

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>Study of 1 Samuel</i>
	MARCH 14	21

THE LORD REJECTS SAUL AS KING

1 SAMUEL 15:1-35

MARCH 14, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying 1 Samuel 15:1-35. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: JUDGMENT AWAITS THOSE WHO REJECT GOD'S INSTRUCTION.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WE ARE OFTEN TEMPTED TO COMPROMISE AND ONLY PARTIALLY OBEY GOD.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: BECAUSE JESUS TOOK OUR JUDGMENT ON HIMSELF AT THE CROSS, GOD FORGIVES OUR SINS AND PURIFIES US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (1 JOHN 1:9).

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 Present the following scenarios and allow time for discussion:
 - 1) You receive an unexpected bonus at work. It's a gift from the company. Are you most likely to tithe 10 percent, give charitably to someone or a good cause but give less than 10 percent, or give nothing to the church or charity?
 - 2) You become aware of a person in a difficult situation. Are you most likely to personally help them, find someone else who can help them, or ignore them after you pray for them?

- 2 Which is easier to justify in our minds: partially disobedient actions or totally disobedient actions? Why is that?

- 3 When God seeks someone to fulfill a task or role, what qualities does He desire?

When the Lord God seeks a man or a woman for a particular task or role, He looks for someone who will obey Him. While other qualities can be spiritually valuable, they become meaningless if the person in question doesn't take God at His word and obey Him. King Saul possessed some admirable qualities for leadership, such as discernment (1 Sam. 14:19) and courage (14:36). But at key moments, Saul failed the greatest test of a spiritual leader—the commitment to obey God. Just as Saul ascended quickly to the throne, he also descended quickly because of his disobedient actions.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

> ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 15:1-9,13-15.

- How clear were God’s instructions to Saul through Samuel?

Amalek was the grandson of Esau (Gen. 36:12). His descendants were the first people to attack the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt (Ex. 17:8), even before the receiving of the Ten Commandments. God had determined at the time to “blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven” (v. 14; see also Num. 24:20). He decided this was the appropriate time to make good on His word to Moses, and King Saul was the appropriate instrument to use.

- What did King Saul do right in these verses? What did he do wrong?

- Why do you think Saul felt justified, even faithful to God, in what he did?

After King Saul received the instructions to destroy the Amalekites, he gathered his troops (apparently without delay or hesitation) and set about his task (vv. 4-6). The region “from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is next to Egypt” represents a very sizeable geographic area. It was much more extensive than merely an attack on a single city and likely took days, if not weeks, to accomplish. Even so, the campaign was successful as Saul and his army “completely destroyed all the rest of the people with the sword”—all except Agag, their king . . . and the best animals . . . “and the best of everything else.” But other than that, he had pretty much done what he’d been told. And the goods that remained had been spared “in order

to offer a sacrifice to the LORD.” Sounds pretty noble, doesn’t it? Because of his fear of the people (v. 24), Saul surrendered what God wanted for what the people wanted.

- What makes settling for partial obedience so tempting? In what ways could a believer exclude the “best” from his or her obedience to God?

Notes:

> ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 15:10-12,16-21.

- Why did the Lord regret He made Saul king?
- In your estimation, does it seem like God is over-reacting here? What’s the big deal if Saul didn’t completely destroy the Amalekites and everything they had?
- What lessons should we draw from Saul’s example and God’s and Samuel’s reactions?

Israel was God’s people, not Saul’s. It was important for Saul to listen and obey all of God’s instructions. Saul did not do this. He spared Agag and the best of everything else. Destroying all the worthless and unwanted things was no great sacrifice, no act of trust. Saul was God’s chosen leader, but Saul’s pattern of disobedience showed he was not the man God needed and required him to be.

- When Samuel initially confronted Saul about his disobedience, what was Saul’s perspective (vv. 20-21)? What does this tell you about Saul’s heart?

- What makes confronting someone about his or her disobedience a challenge? What risks are involved when confronting someone? What risks are involved when we don't confront someone?

Notes:

> ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 SAMUEL 15:22-35.

- How would you state the principle of verse 22 in your own words? What relevance is there in this principle to our day and culture? Explain.

Samuel was quite clear with Saul—there is no sacrifice we can offer God that outweighs or substitutes our obedience to Him. We have no skill, ability, or resource that God needs. Why, then, would we ever think that offering Him that which He doesn't need could in any way make up for withholding from Him that which He wants—our obedience?

- How does accepting partial obedience or religious practice as a substitute for full obedience show disrespect for God?
- Once Saul acknowledged his sin, what reason did he give (v. 24)?
- What was the consequence for Saul's actions (vv. 26-29)?

In response to Samuel's confrontation, Saul confessed his sin twice (vv. 24,30), but we have no evidence that he repented of the sin. The remainder of the biblical account of Saul shows him either being ineffective or attempting to kill David, his God-anointed successor. Had he repented, the Bible is clear that God offers forgiveness and cleansing (Isa. 1:18; Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9).

- What are some common consequences believers face today for only giving partial obedience to God?

Notes:

Good intentions never cancel out disobedience. And the good intentions with which we excuse disobedience are often fraudulent. We disobey because of something we want, and then we try to salve our consciences with some religious act, such as giving something to the church. God is not fooled. His judgment is certain, even if delayed. The only preparation for divine judgment is to believe and obey Jesus Christ and His gospel.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- What are some common situations or circumstances in which believers are tempted to compromise and only partially obey God?
- Why do many believers tend to think it's not a big deal to cut some corners in obedience to God? In your own words, why is it a big deal?
- What are some ways you can choose to fully obey God? How can this group help you in that?

PRAY

Thank God for His love, forgiveness, and patience, though we often think we can improve on His plan or placate Him with sacrifices rather than obedience. Ask Him to teach you to follow Him in full obedience.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - Why do we continue to give excuses when we make wrong choices, even as adults? Why is it better to readily confess our wrong choices?
 - Review your life, looking for areas of partial obedience. What actions do you need to take to complete your obedience to God?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize 1 Samuel 15:22.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

1 SAMUEL 15:1-35

15:1. Saul's power and purpose lay in God's anointing; Israel was His people, not Saul's. Therefore, Saul needed to heed the divine instructions that Samuel now was giving him.

Notes:

15:2. Exodus 17:8-16 records Israel's initial victory over Amalek under Joshua's leadership. At that time, God promised to oppose the Amalekites continually.

15:3. The phrase destroy everything they have describes the practice of the ban, wherein Israel would destroy everything in a town that had breath, including humans and animals. God had authority over when all life began and ended. In the battle of Jericho (Jos 6:17-21), the plunder went into the Lord's treasury; at other times, the people were allowed to keep it (Jos 8:27).

15:6. Saul's warning to the Kenites rewarded earlier friendly terms with them (Jdg 1:16; 4:11). The kindness to all the Israelites is only mentioned here, but clearly this was part of Israel's memory in a land where people had long memories (2Ch 20:10-11).

15:7. This extensive campaign covered a broad region, from Arabia almost to Egypt's border, whose inhabitants included many descendants of Ishmael (Gen 25:18).

15:8. The phrase captured Agag... alive hints at Saul's coming disobedience to what God had commanded (v. 3).

15:9. The Hebrew text emphasizes that Saul was the one primarily responsible for sparing Agag. The people also spared... the best of everything else, another violation of God's command (v. 3). Of course, destroying all the worthless and unwanted things was no great sacrifice.

15:11. The verb regret with God as its subject occurs only here and in Gen 6:7, where it denotes God's regrets over making humanity and His ultimate decision to bring the great flood. In both cases, people made wrong moral

choices, and God's foreknowledge meant He knew what people would do. Nonetheless, it pained Him to see the disobedience come to pass. The word translated turned away commonly means "repent" when it speaks of turning away from sin, but here it describes Saul's conscious decision to cease following the Lord. Samuel was frustrated by Saul's failing kingship, particularly as he remembered he had anointed him (10:1). Saul had indeed turned out to be a king just like the ones of "all the other nations" (8:5,20), but the people had persisted in their request despite his sober warnings (8:11-18).

Notes:

15:12. Perhaps God had told Samuel to get up early during Samuel's intense prayer the previous night (v. 11). Ironically, Saul had gone to Carmel, a town about seven miles south of Hebron in Judah's hill country (Jos 15:55), to erect a monument for himself. This monument presumably would remind the Carmelites of the peace that came to their region because of Saul's victory over Amalek. Gilgal had great historical significance; it lay about 15 miles east of Gibeah, Saul's capital.

15:13. God did not share Saul's perspective on this matter.

15:14. The sound of sheep and cattle was proof that Saul had failed to execute God's command.

15:15. Saul's reference to the Lord your God (not "my God" or "our God") sounds an ominous tone but aptly fits the situation because Saul did not appear to have much of a relationship with the Lord.

15:16. Stop!—The prophet had had enough of Saul's excuses and cut him off, an action most subjects would not dare take with their king.

15:17. God had taken Saul from relatively unimportant status as a common citizen (cp. Saul's own words in 9:21) to king over Israel. The word you is emphasized in the text with respect to Saul to heighten the intensity of Samuel's words.

15:18. The presence of any survivors (in this case, King Agag and the best of the flocks and herds) was a violation of God's command.

15:19. The verbal idea in the phrase rush on the plunder is related to the word for "bird of prey," in this case swooping down on the spoils of war.

15:20. Saul's own description of his actions condemned him because he admitted to sparing Agag and to putting to death only the Amalekites and not their domesticated property as God had commanded (v. 3).

15:21. Sacrifice... at Gilgal would not substitute for obedience on Saul's part; further, God had already claimed the animals and given orders for their destruction (vv. 2-3).

15:22-23. Samuel wasn't buying the excuse. At issue was complete obedience to God. As covenant leader, Saul was to lead the nation to follow the Lord's direction and commands. In this eloquent poetic quotation, Samuel pronounced God's judgment against Saul's kingship.

To obey and heed the Lord God was far better than burnt offerings or the fat of rams. The term translated rebellion has to do with pressing one's case (cp. Deut. 31:27). Samuel referred at this point to Saul's attempts to justify and excuse his actions. Samuel compared this with the sin of divination. Divination attempted to gain control of a deity by foretelling what would please the god. Saul believed he knew what would please the Lord. Saul would later use divination (cp. 28:7-9).

The term translated arrogance is used when someone is trying to force a certain course of action. Samuel equated this with idolatry, using the specific word teraphim (cp. Gen. 31:19). Food and gifts were presented to teraphim (apparently small hand-made idols) in an attempt to manipulate a god into granting requests or bestowing blessings. Samuel implied that Saul was attempting to manipulate Yahweh with the best of the Amalekite flocks just like the pagan idol worshippers.

Notes:

There is no reason to suppose that Samuel was rejecting sacrificial worship. After all, Samuel was a Levite (cp. 1 Chron. 6:22-26) and often performed ritual sacrifice himself (1 Sam. 10:8; 11:15; 16:3-5). Samuel recognized that for a sacrifice to be effective, it must be offered with complete obedience. Worship that counts must result in obedience to the will of God. Because Saul had rejected the Lord, the Lord had rejected him as king.

Notes:

15:24-31. Saul finally admitted that he had sinned, that he had violated (lit. “transgressed”) the Lord’s command and Samuel’s instructions. Instead of fearing the Lord, Saul was afraid of the people. Saul begged for forgiveness, but Samuel was adamant. Samuel must have felt that Saul had not really repented. Saul again was concerned with appearances. He wanted the people to think that everything was all right.

When Samuel turned to leave, Saul grabbed the hem of Samuel’s robe and it tore. Samuel used this as an illustration: the Lord had torn the kingdom of Israel from him (15:27). The Glory of Israel would not change his mind (cp. Num. 23:19); Saul was rejected from being king. Even through this exchange, Saul still thought about appearances. He continued to plead his case that Samuel would honor him before the elders and return with him. Samuel reluctantly agreed.

15:32-35. What Saul had failed to do, Samuel carried out. When they returned, Samuel called for Agag, the Amalekite king. Agag thought that by this time, the bitterness of death had passed, that the Israelites would not put him to death. But Samuel declared an oracle of judgment against him and put him to death as the Lord had commanded. After this Samuel left for Ramah. The men did not see each other again before Samuel died. Samuel continued to mourn for Saul, and the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.