

## INTRODUCTION

So far in this book we have looked at the life of Samuel and most of the life of Saul and one or two characters associated with those people like Eli and Jonathan. Chapter 14 ends with Saul's kingship coming to a close and the rest of the book now moves from the reign of Saul to that of David who is described as "a man after God's own heart."

This chapter is the final nail in Saul coffin as He is rejected by God as King and this rejection prepares the way for the appointment and eventually the Coronation of David as King. The key to this chapter is found in verse one where we are told that Samuel has been sent to deliver this message from the Lord (v 1). Obviously the chapter is long and it is my aim to draw out the main lessons from the chapter rather than deal with every detail or every verse.

### 1. THE COMFORT OF GOD'S VENGEANCE (vs. 1-9, 18 & 32-33)

This is God's message to Saul so he is to listen to it (v 1) and obey it (v 3). But you may immediately sense a potential problem with the Lord's instruction for as we read the chapter you may have felt increasingly uncomfortable with what Saul is being commanded to do. You may think that the Lord is being too severe here on the Amalekites.

What Saul is being told to do here is to totally destroy the Amalekites (v 3) and the term translated "totally destroy" (v 3) translates a Hebrew word which occurs eight times in this chapter (vs. 3, 8, 9 (twice), 15, 18, 20-21). This concept is sometimes known as "placing them under the ban." What is meant by that term is that the people, their place and their material possessions were off limits for Israel's use and were to be devoted only to God for his disposition.

In this case that disposition was by destruction but sometimes when it came to precious metals, the metals were to be devoted to God by placed them in God's treasury. But our problem is that this total destruction sounds horrible and harsh and does not seem to fit in with our view of God as a God of all compassion. Therefore for some people this passage and this command in particular is an embarrassment to them. How can God be associated with such dreadful actions? But to answer this objection we need to realise that what is being commanded here is horrible; but it is not harsh, judgement is never pleasant and the second thing that we need to say is that we believe that Scripture is true but that does not mean that it is sanitised. Finally we need to say that God's judgement is not something to be rejected but praised for it is a just judgement.

We are told that God's total destruction of the Amalekites is just; because He is punishing them for what they did to his people, Israel as they came out of Egypt (v 2 cf. Exodus 17:8-16), and Moses remembers it as a particularly callous attack for they attacked Israel when they weary and worn out and attacked them by cutting off those who lagged behind because of their weariness. On top of this their actions showed that they had no fear of the God of Israel (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

For this action the Amalekites were to be wiped out (Exodus 17:14-16 and Deuteronomy 25:19). Just in case someone should worry that the descendants are suffering for the actions of their ancestors we are told in this chapter that Amalek had not changed over the years for in verse 18 the current residents of this nation are called "wicked." And Agag who was their King committed war crimes against the women and children and that was the basis for his execution (v 33). We

are grateful that God is slow to anger; He had given this nation about 300 - 400 years to repent but they had failed to do so and continued to oppose God and his people and now their time for judgement had come.

But it is precisely because God is a God who judges that those of us who are God's people find this comforting. God does not forget how his enemies have hated, trampled upon and crushed his people. It is good to know that it is the Lord alone who ultimately avenges his people; it is good to know that people do not get away with their sin. God's judgement on sinners actually spells deliverance for God's people.

Without God's justice and judgement we would never be completely delivered because we would always have people who oppose us. But one day there will be a final judgement day when sinners will be dealt with and sent to hell, all those sins against God will be judged all those times they opposed God's truth and God's people will be judged and God's people will once and for all be rid of their opponents and will live in God's new heaven and earth that place of righteousness without any hint of opposition.

We will be completely free from God's enemies and they will be judged and dealt with for they will receive what they deserve in hell. The gospel of Jesus Christ's offers forgiveness and grace for all who will repent but for those who do not fear God and refuse to repent then they will be judged and condemned while those who know God's grace will continue to enjoy his favour in heaven forever.

What is it that brings comfort to God's people throughout the world when they are faced with hostility, opposition and persecution? It is the comfort of knowing that one day their opponents will be judged and condemned and they will be delivered from the hands of their enemies forever.

This also shows how precious God's people are to him for if anyone harms one of God's people then they will draw from God his wrath and eternal condemnation unless of course they too repent and experience God's grace.

## 2. THE PRIORITY OF OBEDIENCE (vs. 10-23)

God's word came upon Samuel and it was a message that so troubled Samuel that he spent the whole night crying out to the Lord (v 10). The message was that the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul King for Saul had turned away from the Lord and the evidence of that turning away is that he has not carried out God's instructions (v 10). It is interesting to note that failure to obey God's word is evidence of something else going on in one's life mainly a turning away from the Lord. The problem with Saul lay not just with the fact that he disobeyed the Lord but that he had turned away from following the Lord in his heart. His disobedience was a symptom of his turning (rebellion) from the Lord.

That is always the case if we are disobedient then that shows that we have drifted from the Lord that we are no longer seeking to follow him in our hearts. If we are wondering why it is that we seem too so often disobey God's word, then we need to look into our hearts. We need to ask God to expose our sin to us and to ask if we are genuinely seeking to follow the Lord and submit to his authority in our hearts. But Samuel's response to pray throughout the night is also a great challenge to us.

We are not told what he prayed about but he is saddened by Saul's failure, he did not delight that Saul's Kingship did not work out; he grieved over the situation. God had chosen Saul and now Saul was a failure, what would happen to God's people, and who would provide that leadership? But no doubt he prayed for Saul himself that God would show him his failures and cause repentance to take place in his heart. It is so easy to gloat over the failings of our fellow believers for someone else's disobedience can so easily show us in a better light but there was none of that sort of thinking with Saul, he was genuinely saddened by the whole episode. How do we respond when a fellow Christian turns out to be a disappointment and lets the Lord down?

Do we silently gloat, for they seemed to be more spiritual than us or do we genuinely grieve over the situation? Pride is an awful sin and is so subtle that it often rejoices in the failings of others; therefore we need to root any such sin out of our own lives.

The next morning Samuel goes and meets with Saul but finds out that Saul has gone to the village of Carmel where he had set up a monument in his own honour in order to commemorate his victory over the Amalekites and now he has travelled to Gilgal (v 12). Although Samuel is distressed by the whole situation Saul on the other hand is very upbeat (v 13) for there is no sense of guilt or embarrassment in that greeting.

Saul claims that he has obeyed the Lord and carried out his instructions, which of course is not the case as we will see (v 13). So Samuel confronts him about the situation. He says in effect if you have obeyed the Lord's instructions then what is that racket that he hears coming from the sheep and the cattle (v 14)? Saul gives his explanation (v 15), moving the blame to the soldiers who saved the best of the sheep and cattle for sacrifice but they complied with God's orders by destroying everyone and everything else except Agag of course. But Samuel was not having it; he faced Saul with a simple question of obedience (v 19). Partial obedience is disobedience and disobedience is evil in the eyes of the Lord.

But even now Saul protests his innocence (vs. 20-21), but his reference to sparing Agag just exposes his heart; for did the Lord not say all the Amalekites were to be destroyed (v 3)?

But Samuel brings the matter to a conclusion in verses 22-23; do sacrifices delight God as much as obedience to him? What does God want more than anything else sacrifices or obedience? Obedience is better than sacrifice, paying attention to him is better than any amount of sacrifices (v 23). The reality is that what lies behind Saul's actions is rebellion, arrogance and idolatry (v 23).

What Samuel is teaching is what is clearly taught throughout the Old Testament (Psalm 40:6-8); formal worship cannot be substituted for an obedient life. External devotions to the Lord are no substitute for internal submission. This is a lesson that we all need to learn. Church attendance, personal devotions and even Bible conferences are simply meaningless activities unless we have submissive and obedient hearts. It is possible to go through Christian routines and external procedures and yet have hearts that are in rebellion against the living God.

No one in church will know of course because you are carrying on with the externals of your faith but inwardly you are rebelling against God and refusing to obey him and justifying your actions by partial obedience. We need to recognise what partial obedience is, Samuel calls it rebellion and arrogance (v 23).

We must call sin by its proper name, a failure to listen and obey God's word is not a weakness in our life or a misunderstanding but it is rebellion, arrogance and it is in the same category as pagan idolatry (v 23). We need to be careful that we do not judge ourselves only by our outward actions for the sinfulness of sin is never seen on the surface or with externals but we need to examine our hearts and our motivations in order to truly understand our actions.

We always have to look beyond the exterior and look at what is going on under the surface to see our true spiritual state. Of course we can never do this on our own for our hearts are so deceitful that we will be experts at convincing ourselves that partial obedient is full obedience. We need God by his Holy Spirit to uncover our hearts for us and to enable us to repent of all rebellion arrogance and idolatry that lies deep within our hearts.

Saul problem was not that he did not **fully** obey the Lord for the reality is that Saul did not obey the Lord **at all** for to partially obey the Lord is actually disobedience. Partial obedience is rebellion, arrogance and idolatry and it must be repented off in our lives. In disobeying the Lord's word Saul was of course disobeying the Lord himself, he was rebelling against the Lord's authority and therefore since Saul has rejected the Lord as his King so the Lord now rejects Saul as King over his people (v 23).

### 3. THE PERVERSITY OF THE HUMAN HEART (vs. 24-35)

The perversity of the human heart is seen in Saul's response to the Lord's rejection of him as King over Israel. At first glance it seems that Saul is genuinely repenting for he acknowledges his sin (v 24), seems to seek repentance (v 25) and wants to worship the Lord (v 25 & 30) but a further look at these verses will show us the perversity of Saul's heart. We know from Samuel's response to Saul that Saul was only interested in saving face; he was not concerned about true repentance. It is clear that God's removal of his office had made an impact on Saul; he clearly felt sorry about the whole situation, he acknowledges he was in the wrong but he still could not face up to his sin and bring himself to genuinely repent. This is seen in his attempt to explain his disobedience (v 24), I did it because I was afraid of the people; perhaps even a hint here that it was their idea (v 21) but Samuel knows that Saul is not repenting which is why he refuses to go back with him (v 25).

Saul is a man who was more afraid of losing everything and especially his standing with the people than he is of God. He could not bear losing face with the people, which is why he asks Samuel to go back with him he wants to give the impression that everything is OK even though he knows that he is no longer King in God's eyes although he will continue to reign for about another 15 years. Samuel at first refuses to go back with Saul and as Samuel turns to leave Saul grabs the hem of his robe and it tears as a result (v 27). This provides Samuel with a parable just as Saul has torn Samuel's robe so God has torn from Saul his Kingship. God's mind is made up and He does not change his mind; He cannot lie, Saul will no longer be God's king over his people (v 29).

But unlike Saul, Samuel is a man who inwardly seeks to submit and obey his God and so he does what Saul fails to do and kills Agag king of the Amalekites (vs.32-33). Samuel and Saul go their separate ways God has finished with Saul as King God's word would no longer be given to Samuel for Saul. It's a sad end to the chapter but one that exposes the nature of the human heart. How often when we are caught sinning do we try to save face instead of genuinely repenting.

How often do we seek to reflect the blame to someone else? How often do we want to give the impression that everything is normal, everything is Ok instead of repenting. Our human heart is so

preserve and our pride is so great that we will do anything including admitting our sins instead of repenting. Sinners under conviction of sin will seek to transform their ways, become religious or do other charitable things in order to ease their conscience; but the one thing they do not want to do is repent and only God can enable a sinner to repent. Likewise even Christians who have regenerate hearts will do anything but repent. We might feel sorry about our sins and even show remorse over them but repentance means more than being sorry or showing remorse; for repentance means fleeing from our sin and our hearts are reluctant to do that.

We are often more concerned about losing face than genuinely repenting of sin because we love ourselves more and our sin more than we love the Lord. We need to ask God to search our hearts and expose our hearts and to enable us to repent of all known sin.

Repentance is a painful thing, it might mean we lose face and even our position in the church or respect among our fellow Christians but only repentance brings forgiveness and joy therefore learn to know your own heart and genuinely repent of all sin in the knowledge that true repentance brings true forgiveness which in turn brings the joy of the Lord into our lives.

May God search us and help us to repent.

Amen