

“Saul defies the Lord”

Saul was chosen to be king. Yet, despite this honour beyond words, with its attendant responsibilities, Saul very quickly left God’s path by making decisions against those already given by God. There are many today who do this, thinking it makes no real difference. There are pastors who follow their own hearts, and Christians who follow their own interpretation of scripture. They think they can get away with it. But, they can’t. Like Saul, but maybe not in such spectacular fashion (as is seen much later in his life), they will be shown by God that they were sinful people. When God tells us what we should do, we must do it, regardless of our own plans and ideas. Simple as that. And this is exactly what the first verse of this chapter says...

Verses 1-3

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.

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.

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.”

Samuel had a word from God for Saul. He said, the Lord sent me to anoint you king. So, listen to what your Lord tells you. Samuel then gave Saul the message from God – God said He remembered when Amalek (‘dweller in a valley’; Esau’s grandson who began a tribe in southern Canaan) ambushed Israel (the nation) as they travelled from Egypt (Exodus 17: 8-13) Deuteronomy 25: 17-19.

At the time he was ‘duke Amalek’; ‘duke’ or *‘alluwph*, in this context, meant ‘chief’, for he had many people at his disposal, who wished to prevent their distant cousins from entering the land.

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He ranged his army against Israel at Rephidim ('resting places'; between Sinai and Egypt), as the tired people tried to rest. Moses sent Joshua out to fight Amalek. From that time God cursed Amalek, and an altar was built at Jehovahnissi to remind the people that God would war against him and his descendants. This would have been known to Saul, yet he went on to disobey the Lord! Sadly, though Saul began as a good man, his life began to disintegrate when he tried to run his life on his own human terms. This is bad enough for believers, but far worse in the case of a leader of God's people.

Today, we have the full scriptures and know what God says, yet many disobey by 'doing their own thing'. They have no qualm about giving their own personal interpretation of what God says. This is called disobedience... and Saul died because of it.

God's instructions to Saul were specific – go and fight the Amalekites; destroy all the people and everything they have, from homes to fields and animals. Even the children had to die. There were to be no exceptions, for God had declared it. Whether or not we have a personal wish to accept it or not, we must obey God's commands. He has no emotional tie to His creation, only a pure and unadulterated view of His own plan and will. What we think of His plan is irrelevant and does not come into any part of His will. We are His creatures and we must do what He says, disregarding our own ideas and emotions.

Verses 4-9

1.

“And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah.

2.

And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley.

3.

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.

4.

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And Saul smote the Amalekites from Haviah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt.

5.

And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

6.

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 can best be described as a good man in the human sense, just like so many good people of our own era. But, perceived human goodness is not of any consequence to God. What He looks for is spiritual obedience to Himself. Human goodness is, to Him, but filthy rags. We may not, then, have sympathy for Saul, though what he did is nothing different from what many modern Christians would have done in the name of their own versions of ‘religion’.

210,000 fighting men gathered at Telaim (‘lambs’). The mention of ‘footmen’ or, men on foot, might suggest that the 10,000 from Judah were charioteers or had horses/camels/asses, but we cannot say this for sure. He then marched on a city of the Amalekites, sited in a wadi or river-bed valley, and waited.

Saul sent word to a smaller tribe living nearby, the Kenites (‘smiths’; same tribe as the father-in-law of Moses, in a place between southern ‘Palestine’ and the Sinai mountains), urging them to leave the area to avoid getting caught up in the fighting. He was giving them notice that because they were kind to the Israelites in their travels from Egypt, they were being shown mercy. But, if they stayed, they would share the same fate. Wisely, they all left the area.

Saul then began the carnage, killing Amalekites from Havilah (‘circle’; north-west Yemen) to Shur (‘wall’; on the eastern border of Egypt). The Israelites passed through the area when they fled Egypt). Remember – this was commanded by God, Whose concern is about obedience,

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NOT age, gender or nation.

During the fighting they captured the Amalekite king, Agag (probably means 'violent'), but killed every other Amalekite they could find. Besides keeping the king alive, they also gathered together all the best sheep and other animals. They destroyed everything they thought was useless or of poor quality, but kept what was good and of higher value. And it was this act by Saul that sealed his fate for years to come, and which finally led to his death.

This is a lesson to us all – we either follow God, or we do not. There is no middle ground, for God does not ask for our cooperation in being faithful, only for our total obedience... we are faithful to God, not to our own idea of Him, or to our meagre attempts at living out the Christian life in our own strength. The point of departure from what God says specifically, is the very point that we sin. For Saul that departure was to spell his own death-knell. I have no doubt whatever that even today God sends death to some who disobey. This is not just something said to 'save by preaching hell-fire' – it is simple fact observable in scripture and in daily life.

Verses 10-15

1.

"Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying,

2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him. Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have performed the commandment of the Lord.

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5.

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

6.

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.”

God spoke to Samuel, using words none of us would wish to hear – “It repenteth me...” that Saul was set up as king. God said in earlier years that He repented of creating man and animals (Genesis 6:7). Though used only twice in the Bible, the two instances should bring fear to any man who reads them.

Some try to make this word mean that God had made a mistake. This is simply not possible. ‘Repenteth’ can mean to be sorry (implying a mistaken motive), but it can also mean to be moved to pity or compassion. It can also mean to be caused to grieve, or even to comfort oneself. In this text it can only mean that God was grieved by the refusal of Saul to obey such a direct and simple command. Being king, this rejection by Saul was intolerable to God. This statement by God hit Samuel hard and he cried out to God throughout the night.

Next morning Samuel got up and started out to meet Saul. The meeting would not be a pleasant one, but it had to occur. Many times as a pastor I have to meet with this or that person with news of their unbiblical stance or action, or to speak against someone for their sinfulness. I never relish such times and would humanly avoid them if I could, but I know that the office I hold precludes me from such cowardice! Our allegiance is to God not to men...even if someone then dislikes us for saying something. I can assure you this is not easy.

Samuel was told Saul went to Carmel to camp, and then went on to Gilgal. And that was where Samuel found him. When they met, Saul blessed Samuel and said he had done all that God had commanded of him! This often happens amongst Christians, and so many claim to be faithful to God or to His word, whilst they disobey openly or secretly. This can only be the result

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of sin and an underlying refusal to act Biblically.

In retort, Samuel demanded to know: 'Then why do I hear sheep bleating, if you have done what God commanded of you? How can I hear oxen lowing?' Blatantly, Saul said they had been taken from the Amalekites. As if to justify his sin, Saul said they had only kept back the best of the stock. The rest were destroyed. Note that he used a seemingly 'good' reason for his sin... he kept back the best stock for sacrifice to God. Many times I have heard similar claims by those who sin or are heretics! They think that by giving something to God that is not of God in the first place, they thereby absolve themselves of guilt! Putting a veneer of 'good' on a sin does nothing to make it right.

Verses 16-21

1.

"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.

2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

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?

5.

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.

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6.

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.”

Samuel was heart-broken, and Saul’s inability to understand what he had done must have torn Samuel apart. It is sometimes my sadness to listen to a Christian accept all that God has said, and then to openly deny God’s word or command by doing what is opposite to it. They neither see, nor wish to know, they have done wrong. They ignore God and do whatever is good in their own sight. Thus, they bring down God’s wrath upon their heads, or, they lose their way from God’s path of righteousness and effectively bring wrongness into their lives. Some are led to earthly destruction by such a choice. Why do it? The cause is sin.

So, Samuel had to sit down and explain to Saul what he had done. This can be very sad, and even tiresome, especially if what God says is explicit and clear to understand. How often does a pastor have to watch Christians deliberately avoid or ignore God’s direct teaching to us? I have lost count! When they do such things it is because they claim to follow God with their mouths and heads, but finally reject it all in their hearts, as they determine to do what they see fit instead. Such is VERY common.

Samuel reminded Saul that when he was nothing in people’s eyes, a local man of the soil, God made him head of the entire nation. He reminded Saul that God had sent him to obliterate the Amalekites – every last one of them. So, why did Saul keep alive what God commanded to die? Why keep back some of the spoils of war and incur God’s wrath?

Even though Samuel spoke plainly, Saul still could not see his own sin! He even claimed to have *obeyed* God totally, even as the oxen and the sheep strolled around them! How could he say he had killed everybody and everything, when he then admitted he now had king Agag held as a prisoner, alive? This is blindness indeed.

Then, Saul made the mistake of blaming his people for his own sin. He told Samuel it was they who kept back the spoils, albeit for a ‘good’ reason. How fatal is this flaw in men, to blame others for one’s own wrongs. It was Saul who had responsibility to carry out God’s plan and will. So, if he failed, it was his failure alone. We cannot blame others if we sin, even if they bring

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much pressure upon us to do so. I have personally heard many such excuses – and, unhappily, I have even done so myself.

Verses 22-26

1.

“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.

2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord.

5.

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.”

Samuel, with great heaviness of heart, responded: ‘Do you think God prefers sacrificial animals to obedience? To obey God is better than sacrifice. To listen to God is far better’. He then told Saul that not listening is rebellion, and rebellion is the same as the detestable pagan practice of witchcraft, when false prophets delude and mislead the people. It is the same as stubbornness – something I witness in Christians many times today – which is insolence and arrogance before God. It is like idolatry, in which people turn to other gods. That is how God sees our foolish refusal to obey His commands! It is not to be viewed lightly or covered over with fine words. It is sin, and unrepented sin must be punished... and even then our repentance might

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come too late, as happened here, for Samuel uttered words of doom – because Saul rejected God’s command, God has rejected Saul as king.

We are not told how Saul responded, but we may assume he must have panicked. He said he had sinned and ignored God’s command and Samuel’s instructions, and excused it by saying he feared the people and so allowed them to keep back animals and Agag. Note how he repented (?) not just of going against God, but also for not obeying Samuel. Today, how many people obey the voice of their pastor? Bear in mind that when a pastor speaks from God, he must be obeyed. Not for his own sake, but because what he says is from God and is thus a command. We know it is a command if what he says is from scripture and is applied to the correct situation.

Thinking he had thus provided an excuse, Saul then pleaded with Samuel to pardon his sin and to join him in praise of the Lord. But, Samuel, in true pastoral manner, said he could not join him anymore, for God now disassociated from him for his rejection of His word. Oh how we need such forthrightness and honour amongst pastors and Bible teachers today! Few are upright enough to stand against what God has rejected. Saul was now rejected by God, so that was the end of the matter. Samuel could not join in praise with Saul, even though he apparently repented (?). To do so, would have been a very human failing on his part, and it would have meant joining with a man who God had cast aside. Any Christian who does that is asking to be judged by God! How many Christians uphold those who God has rejected?

Verses 27-35

1.

“And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent.

2.

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.

3.

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

4.

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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.

5.

So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the Lord.

6.

Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately.

7.

And Agag said, surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women.

8.

And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.

9.

Then Samuel went to Ramah; and Saul went up to his house to Gibeah of Saul.

10.

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 went to move away from Saul and in desperation the king flung himself at Samuel's feet, grabbing hold of the bottom of his cloak, tearing it. Samuel saw this as prophetic and said that just as Saul had torn apart his cloak, so God had torn the kingdom of Israel from Saul, to give it to an Israelite who was far better. He added that the One Who led Israel was eminent ('Strength') and could not deal falsely. Nor could He change His mind, for He was not a mere man. When God judges and pronounces, what He says is law and cannot be altered, not even

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by Himself. Once God has judged us and cast us aside, we have no hope.

Saul again admitted (what else could he do when he was caught out roundly?) he had sinned, and begged Samuel to honour him before the elders and the people. He wanted Samuel to give a show of God's acceptance, to save face, so he could return to the true path. But, this was not to be, and was not truly in his heart. And besides, God had already spoken the terrible words of denunciation that could never be reversed. Even in this situation we see the grand teaching of predestination and God's supremacy.

As Samuel turned away from Saul, Saul entered into a scene of immense pathos, as he tried in vain to praise God in worship. It was pathetic because God had already rejected him... any act of worship after that was futile. Today we see thousands who pretend to worship, after their movements have been rejected by God and His word. They believe their false activities are a substitute for truth and so they ignore God even more.

Watching this foolish act, Samuel called upon Saul to bring him king Agag, who, when faced with Samuel was delighted, for he thought the 'bitterness of death' was now well past. Agag had a good feeling, that all was well and he was to be freed. But, Samuel, in the manner of a great prophet, would not be deviated from his calling. He told Agag that just as his armies killed and maimed others, making mothers childless, so his own mother would now be childless.

In an act that some think was barbaric, Samuel then killed Agag with a sword, hacking him to bits. A true prophet and man of God has no option but to obey to the letter, even if his own heart has yet to be convinced. Samuel was already convinced and he knew the penalty for not obeying. If Samuel had not completed the task Saul had rejected, then he, too, would have been guilty before God, just as Eli was judged guilty for allowing his sons to rule Israel with deception and evil.

Samuel then returned to Ramah and Saul returned to his own home at Gibeah. The parting was final and there was no return to better days. On many occasions, when we reject God's plan, and sometimes even if we truly repent later, the repercussions of our sins can stay with us to the end of our lives. "*Samuel came no more to see Saul*". Even so, Samuel grieved after Saul. Whilst God also grieved, it was not like human grief. It was a pure grief that said God must judge and punish blatant disobedience. Though a good man, Samuel's grief was very human, and not acceptable to God, as we shall see in the next chapter.

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It is an axiom of our faith that we must never accept or grieve over what God has called evil. If God rejects something or someone, we have no right or calling to accept them, or to treat them kindly, or to in any way show affiliation. Note how today, foolish Christians help those whom God hates and casts away – homosexuals and pagans of every hue, including Muslims, and others who are heretics within the churches.

Do you see this as a harsh judgement? Then take it up with the Lord, whose judgement it is. Too many Christians think they can usurp God by making their own decisions as to what is right and wrong. Too many show support for those God has clearly rejected. Too many think that we may not judge in this lifetime, though God says we must, in His word. It is about time that we all knuckled down to obedience and stopped fooling about with silly attempts to second-guess God!

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