21). However, **Saul** was to spare **the Kenites** since they had **shown kindness** to Israel in the wilderness wandering (1 Sam. 15:6; cf. Ex. 18:9–10 [Jethro was a Kenite, Jud. 1:16]). **Saul** proceeded to do the bidding of Samuel (1 Sam. 15:7–8) but not entirely.

15:9–35. When **Saul** saw the fatness of the Amalekite **sheep and cattle** and when he considered the enhancement of his own glory and prestige in bringing back **Agag, king of Amalek**, as prisoner, he could not resist returning them as public exhibits of his leadership (v. 9). That this was Saul's intent is clear from verse 12, which speaks of Saul's erecting **a monument to his own honor** at **Carmel** (in Judah, not the Carmel on the upper Mediterranean coast). When accosted by **Samuel** (v. 14), **Saul** tried to justify his disobedience by claiming that the animals were brought as **sacrifice to the LORD** (vv. 13, 15), and were brought because of the insistence of **the soldiers** (vv. 20–21). But **Samuel** responded with a statement of principle that is timeless in its application: **To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams** (v. 22). In addition to disobeying, Saul was guilty of **rebellion ... arrogance**, and rejecting God's **word** (v. 23).

The result for **Saul** was the Lord's rejection of him **as king** (v. 26), symbolized by Saul's tearing of Samuel's **robe** (vv. 27–28). This repudiation of Saul and selection of a replacement (David) did not mean that God had misled Samuel or even changed **His mind** (v. 29). Rather, God had from the beginning chosen another, one who would be “after His own heart” (cf. 13:14; 16:1). Though still recognized by the people as their king for about 15 more years, **Saul** was deposed by **the LORD** right then (cf. 16:14), and **Samuel** executed **Agag** (15:32–33). The finality of it all was not missed by **Samuel** for from that day Samuel never visited the **king** again (v. 35). The estrangement between **Samuel** and **Saul** represents that which now existed in permanent form between the Lord Himself and the disobedient king. Though God had permitted Saul to reign in response to the demand of the people, that very concession now **grieved** the heart of **the LORD** (v. 35).

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 114). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Rejection of Saul (15:1–35). Saul’s pride and desire for economic gain fueled his continued disobedience. Saul went so far as to build a monument for himself. The Lord “grieved” that he had made Saul king over Israel. The Lord instructed Saul by the prophet Samuel to put to death the Amalekites and all their possessions because of their past sins (see the law of holy war, Deut. 20:16–18). Saul, however, permitted Agag, the Amalekite king, and the best of the spoil to live. The Lord rejected Saul because of his sin, and Samuel wept for him.

When Samuel confronted Saul with his sins, Saul tried to justify his actions by explaining that he wanted to make a sacrifice of the spoil to the Lord. Saul had failed to learn that God does not accept ritual without obedience. Samuel refused to support Saul any longer because God had torn away his kingdom. Samuel himself executed Agag in accordance with the Lord’s command. Samuel, as the prophet of God, never advised Saul again (see 19:24; 28:11).

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). 1 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary* (p. 171). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The passage—This chapter contains a second version of the reason for Saul’s rejection as king (13:1–14). Again, he is condemned for failing to carry out the Lord’s commandments. In this instance, he failed to annihilate the Amalekites as he had been instructed to do (vv. 2–3).

The commandment to destroy the Amalekites and all their possessions was in keeping with a common Near Eastern custom called the *herem*. This practice was an outgrowth of the old holy wars in which all the spoils of battle were devoted to the national god. All living creatures were to be killed, all combustibles were to be burned, and all precious metals were to be placed in the god’s treasury. Since all profit motives were removed, only the most dedicated soldiers would go to battle.

Saul’s preservation of the Amalekite king and the best of their cattle was not the result of humanitarian nor religious motives (see v. 15). Rather, Saul was prepared to modify social custom or religious conviction to accommodate public opinion (vv. 21, 24). A man of such character was hardly qualified to serve as Israel’s king.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.