

## Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 15:1-35

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### 1 Samuel 15:1-35

#### Verses 1-3

***<sup>1</sup> Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. <sup>2</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. <sup>3</sup> Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”***

- Samuel, who had anointed Saul king in obedience to God’s instructions, came to King Saul, and ordered him to “listen” to a message from YHWH. The word translated “listen” means to listen with the intention of obeying.
- The message was that God was going to punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel as Israel left Egypt (see Exodus 17:8-14, especially verse 14). God had promised many years before that he would “totally destroy the Amalekites.” This was the moment when God’s judgment fell on that nation for attacking Israel.
- While the judgment may seem harsh to us, God places Amalek under a ban in accordance with Deuteronomy 25:17-19. All the Amalekites and all their possessions were to be destroyed. Their offense in attacking Israel was so great that the punishment was the annihilation of the nation. God blesses those who bless Israel and punishes those who oppose her. It is His right as sovereign God of the universe to judge the nations. The text does not question God’s right to impose judgment. The command is clear. All the Amalekites and all their possessions must be destroyed.

#### Verses 4-6

***<sup>4</sup> So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim—two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand from Judah. <sup>5</sup> Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. <sup>6</sup> Then he said to the Kenites, “Go***

***away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites.***

- Respecting the sovereignty of God, Saul prepared for battle with the Amalekites. He summoned an army of 210,000 soldiers. He moved the army into position. But before the battle began, he told the Kenites to move away from the Amalekites. The Kenites were a nation of nomads who had been traditionally supportive of Israel. At this moment, they were living among the Amalekites. They were not under God’s judgment so they were given opportunity to leave Amalek, which they did.

### **Verses 7-9**

***<sup>7</sup> Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. <sup>8</sup> He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. <sup>9</sup> But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs— everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.***

- The command of God was clear (see verse 3). But Israel did not keep it! They spared Agag, Amalek’s king, and all the possessions of the Amalekites that seemed “good” to them. Israel only partially obeyed God because obeying God fully did not appear to them to be in their best interest.

### **Verses 10-11**

***<sup>10</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: <sup>11</sup> “I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the LORD all that night.***

- Nothing is hidden from God. God knew that Saul had not obeyed Him completely and revealed this to Samuel. God told Samuel he regretted making Saul king. God’s regret is not in the sense that he is sorry about what he did. His regret is that the only way that Israel would learn the lesson of obedience was in this way. If only Israel had been willing to submit to the will of God. Their failure to bend to the will of the Lord had brought them to this moment and God regretted their attitude as He does ours when we disobey Him.

- God's reaction to Israel's disobedience was regret, but Samuel's was anger. He was angry at Israel for not listening to God. He prayed about this all night. He was very angry.

#### Verses 12-14

***<sup>12</sup> Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal."***

***<sup>13</sup> When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions."***

***<sup>14</sup> But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"***

- The next morning, Samuel went to confront Saul. But he discovered that Saul had gone to Carmel, where he set up a monument to celebrate his victory over the Amalekites, and then went on to Gilgal.
- When Samuel caught up to Saul, Saul's greeting suggested that he was content with himself, the victory over the Amalekites, and did not know he had offended God in anyway. Saul believed that all was well. He declared that he had obeyed God completely.
- Sarcastically, Samuel asked Saul about the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle. He asked Saul to explain the increase in the number of Israel's sheep and cattle if Israel had completely obeyed God.

#### Verse 15

***<sup>15</sup> Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."***

- Saul's response to Samuel's question about sheep and cows is flippant! He blamed the soldiers who were under his command. He said that the command of God seemed ridiculous to them. Why destroy the good stuff? So they brought the good stuff home. But, they intended to use the sheep and the goats to make offering to God.

#### Verses 16-21

***<sup>16</sup> "Enough!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night."***

***"Tell me," Saul replied.***

**<sup>17</sup> Samuel said, "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. <sup>18</sup> And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.' <sup>19</sup> Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?"**

**<sup>20</sup> "But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. <sup>21</sup> The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal."**

- Samuel lost control of his anger at Saul's flippant response. He exploded. He asked Saul if he wanted to hear what YHWH had to say about the matter. And Saul said, "Sure, tell me."
- Samuel told Saul that he did not obey the command of God in this matter. He pointed to the plunder of the battle as proof that the Amalekites were not "completely" destroyed.
- Saul responded to Samuel in anger and disbelief. He contended that he did obey God completely, and then points to evidence that he did not obey completely as proof that he did. He only spared Agag. The soldiers brought back the plunder, not he. All they brought back was to be used to honor God. He was blind to his sin.

## **Verses 22-26**

**<sup>22</sup> But Samuel replied:**

***"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD?"***

***To obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.***

**<sup>23</sup> For rebellion is like the sin of divination,  
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.**

***Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
he has rejected you as king."***

**<sup>24</sup> Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. <sup>25</sup> Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD."**

**<sup>26</sup> But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!"**

- In response to Saul, Samuel replied with a compilation of Scripture verses. His point was that God requires obedience above religious acts. He pointed out that disobeying YHWH's specific command is as serious a sin as is divination and idolatry. He told Saul that the cost of disobeying God and thinking himself above God was the loss of the Kingdom. God was rejecting the dynastic rights of Saul. The kingdom of Israel would not pass to his sons to rule.
- The threat of the loss of his dynastic rights caused Saul to repent of his sin. He again blamed his soldiers for the offense. While he confessed his sin, it is not the offense of disobedience to which he confessed. He still did not get it. He begged Samuel to stand with him before Israel and to join him in worshipping YHWH.
- Samuel refused the king's request. He would not stand with Saul, nor would he worship God with him. He declared that Saul had been rejected by God.

#### **Verses 27-31**

***<sup>27</sup> As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. <sup>28</sup> Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. <sup>29</sup> He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind."***

***<sup>30</sup> Saul replied, "I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God." <sup>31</sup> So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.***

- As Samuel turned to depart, Saul grabbed hold of Samuel's robe and tore it. Samuel pronounced that there was nothing Saul could do to reverse God's judgment. He had lost the kingdom because he did not fully obey the Lord. This judgment could not be changed. The kingdom would pass to someone other than Saul's descendants.
- Saul, then, acknowledged his sin. Again, Saul pleaded with Samuel to stand beside him in worship. Because Saul's repentance was genuine this time and for the sake of the nation, Samuel agreed to go back with Saul and stand with him in worship.

#### **Verses 32-35**

***<sup>32</sup> Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites."***

***Agag came to him in chains. And he thought, "Surely the bitterness of death is past."***

***<sup>33</sup> But Samuel said,***

***"As your sword has made women childless,  
so will your mother be childless among women."***

***And Samuel put Agag to death before the LORD at Gilgal.***

***<sup>34</sup> Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. <sup>35</sup> Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.***

- At Samuel's direction Agag was executed.
- Samuel then went to his home in Ramah and Saul went to his home in Gibeah. The two never met again. However, Samuel continued to pray for Saul as Israel's king.
- God continued to regret that Israel's rejection of Him as their king had brought them into this situation. He knew this would happen. But it grieved Him that Israel had to suffer the consequences of her own choices.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon based on 1 Samuel 15:1-35. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)