



Finer Grounds Bible Study

1 Samuel

Lesson 8: 1 Samuel 15

Even though Saul was denied the promise of a dynasty in 1 Samuel 13, God still had plans for Saul. After battling the nations surrounding Israel, God commanded Saul to carry out divine judgement on a people that had been terrible to the Israelites since the time of Moses: the Amalekites.

Before we dive into 1 Samuel 15, let's learn a little about the Amalekites. The Amalekites were a nomadic people who occupied much of the northern Sinai Peninsula. They were descendants of Esau and so were distantly related to the Israelites.

Read Exodus 17:8-16

Read Deuteronomy 25:17-19

What did the Amalekites do to Israel?

What part of the Israelite travelling formation did the Amalekites attack (Deuteronomy 25:18)?

What command did Moses give concerning the Amalekites?

God planned to wipe out the Amalekites as punishment for attacking Israel during the exodus. However, they were not the only nation to attack Israel. Other nations, like Moab and Ammon, also battled the Israelites during the exodus. God's judgement against Amalek was more severe because of how the Amalekites attacked. They were the only nation that attacked the most vulnerable of the Israelites; the elderly, the little ones, the weak, and the sickly who had to walk at the back of the group. They cowardly killed the easiest targets.

After the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, the Amalekites continued to harass God's people.

Read Judges 3:12-14 and Judges 6:1-6

What other nations were allied with the Amalekites?

Even though Moab and Midian were subdued by God's appointed judges, the Amalekites were able to live on. However, God did not forget their atrocities. He decided to use Saul's trained army to destroy this enemy that had plagued the Israelites for centuries.

Read 1 Samuel 15:1-3



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Describe God's command concerning the Amalekites.

God planned to use Saul to deliver judgement against the Amalekites. God specified that nothing was to be left; not a man, woman or child. No spoil, like sheep or cattle, was to be taken by the Israelites. This was not to be an attack for monetary gain; this battle was fought to carry out the Lord's judgment.

This punishment does not sit well with our modern sensibilities and it may seem uncharacteristic of the merciful God we know. We must remember that while God is love, He is also righteous and just. The Amalekites had done much to deserve this punishment. Unfortunately, so have we.

Read Romans 3:23-26

What is the punishment for any sin?

How can we escape this punishment?

We all are deserving of death for the sins we have committed. Thanks be to God that He provided Jesus as propitiation for our sins.

Read 1 Samuel 15:4-9

As you read through this passage, think of it in comparison to Saul's battles with the Philistines

in 1 Samuel 13-14. Saul was able to muster a huge force of 210,000 men. He was prepared for this battle, and most likely outnumbered the Amalekite forces. He was no longer trying to fight with a meager 600 troops. Saul made every necessary preparation to fight the Amalekites, including warning the innocent Kenites.

Who were the Kenites and with what tribe were they associated? (Read Judges 1:16)

The Kenites had followed the Israelites out of the wilderness and into Canaan, eventually settling with the tribe of Judah. Judah was the southern most tribe of Israel and therefore, bordered Amalekite territory. The Kenites may have lived near or even among the Amalekites, and so, were asked to leave as they were allies of Israel.

What was the outcome of the battle?

Saul devastated the Amalekites throughout their territory, pushing them back all the way to the Egyptian border near Shur. Havilah to Shur was the fullest extent of Amalekite territory, so they should have been utterly destroyed.

What and who did Saul allow to remain after the battle had been won?



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Read 1 Samuel 15:10-15

God told Samuel that He “regretted” making Saul king. The word “regret” may seem problematic; if God is omnipotent, how could He regret His decision? Another, perhaps better, translation for this word is “grieved.” While God knew what the eventual outcome would be, He was grieved that Saul had chosen to act in opposition to His command. Even though God knows what our actions will be, whether good or bad, we still are responsible for the choices that we make.

Samuel’s reaction to Saul’s disobedience is understandable.

What did Samuel do when he heard about Saul’s sin?

Samuel’s initial reaction was anger over Saul’s blatant disobedience. He then grieved over the sin, crying all night. Finally, he went to confront the sinner, Saul, to make sure he understood his error.

How should we respond when a brother or sister has sinned? (Read Matthew 18:15-20 and Galatians 6:1-5).

Consider Saul’s description of his actions. Did he think he had sinned?

Saul was oblivious to his disobedience. He celebrated the victory by building a monument in honor of the event. He greeted Samuel by saying that he had fulfilled the command of the Lord. When Samuel questioned the presence of the animals, notice the wording of Saul’s response. Saul distanced himself from the choice to preserve the animals by stating that the people chose to keep them and Agag alive. Saul even tried to validate the decision by saying that the animals they saved were to be a sacrifice to God. While these explanations may have helped him to feel better about his decisions, they did not excuse his defiance. There are no extenuating circumstances that justify disobedience.

Read 1 Samuel 15:16-21

What was Samuel’s response to Saul blaming the people for keeping the animals alive?

Does Saul back down from his excuses for his sin?

Samuel can see right through Saul’s flimsy excuses. He reminded Saul that he was the king, appointed by God himself. If Saul had really wanted to follow the Lord’s command, he could have ordered the people to destroy the animals, or, he could have destroyed them himself. There was no excuse for his decision not to comply with God’s directive. Whether he kept the animals alive because of his own greed, or to please the people, we can’t be sure. We do know that he



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had it in his power to do what was right, but he rebelled anyway.

Why do you think Saul wanted to keep the animals alive?

Read 1 Samuel 15:22-23.

Write 1 Samuel 15:22 in your own words.

Samuel countered Saul’s excuses with an important truth; God desires our obedience above all else. While we need to offer praise and sacrifice to God, these acts don’t mean anything if they are not offered out of an obedient heart.

Read Romans 12:1. What should we sacrifice to God?

What are some ways that we “worship” or “offer sacrifices” without being obedient?

It is so easy today to fall into the trap of doing good without truly being obedient to all that God calls us to do. There are those who attend church each Sunday but have failed to repent and submit themselves to God. There are those who attempt to do good deeds as a means of making themselves “good enough” for heaven but have

not abandoned their sinful lifestyle. Obedience to God is how we show that we love Him (John 14:15).

In verse 23, Samuel compares rebellion, acting in defiance to God’s command, to divination or idolatry which at that time were viewed as the “worst” possible sins. We need to remember that all sin separates us from God, no matter how much we would like to rate it on a scale from “really bad” to “not so bad.” Think of a time when you told a “little white” lie, or perhaps gossiped about someone. In our society, these sins would seem insignificant in comparison to someone who stole, cheated on their spouse, or even murdered. But God sees all disobedience equally, as all sin causes us to fall short of his glory (Romans 3:23).

Because of Saul’s rejection of God’s command, God rejected him from being king. This is different than the punishment given in 13:13, where Saul is denied dynastic succession of his sons to the kingship (Tsumura 402). Here, Saul himself was rejected as ruler in the eyes of God.

Read 1 Samuel 15:24-31

Saul offered what seemed to be the “right” words for repentance by admitting to wrongdoing, but even this apology is self-serving. Saul wanted the punishment to go away and hoped that repenting would do that for him. He also repented because he wanted to be honored by the elders of the people. It was seeking their approval that tempted him to sin in the first place. Yet, he still couldn’t let go of looking good in the eyes of men. He repented so that he could receive this earthly glory, not so he could be forgiven by God.



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How often do we allow ourselves to sin in order to gain the approval of a person or group of people? It is so easy to deny Christ when faced with winning or losing public opinion.

What are some examples from the Bible of people who sinned or denied their faith in order to gain favor with people?

What are some ways that we deny or even disobey Christ to improve our stature in the eyes of society?

Read 1 Samuel 15:32-35

In the end, it would be Samuel who finished the work that God had appointed to Saul. Samuel killed Agag, the king of Amalek, just as God had commanded. Saul, if he was truly repentant, should have fixed the error himself.

Samuel, seeing how far Saul had fallen, was never able to bring himself to see Saul again. He mourned for him, almost like a father would mourn for a lost son. The hopes he had for Saul's success as a leader were gone.

We can learn a lot from both Saul and Samuel in this passage. From Saul, we learn that we can't justify disobedience, no matter our intentions. We cannot pass the blame for our sin on to someone else, even if they sinned as well. God gave us our own wills and control over our own actions and thoughts. No matter who influenced

us, taught us incorrectly, or didn't stop us, we are responsible for what we do.

We also can't justify sin committed for "good" motives. God does not accept empty sacrifice, acts of worship, or good works done because of sin. God knows our hearts. Words and acts of repentance mean nothing if we don't truly believe we need to offer them. We must be wary of admitting a sin outwardly while still trying to justify it inwardly.

From Samuel, we see the example of what we should do when we see our brother or sister fall into a trap of sin. We should pray for them and mourn for the sinner. We need to confront them in love and in hopes for their repentance. We must be willing to affirm God's righteousness, even if it hurts feelings.

What lessons did you learn from Saul and Samuel in this passage?

Continue your character studies by listing the traits exhibited by Saul and Samuel in this passage.