

Bible Study January 17, 2023

THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR SAUL

1 SAMUEL 15 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

The LORD Rejects Saul

1 And Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. 2 Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt.

- **Romans 12:19 (ESV)** *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."*

Exodus 17:13 – 16 (ESV) *13 And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. 14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." 15 And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner (Jehovah Nissi), 16 saying, "A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."*

Deuteronomy 25:17-19 (ESV) *17 "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, 18 how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God. 19 Therefore when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.*

3 Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

- Since God is God of the whole world, sometimes God uses nations to execute justice. God is using the nation of Israel to exact Justice on the Amalekites.

- God is a patient and merciful God. God gives us time to change.

2 Peter 3:9-10 (ESV) *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*

- Why did God command such utter destruction? The Amalekites were a band of guerrilla terrorists. They lived by attacking other nations and carrying off their wealth and their families. They had been the first to attack the Israelites as they had entered the Promised Land (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-18), and they continued to raid Israelite camps at every opportunity. God knew that the Israelites could never live peacefully in the Promised Land as long as the

Amalekites existed. He also knew that their corrupt, idolatrous religious practices threatened Israel's relationship with him. The only way to protect the Israelites' bodies and souls was to utterly destroy the people of this warlike nation and all their possessions, including their idols.

4 So Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand men on foot, and ten thousand men of Judah. 5 And Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. 6 Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart; go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. 7 And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. 8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

Saul and his men did not destroy all the plunder from the battle as God had commanded them to do (15:3). When we gloss over sin in order to protect what we have or for material gain, we aren't being shrewd; we are disobeying God. Selective obedience is just another form of disobedience.

10 The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 11 "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night.

When God said he was sorry he had made Saul king, was he saying he had made a mistake? God's comment was an expression of sorrow, not an admission of error (see also Genesis 6:5-7). An omniscient God cannot make a mistake (1 Samuel 15:29); therefore, God did not change his mind. He did, however, change his way of relating to Saul when Saul changed. Saul's heart no longer belonged to God but to his own interests.

12 And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal."

Saul built a monument in honor of himself. What a contrast to Moses and Joshua, who gave all the credit to God. We can be thankful for what we accomplish, but we must also recognize God's role in helping us.

- **Proverbs 16:18** *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

13 And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." 14 And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?"

Saul thought he had won a great victory over the Amalekites, but God saw it as a great failure because Saul had disobeyed him and then lied to Samuel about the results of the battle. Saul may have thought his lie wouldn't be detected or that what he did was not wrong, but Saul was deceiving himself.

Dishonest people soon begin to believe the lies they construct around themselves. Then they lose the ability to tell the difference between truth and lies. By believing your own lies, you deceive yourself, you will alienate yourself from God, and you will lose credibility in all your relationships.

15 Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.”

Saul disobeyed God and kept part of the spoils, including the choicest livestock. When Samuel arrived, he could see and hear the evidence of Saul’s wrong actions. When confronted, Saul claimed that the spoils they kept were going to be sacrificed to God. Obeying God is always better than disobeying him, even when you do a supposedly noble deed.

16 Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night.” And he said to him, “Speak.”

17 And Samuel said, “Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. 18 And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, ‘Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ 19 Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?” 20 And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. 21 But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.” 22 And Samuel said,

***“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.***

***23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has also rejected you from being king.”***

This is the first of numerous places in the Bible where the theme “obedience is better than sacrifice” is stated (Psalms 40:6-8; 51:16-17; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 12:7; Mark 12:33; Hebrews 10:8-9). Was Samuel saying that sacrifice is unimportant? No, he was urging Saul to look at his reasons for making the sacrifice rather than at the sacrifice itself. A sacrifice was a ritual transaction between a person and God that physically demonstrated a relationship between them. But if the person’s heart was not truly repentant or if he or she did not truly love God, the sacrifice was a hollow ritual. Religious ceremonies or rituals are empty unless they are performed with an attitude of love and obedience. “Being religious” (going to church, serving on a committee, giving to charity) is not enough if we do not act out of devotion and obedience to God.

Rebellion and stubbornness are serious sins. They involve far more than being independent and strong-willed. Scripture equates them with witchcraft and idolatry, sins worthy of death (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:6; Deuteronomy 13:12-15; 18:10-12; Micah 5:10-14).

Saul became both rebellious and stubborn, so it is little wonder that God finally rejected him and took away his kingdom. Rebellion against God is perhaps the most serious sin of all, because as long as a person rebels, he or she closes the door to forgiveness and restoration with God.

24 Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. 25 Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD." 26 And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel."

Saul's excuses had come to an end, and the time of reckoning had come. God wasn't rejecting Saul as a person—the king could still have sought forgiveness and restored his relationship with God. But it was too late to get his kingdom back. If you do not act responsibly with what God has entrusted to you, eventually you will run out of chances to keep it. All of us must one day give an account for our actions (Romans 14:12; Revelation 22:12). At the same time, when we follow God, we may lose our reputations, possessions, or careers, but those are nothing compared to the eternal life we gain.

27 As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. 28 And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. 29 And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret." 30 Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God."

Saul was more concerned about what others would think of him than he was about the status of his relationship with God (15:24). He begged Samuel to go with him to worship as a public demonstration that Samuel still supported him. If Samuel had refused, the people probably would have lost all confidence in Saul.

31 So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the LORD.

32 Then Samuel said, "Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." 33 And Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

34 Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. 35 And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.