

Fact Sheet for "Saul" 1 Samuel 15:1-35

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This is the first of 12 sermons from the kings of Israel and Judah. I have found Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles to be a rich source of both encouragement and warning. Today we will begin with a chapter in the life of King Saul.

Read 1 Samuel 15:1-3. Amalek had been a thorn in Israel's side (Exodus 17:8-16; Numbers 24:20; Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

Read 1 Samuel 15:4-6. Who were the Kenites? See Exodus 18:5-9 and Numbers 10:29-32 ("Jethro" is also called "Reul".)

ESV 7 And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt.

...from the southern tip of the Red Sea north to the Mediterranean Sea

ESV 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.

Oops! This was not what God had told Saul. *From a human perspective* we may be inclined to excuse this understandable breach. Saul did destroy the people. After all it wasn't that much of a departure from Saul's marching orders was it? It was! It was a direct violation of God's specific command. Agag should have been killed along with everyone else, and all the animals should have been killed as well. There had been a similar situation earlier with Jericho, Ai, and Achan. Whether out of pride, or greed, or both... Saul did not follow God's specific command.

ESV 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.

God regretted He had made Saul king. This does not mean that God didn't foresee Saul's actions, and it doesn't mean God is fickle, having second thoughts about His decision to make Saul king. It does mean that God is deeply moved emotionally at the responses of His people. Here it is an expression of His sorrow.

ESV 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." 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?" 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."

Look closely at Saul's words in verse 15. He denies culpability, unwittingly betrays his distance from God, and praises himself. Samuel would have none of it.

ESV 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."

Wow! Take the first part of this verse to heart! Samuel ends with a rejection of Saul that cut him to the quick and would define the rest of his life. God had rejected him from being king! This only confirmed what Samuel had said earlier to Saul when previously Saul didn't wait for Samuel to offer a burnt offering but offered it himself. Saul had been afraid because his army was deserting. Then Samuel arrived almost immediately (see 1 Samuel 13:13-14). Now God's words to Saul were stronger. Not only has God sought out a man after His own heart to be king, but now God has rejected Saul from being king. Only now did Saul repent. Too little too late. The mold was set.

ESV²⁴ **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."**

Samuel is not swayed. Saul panics. And God's plans are set in motion.

Read 1 Samuel 15:26-28. Don't think that Saul didn't hear everything God was saying! Not only had God now rejected him, but also the next king was already in the wings.

Chapter 16 – Samuel anoints David as the next king

Chapter 17 – David kills Goliath and gains a reputation that exceeds Saul's

Chapter 18 – David marries Saul's daughter even though Saul tried to trick David into being killed

Chapter 19 – Saul tries to kill David

Saul was on the lookout for this next king and would try his best to stop him. But he was fighting against God and wouldn't win!

²⁹ **And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret."**

The word for "regret" here is the same word as in verse 11, but here it is used differently. This verse is not about God having second thoughts about His decisions, or His sorrow over His decisions. It was a statement that God's decision to give the kingdom to David was irrevocable. Saul reaches now for a few crumbs of respect, and again betrays his distance to God.

Read 1 Samuel 15:30-35. Again, this is the same word for "regret" and is used the same way as in verse 11 speaking of God's sorrow.

We don't have specific marching orders from God as Saul did that day, but we do have specific commands from God found in the Bible. There are specific commands for righteousness, morality, love, forgiveness, etc. that are found throughout Scripture. When we intentionally and only partially follow these commands, then justify our foibles as being understandable and not so bad, how do you think God looks at our shortcomings? He is a forgiving God, but is He pleased with us? To obey is better than asking forgiveness after the fact. To listen to God and seek to follow His commands is better than deliberately not following His commands *then* turning around to sing His praises. To worship Him in form and ritual but not in heart brings God sorrow. There is a warning that should not be missed in 1 Samuel 15. Don't wait until the die is irrevocably cast before you get your act in order. I would refer you to verses like... Deuteronomy 6:5; Proverbs 3:5-6; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 1:14-16; and of course...John 3:16.