

## 1 Samuel 15

**Why did Samuel confront Saul (v. 1)?** He had a message from the Lord to deliver to Saul. **What was the message (v. 2)?** God is going to punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when the Jews were on their way from captivity in Egypt to the Promised Land (Exodus 17:8-16).

**What were Saul's specific instructions (v. 3)?** Saul's mission was to completely annihilate the Amalekite people and their animals. This was a test of obedience for Saul. They were to be blotted out as punishment for their sin.

**As Saul gathered his army and positioned them to attack the Amalekites, who was Saul to spare (v. 6)?** The Kenites. The Amalekites (v. 6) were descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:12), but the Kenites traced their ancestry from Midian, one of Abraham's sons by Keturah (Genesis 25:2). The Kenites had been friendly to Israel (Exodus 18:9, 10, 19; Numbers 10:29-32), whereas the Amalekites had not.<sup>1</sup>

**Saul launched his attack (vv. 7-9). How would you describe the outcome of the battle?** When Saul saw the fatness of the Amalekite sheep and cattle and when he considered the potential enhancement of his own glory and prestige by bringing back Agag, king of Amalek, as prisoner, he could not resist returning them as public exhibits of his leadership.<sup>2</sup> His obedience was *selective and partial*. He thoroughly defeated the Amalekites and put everything to the sword *except* the king and the best of the spoil.<sup>3</sup> Saul failed the test.

**How did the Lord react to Saul's "victory" (vv. 10-11a)?** God conveyed a message to Samuel.....He regretted that He had made Saul king because of Saul's actions. God's heart was broken over Saul's disobedience.

**How did Samuel respond to God's words (v. 11b)?** Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the Lord all night. **What does that say about Samuel?** Samuel shows that he has God's heart. It hurt God to reject Saul, and it hurt God's prophet to see him rejected. When the things that grieve Him grieve us, and the things that please God please us, we become men/women after God's own heart.

**How can God say, "I am grieved that I have made Saul king....." (v. 11)?** Does this mean that God did not know what would happen? Or that God wanted things to happen a certain way, but was powerless to make them come to pass? Not at all. This is the use of an *anthropomorphism*, when God explains Himself to man in human terms (God's eyes, hands, etc.), so man can have *some* understanding of God's heart. He is an emotional God.

From the beginning, God knew Saul's heart, and Saul's ways, and Saul's destiny. He knew that He had already *sought for Himself a man after His own heart* (1 Samuel 13:14). It doesn't mean that God suddenly realized He had made a mistake in choosing Saul.

**What did Samuel hear about the next morning when he went looking for Saul (v. 12)?** He heard about the monument Saul had set up at the village of Carmel honoring himself, not God, who gave him the victory.

**When Samuel reached Saul at Gilgal, how did Saul respond (v. 13)?** Saul was pleased with his obedient performance. Consistent with his view of his own behavior, Saul claimed to have obeyed God. Nevertheless he had only been partially obedient.

**When Samuel confronted Saul with his disobedience (vv. 14-21), how did Saul "explain" his sin to Samuel.** Saul's excuses to justify his disobedience are revealing. First, he blamed the people, not himself (*The soldiers* have brought them . . . *they* spared the best of the sheep and the oxen). Second, he included himself in the obedience (the rest *we* have utterly destroyed). Third, he justified what he has kept because of its fine quality (the *best* of the sheep and the oxen). Fourth, he claimed to have done it for a spiritual reason (to *sacrifice* to the Lord your God).

Saul was constantly redefining the Lord's commands, doing what seemed best to him rather than what God said was best.<sup>4</sup>

**Though his disobedience was the most apparent sin, what was the root of Saul's disobedience (v. 17)?**

Pride. Samuel referred to this when he remembered when things were different with Saul: *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.* Now, it could no longer be said of Saul, you are "small in your own eyes." He was big in his own eyes, and that made the Lord small in his eyes!

**What was Samuel's reply to Saul's excuse about using the finest of the animals for sacrificial offerings (vv. 22-23)?** *"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. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry."* In other words, sacrifice is only acceptable if it is accompanied by a surrendered heart to God, as demonstrated by simple obedience and devotion to the Lord (Psalm 15; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8).

**What judgment did Samuel pronounce on the disobedient king (v. 23)?** *"Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king."*

**What do verses 22-23 tell us about God?** Religion without obedience is empty before God. The best sacrificial offering we can bring to God is a repentant heart (Psalm 51:16-17), *"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart."*

**How did Saul respond to Samuel's pronouncement of judgment (v. 24)?** *"I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions."* So far, so good. Saul's statement begins like a genuine confession, reflecting a genuinely repentant heart. But that changes as he continues. *I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.* In saying this, Saul refuses to own up to his sin; instead he blames the people who "made him" do it. Another excuse.

In Samuel's presence, Saul may have been bowing down in repentance, but inside, he was standing up. It was that unbending resistance to God's complete sovereignty that made Saul unusable as Israel's king.<sup>5</sup>

**But even in his excuse, what was Saul's real problem (v. 30; v. 21 also)?** He had a poor relationship with God. Notice how he speaks of God to Samuel: *"so that I may worship the Lord your God."* The Lord was not Saul's God. Saul was Saul's God. The Lord was the God of Samuel, not Saul. In his pride, Saul had removed the Lord God from the throne of his heart. *"I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel;"* Saul's desperate plea shows the depths of his pride. He was far more concerned with his image than with his soul.

**When Samuel summoned King Agag, what was Agag's attitude (v. 32)?** Confident - *"Surely the bitterness of death is past."* The Living Bible expresses the thought well: *Agag arrived all full of smiles, for he thought "surely the worst is over and I have been spared."* Imagine Agag's shock when he was condemned and executed (v. 33).

**Samuel and Saul then split for the rest of Samuel's life. How did Samuel regard the split (v. 35)?** Samuel didn't say, *"Saul got what he deserved. Good riddance."* Rather, he mourned for Saul.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Samuel 2024 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 112.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 447.

<sup>3</sup> William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 307.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Samuel 2024 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 118.