

Moments that Define Your Legacy
A study of 1 Samuel 15

Selah- is an expression occurring frequently in the Psalms. It is thought to be a musical direction given by the leader to raise the voice - or it could also be an indication of a pause, a moment to reflect on the previous words. As you go through this lesson, there may be some "Selah" moments where you may want to reflect one-on-one with our God. Too often we do not take the opportunity to "pause" and hear the voice of God.

1. Saul had been bestowed the great honor of being Israel's first king (1 Sam 10:17-24). What qualities does the Bible reveal about him before his selection as king (1 Sam 9:2, 21)? How did God prepare Saul for service (1 Sam 10:6-9)? What was Saul's potential as king of Israel?

Tall and striking than any other, Saul was a choice and handsome man of all of Israel. In the beginning, Saul was transparent and had humility.

He was blessed to be enabled by the Holy Spirit to be changed into a different person and join with the prophets in their prophesying. The Holy Spirit enabled Saul to assume kingly responsibilities just as the judges before him (Jud 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 9; 15:14).

Saul had the potential to be a great king of Israel. **Selah:** What is your potential in your service to God?

2. Study 1 Samuel 15:1-9. What was Saul's mission and how well did he complete it?

God instructed Saul to:

- 1) exact God's judgment of the Amaleks and completely destroy them,
- 2) put to death all men, women children and infants,
- 3) put to death all oxen, sheep, camels and donkeys.

The Amaleks were being punished for their actions some 400 years earlier. As the first peoples to attack Israel in their exodus out of Egypt (Ex 17:8-16), the Amaleks did not fear God and attacked in the rear where the weakest were (Deut 25:17-19).

Saul did the following:

- 1) destroyed the Amaleks but spared king Agag of the Amaleks.
- 2) destroyed all of the livestock except the best sheep and cattle.

Ancient conquerors would often capture the opposing king and the best of the spoils to parade them back for the purposes of personal glory and public accolades.

3. Study 1 Samuel 15:10-11. What distressed Samuel so much?

Samuel cried all night, because God's heart was broken over Saul's disobedience and regret of making Saul king.

God was not surprised or caught "off guard" by Saul's sin. Despite His warnings to the people, God permitted Saul to reign in response to their demands (1 Sam 8:4-22) and that concession grieved His heart.

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Samuel's heart is close to God's. What grieves God, grieves Samuel.

Selah: Is your obedience to God complete? Partial obedience is complete disobedience.

4. Study 1 Samuel 15:12-15, 20-21 and examine the nature of Saul's character.

To commemorate his victory, Saul erected a monument to his own honor at Carmel in Judah. This was a common practice among ancient conquerors; however, Saul did not attribute his success to the Lord despite the fact it was the Lord punishing the Amaleks (1 Sam 15:2).

When confronted with possession of the spoils, Saul made two notable comments:

1) The people (implication - not me) brought the best livestock back.

Saul began his excuse for disobedience by blaming the people.

2) They brought the best sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord **your** God.

Saul sought to justify the sparing of the livestock by stating his intention of sacrificing them to God.

When confronted with the charge of disobedience, Saul made three points:

1) I did obey the Lord by destroying the Amaleks and brought back Agag.

Saul misstates the mission that God had given him; Saul was to destroy all of the Amaleks.

2) But the people brought back the sheep, oxen and choicest of things devoted for destruction.

Saul disavows any responsibility of disobeying the order of destroying all livestock.

3) The spoils were intended for sacrifice to the Lord **your** God.

Saul lied about the true intent of the spoils.

Saul's actions revealed that he had no relationship with God, and his pride led to self-deception and unwillingness to admit to any wrongdoing.

One consequence of Saul's disobedience was the continued existence of the Amaleks (1 Sam 27:8; 30:1-20). Ironically, Saul's death on the battlefield was from a sword's thrust from the hand of an Amalekite (2 Sam 1:8-10).

5. Read 1 Samuel 15:22-23. What did Samuel tell Saul?

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

Religious observance without complete obedience is empty before God. Sincere obedience was the prerequisite for worship that pleased God. The best sacrificial offering we could bring to God is a repentant heart (Ps 51:16-17) and our bodies surrendered to his service (Rom 12:1-2).

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Rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.

Rebellion is more than “having it your way.” Samuel equated it to divination, the practice of making decisions or foretelling the future by means of reading signs and omens. God condemned this, and the Mosaic Law stipulated the death penalty (Ex 22:18; Lev 10:27). Engaging in divination was seen as “detestable” and idolatrous, because it denied the authority of God and led people astray from Him (Deut 18:9-22).

Samuel equated disobedience to sin and idolatry, because Saul elevated his will above God. Instead of being a representative of God, Saul believed that he was an independent and sovereign king. Saul’s behavior testified to what God already knew about Saul’s heart, and Saul’s rejection of God was the basis for God’s rejection of Saul’s kingship.

Selah: Do you ever mischaracterize God’s will for your life? For instance, forgiving a friend or enemy? Or reconciling your spouse? Do you justify your disobedience? A lack of obedience or justifying it is seen by God as open rebellion – sinful and idolatrous.

6. How did Saul respond to Samuel’s rebuke (1 Sam 15:24-31)?

Saul confesses his sin; however, he used the excuse of “fearing the people and listening to their voice” (1 Sam 15:24). This is a surprising statement from a king. While peer pressure would affect anyone else, a king of his stature would hardly care about what anyone else would think.

Saul’s insincerity becomes more apparent. Instead of being concerned with his worship of God, Saul is more concerned about the public break with Samuel which would undermine his authority as king (“return with me” - 1 Sam 15:25, “please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me” – 1 Sam 15:30).

Samuel does go back with Saul. However, instead of honoring Saul, Samuel’s purpose was to carry out God’s judgment on Agag. Samuel would mourn for Saul and would not have any more contact with him, because God rejected him as king. The Bible records only one other instance in which Saul came to Samuel (1 Sam 19:24).

Selah: Just as Saul had the potential to be a great king, we all have the potential to be a great servant of God. Will you realize that potential or will you be known as the person who squandered that potential?

Saul presents an example of someone who squandered their potential, and in him, four characteristics can be seen:

1. Make decisions and act without Bible study or prayer.
2. Misstate God’s word or partially obey His commands or prohibitions.
3. Justify your actions and pride when confronted with the truth and your sin.
4. Let peer pressure guide your moral standard.

Selah: What will you do?

References:

1. Walvoord JF and Zuck RB, eds., *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton: Victor Books, (1985).

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