

**1Samuel 15:1** ¶ Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD.

**1Samuel 15:2** Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember *that* which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid *wait* for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt.

**1Samuel 15:3** Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

One day Samuel came to talk to Saul. He reiterated how he had anointed Saul as king over the Hebrews, God's people, as the LORD had commanded him. In other words, God had chosen Saul to serve Him as king over God's people; His allegiance was to be to God as his king as he served the people as their king. Then he told Saul that the LORD had something He wanted Saul to do.

After the people of Israel left Egypt, Amalek ambushed them on their way to Canaan. (See Exodus chapter 17.) At that time, the LORD made the following declaration:

*Exodus 17:14 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."*

The LORD had decided that it was now time to judge the Amalekites for their treatment of Israel. He commanded Saul to attack Amalek and utterly, completely destroy all that they had; they were not to spare one living thing—including men, women, children, babies and all livestock.

The NIV Commentary adds this information: "The geographical clues scattered throughout the chapter make it clear that the Amalekites referred to here are the traditional southern marauders rather than a smaller Amalekite enclave occupying an area in the hills of western Samaria."

This is one of those areas in which I have to admit that God's ways are far beyond my understanding. It would seem that this generation of Amalekites were to suffer the judgment deserved by their ancestors, though I know that they were just as sinful and deserving of judgment. God was not judging them unjustly. Plus, it's always hard to think about children and babies being killed in such a situation.

Matt Slick offers a thoughtful explanation at [www.carm.org](http://www.carm.org). "When God authorizes the nation of Israel to wipe out a people, it is a lawful execution due to their rebellion and sin against God. Furthermore, such an extermination can be seen to be merciful by delivering the young into the hands of the Lord and possibly saving their souls by not giving them time to become "utterly sinful. "Additionally, further generations that would have arisen from the perverse culture are likewise prevented from coming into existence and spreading their sin."

It is also important to note that though the LORD said that He “remembered” what Amalek did to Israel, we know that He never really forgot. He is just making a statement that His judgment now was connected to their actions then.

**1Samuel 15:4** And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah.

**1Samuel 15:5** And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley.

**1Samuel 15:6** And Saul said unto the Kenites, Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye shewed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.

Saul gathered his people together in Telaim to determine the size of his military force and was able to identify 200,000 footmen plus 10,000 men of Judah. Once again the men of Judah are noted separately as they were in chapter 11, and I don't know why.

Telaim = a city on or near the southern border of Judah near Edom.

Saul took his men to one of the Amalekite cities to set an ambush in the valley. Evidently, that valley was where some of the Kenites, descendants/relatives of Moses' father-in-law, were dwelling. He told them to separate themselves from the Amalekites or they could become casualties of the attack. He noted that he was allowing them to get to safety because of the kindness their ancestors had shown the people of Israel when they left Egypt. So the Kenites left.

**1Samuel 15:7** And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah *until* thou comest to Shur, that *is* over against Egypt.

**1Samuel 15:8** And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

**1Samuel 15:9** But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all *that was* good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing *that was* vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.

Saul and his armies attacked and slaughtered (from the Hebrew) the Amalekites from Havilah westward toward Egypt to Shur. Sin #1, Saul took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive even though they killed the rest of the people. Sin #2, He allowed his men to keep the best of the livestock instead of destroying every living thing as God had commanded. Disregarding the will of God seems to have become the norm for Saul, not the exception.

**1Samuel 15:10** ¶ Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying,

**1Samuel 15:11** It repenteth me that I have set up Saul *to be* king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night.

The LORD spoke to Samuel and told him that He “repented” of choosing Saul as

king because he had turned back from following Him in obedience. This really “grieved” Samuel, and he talked to the LORD all night.

“repented” – The first thing the Hebrew states is “to sigh.” It reminds me of the response of a father who is discouraged and frustrated at the actions of his child. I think the LORD uses this type of language to help us understand His heart. We know that God is omniscient and that He knew what Saul would do before appointing him king. I think He chose Saul in part as an example to His people and to teach us from that example by showing the contrast between a king that acted in the flesh and in pride and a king that had a heart to serve the LORD in faith and obedience.

“grieved” – The Hebrew for this word states, “to grow warm, to blaze up...be angry...be displeased. In other words, Samuel was angry with Saul. He talked to the LORD all night in anguish (from the Hebrew) of heart because of Saul’s actions.

**1Samuel 15:12 And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal.**

**1Samuel 15:13 And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD.**

**1Samuel 15:14 And Samuel said, What *meaneth* then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?**

**1Samuel 15:15 And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.**

Samuel got up early the next morning to meet Saul and was told that Saul had set up a monument to his victory at Carmel and then headed to Gilgal. Though the KJV wording isn’t as clear, the other translations make it clear that Saul established the monument to his own honor—not to the LORD’s. He is taking the credit for the victory rather than giving the credit to the LORD. The humble man that had been anointed king is no more.

When Samuel got to Saul, he was greeted with a blessing and a declaration that Saul had done what the LORD had commanded. Samuel immediately confronted Saul and asked him why he could hear the noise of so much livestock. Saul confidently declared that “they” had spared the best of the sheep and oxen to sacrifice to the LORD “thy God,” but assured him that they had destroyed the rest. Note that Saul declared the people responsible for saving the livestock—a classic case of blame shifting. He obviously thought that such a righteous reason for allowing this would absolve him of any wrongdoing.

I think Bob Deffinbaugh made a good observation: “I think we may safely assume that Saul’s sparing of Agag, along with his sparing of the best of the flocks and herds of the Amalekites, is really self-serving. Saul certainly gains a measure of popularity for allowing the Israelites to have a good sacrificial meal with the

Amalekite animals. After all, this not only means they can feast on the meat; it also means they do not have to sacrifice their own animals. Sparing the life of Agag probably provides Saul with a trophy of his prowess and power. When Agag sits at Saul's table, he is much like a stuffed moose head, mounted and prominently displayed in a hunter's den."

I think it is significant to note that Saul again refers to the LORD as Samuel's God—not our God or my God.

**1Samuel 15:16** Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on.

**1Samuel 15:17** And Samuel said, When thou *wast* little in thine own sight, *wast* thou not *made* the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?

**1Samuel 15:18** And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.

**1Samuel 15:19** Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?

Samuel doesn't want to hear any more and tells Saul to listen to what the LORD had told him the night before. He reminded Saul that when he was a humble man, little in his own eyes, the LORD chose him as leader and king over all the tribes of Israel. The LORD gave him a command to go and totally and completely destroy the sinners, the Amalekites (and everything belonging to them). Samuel now questions Saul point blank. Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you take spoils of victory and do evil in the sight of the LORD?

Samuel is trying to get Saul to recognize his sinful pride and admit that he was now a big man in his own eyes—the total opposite of the man God had chosen to be king.

**1Samuel 15:20** And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

**1Samuel 15:21** But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal.

Saul refused to recognize his sin and argued that he had obeyed the LORD. He had done what the LORD sent him to do and brought back Agag the king of Amalek and utterly destroyed the rest. It was the fighting men that took the spoil of the livestock that should have been destroyed, but they only kept the best to sacrifice to the LORD "thy" God in Gilgal.

In one breath Saul says that he has obeyed God and destroyed all the Amalekites, even though he has spared the life of Agag, their king. It's a statement of self-contradiction, and he doesn't even seem to realize it. He again insists that the troops were guilty of taking some spoil of the livestock, but only because they

wanted to use it to sacrifice to the LORD “thy” God. That reference begins to carry more and more significance. Whether he realizes it or not, he is declaring that the LORD is not “his” God.

**1Samuel 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath 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 hearken than the fat of rams.***

**1Samuel 15:23 For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king.**

Saul asks a question to make Saul think. Does the LORD take more delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices or in our obedience to Him? He then answers the question for Saul. “To obey is better than sacrifice.” He would rather you listen to Him and act in obedience given the choice of obedience or sacrifice. Samuel declares that rebellion is just as sinful as witchcraft and stubbornness is like the sin of idolatry. Once again Samuel affirms that the LORD has rejected Saul as king.

There are important truths in Samuel’s words to Saul that have direct application to those of us who claim to be followers of Jesus today. We may not participate in animal sacrifices, but we have many other ways of offering sacrifices to the LORD today—e.g., by use of our time, gifts and resources in ministry. The LORD is honored by the sacrifices we make in His name when done in accordance with His will. He is most honored and most pleased, however, when we choose to obey Him. Just like Saul, we like to excuse our actions based on righteous intent. The thing is that God can see right through to our heart. He knows our true motivations. He knows whether we are truly acting to honor Him or for selfish reasons. I know that I have had to stop and question myself at times. It’s so easy to fall into a trap of serving or doing to impress others. Those who work in full-time ministry, especially in positions of leadership, really have to guard against falling into this type of sin. It’s so easy to get your priorities all messed up when you are in full-time ministry—especially as pertains to your family, your number one priority before the LORD.

Rebellion is just another word for intentional disobedience to God’s will no matter the reason. I thought the Hebrew for “stubbornness” was interesting—“to peck at, stun or dull.” Stubbornness before the LORD pecks at one’s character and dulls one’s spiritual sensitivity, which, in turn, allows pride to grow.

**1Samuel 15:24 ¶ And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.**

**1Samuel 15:25 Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD.**

**1Samuel 15:26 And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.**

Saul finally makes an admission of sin to a degree. He admits that he has sinned but attributes his action to fear of the people. How hypocritical is that! Didn't we just read that his men refused to eat a bite of food because they feared his judgment?

Saul asks for Samuel to forgive his sin and go with him to worship the LORD. Again, Saul doesn't get it. It should be the LORD's forgiveness he seeks—not Samuel's. He hopes to get Samuel to consider the matter closed and turn his focus to worship. Samuel, however, refused to go back with Saul because since he had rejected the word of the LORD, the LORD had rejected him as king.

**1Samuel 15:27 And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent.**

**1Samuel 15:28 And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, *that is better than thou.***

**1Samuel 15:29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.**

Samuel turned to leave, but Saul caught hold of his robe and caused it to rip. Samuel pointed out that just as Saul had ripped his robe, the LORD had ripped the kingdom from Saul that day and given it to a neighbor of his who was more deserving.

Samuel then declared in no uncertain terms the truth of his statement. The "Strength of Israel" is a reference to the LORD, and the LORD does not lie and will not change His mind. He is not a man like Saul that is subject to changing what He purposes to do. Though He may sometimes respond to prayer that seems to represent a change of mind, as He did for Hezekiah (2Kings 20), He never allows it to affect the accomplishment of His primary purposes. That is because He knew everything—every person who would choose to follow Him or reject Him and every prayer that would be made—and has taken all that knowledge into account in His overall plan for mankind. How great is our God!

*Romans 11:33 "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"*

Though Samuel's words brought no comfort to Saul, they can certainly bring comfort to the child of God. God does not lie and His purposes are sure. We can count on Him to do what He says. We can confidently claim the promises of His word.

**1Samuel 15:30 Then he said, I have sinned: *yet* honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God.**

**1Samuel 15:31 So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the LORD.**

Finally, Saul admits that he has sinned with no qualifying statements. I think even that statement was made so that Samuel would not shame him with public rejection in front of the people in light of his next statement. He asks Samuel to show him respect as king before the people and go back with him to worship the LORD “thy” God. And Samuel did.

**1Samuel 15:32 ¶ Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past.**

**1Samuel 15:33 And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.**

After a time of worship, Samuel called for Saul to have Agag the king of Amalek brought to him. Agag came “delicately,” without fear because he thought his life was safe in Saul’s protection. He was greatly mistaken.

Samuel declared to Agag that just as surely as he had made women childless, so too would his mother be childless. Samuel then cut Agag into pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

**1Samuel 15:34 Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul.**

**1Samuel 15:35 And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the LORD repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.**

Samuel left and went home to Ramah, and Saul went home to Gibeah. Samuel did not come to see Saul ever again. Still, Samuel mourned for Saul just as the LORD sighed in disappointment with Saul as king.