

**Week 15**  
**April 13/14**  
**The King Israel Wants**  
**1 Samuel 15**

**Summary and Goal:**

In rebellion against God, the people of Israel demanded to have a king just like the other nations of the world. Saul, the first king of Israel, had all the external qualities that most of us assume should make up a great leader. However, Saul's disobedience gives us an example of an ungodly leader who misses out on their true calling from God.

**Main Passage:**

**1 Samuel 15:1-3; 7-23;** April 13<sup>th</sup>, pp. 402-403 in the Chronological Bible

**Session Outline:**

- 1. Ungodly Leaders Fail to Follow God's Commands (v. 1-3; 7-11; pg. 402)**
- 2. Ungodly Leaders Exalt Themselves (v. 12; pg. 402)**
- 3. Ungodly Leaders Fail to Admit Their Mistakes (v. 13-23; pg. 403)**

**Session in a Sentence:**

God expects obedience from those He places in positions of authority.

**Kingdom Connection:**

God cares about His Kingdom in the world. At this point in the text, the nation of Israel was God's Kingdom, and He expected that they represent Him correctly in the world. God was grieved that the Israelites demanded a king, but He did allow their request by putting Saul in the position of king. However, when Saul did not lead God's people with integrity, God removed him and replaced him with another who would do the job better. God is looking for leaders in His Kingdom that will obey His voice and walk with Him.

**Missional Application:**

God's mission in the world is for His Kingdom to be established, and His will to be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. We learn from the story of Saul that God demands the leaders in His Kingdom be obedient to Him, humble, and willing to acknowledge mistakes. If we want to participate in God's Kingdom, then we must take on these attributes.

## **Introduction:**

In the coming weeks, we will be using the Kingdom and Divided Kingdom Eras to examine what it takes to be a godly leader. In this lesson, we will see the first King of Israel, Saul, demonstrate what it looks like to be an ungodly leader. Ultimately, Saul was rejected by God and replaced by the leader of God's choosing, David. But for today, we will look closely at the choices and character flaws that led to Saul's downfall as a leader of God's people.

## **How did we get here?**

The beginning of 1 Samuel details the desire of the people of Israel to have a king just like all the other nations around them (1 Samuel 8). Samuel was the last good judge over Israel, and when the time came for Samuel to appoint his sons as judges over the people, the elders said to him "Appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." (1 Samuel 8:5) The demand for a king was ultimately a rejection by the Israelites of God as their True King. Samuel warned the people about the dangers of having a king like the other nations, but they did not listen. Saul was selected to be the first king of Israel, and 1 Samuel 9 tells us that he was tall, handsome, and powerful. Saul had all the stereotypical qualities of an ancient king. By all accounts, he should have been a great leader.

### **1. Ungodly leaders fail to follow God's commands**

*<sup>1</sup>Samuel also said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. <sup>2</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. <sup>3</sup>Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them.*

*<sup>7</sup>And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. <sup>8</sup>He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. <sup>9</sup>But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.*

*<sup>10</sup>Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, <sup>11</sup>"I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night. (April 13<sup>th</sup>, pg. 402)*

## **What does it say?**

This passage gives us an example of God sending a clear command to Saul through Samuel. He told Saul to go completely wipe out the Amalekites and their King Agag as an act of judgment. This meant that God wanted Saul to wipe out the entirety of the Amalekite people and their possessions.

**Teachers Note:** *Passages like this, along with those in the Conquest Era, can be the most difficult portions of the Bible to come to terms with regarding God's commands. Please see our "Hard Questions from Conquest, Judges and Kingdom Eras" video on [second.org/teach](http://second.org/teach), for more insight.*

Instead of obeying the Lord's commands, Saul left Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive along with the best of his livestock and possessions. Saul wanted to keep the spoils of war for himself.

## **What does it mean?**

This section demonstrates a key character trait that Saul displayed over the course of his time as king: he failed to fully obey the commands of God. Saul had a habit of listening to God's commands, and only following them halfway (or not at all). If Saul thought that he knew better than God, then he would do as he pleased. Saul did this multiple times in key moments of his rule over Israel. This disobedience from Saul grieved the heart of God so much so that God began to regret ever allowing Saul to become king over Israel.

## **Application:**

Every one of us will be tempted to disobey God's commands in the same manner as Saul. There are many times that the commands of God and the teaching of Scripture will seem inconvenient, untenable, or unpalatable to us. When we come across a truth from God that doesn't make sense to us, we become tempted to either ignore it or only partially obey it. We do this at our own peril. God's laws are not given to us to be restrictive or to make life difficult, but they are given to help us thrive and become the people that God made us to be. Ignoring or picking and choosing God's laws only leads us to destruction and pain for ourselves and those around us.

## **2. Ungodly leaders exalt themselves**

*<sup>12</sup> So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal." (April 13th, pg. 402)*

### **What does it say?**

Samuel went to find out how the battle with the Amalekites ended. He found out that Saul had completed the task and went on to build a monument to himself instead of worshipping God.

### **What does it mean?**

Here we get another glimpse into Saul's character flaws as a leader. Not only did Saul not fully obey the command of the Lord, but he also had the gall to build a monument to himself after his disobedience. Saul's priorities were not with following the Lord or honoring Him. Instead, Saul wanted to lift himself up to increase his own esteem and notoriety in the world. Saul was overtaken by the deadliest of sins: pride. Saul's vocation as the king made him think that he was more important than anyone else in the world, and it is clear from his actions that he actually thought himself more important than God. His first instinct was to do what he wanted to do and to have people honor him. Saul wanted to worship himself instead of the God who gave him every good thing in his life.

### **Application:**

Pride and self-importance are perhaps the deadliest traps for any of us who find ourselves in a place of leadership. A true leader looks to the best interest of their teammates and seeks to accomplish the task at hand. An ungodly leader uses his status to elevate himself above his teammates and allows pride to twist his motivations. If anyone wants to become a godly leader, then he must learn to walk in humility and do everything possible to avoid the trap of pride.

### **3. Ungodly leaders fail to acknowledge their mistakes**

*<sup>13</sup> Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD." <sup>14</sup> But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" <sup>15</sup> And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."*

*16 Then Samuel said to Saul, “Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night.” And he said to him, “Speak on.”*

*17 So Samuel said, “When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? <sup>18</sup> Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ <sup>19</sup> Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?”*

*20 And Saul said to Samuel, “But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. <sup>21</sup> But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.”*

*22 So Samuel said:*

*“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,  
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?  
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
And to heed than the fat of rams.*

*23 For rebellion is as the sin of <sup>[d]</sup>witchcraft,  
And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.  
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
He also has rejected you from being king.” (April 13<sup>th</sup>, pg. 402-403)*

### **What does it say?**

This section of the passage gives us our deepest glimpse into the deluded thoughts of King Saul. When Samuel went to Saul, Saul greeted him by declaring that he had successfully obeyed the command of the Lord. Samuel pointed out that he heard the noise of the Amalekites’ animals, and asks Saul why. Saul says that he kept the best animals from the Amalekites in order to sacrifice them to the Lord. Samuel asks Saul again why he did not obey the voice of the Lord to destroy the Amalekites completely, instead of keeping the spoils of war. Saul then says that he did obey the Lord, but it was the people who took the plunder in order to sacrifice it to God. Samuel then points out that God desires obedience more than sacrifice,

and that Saul's lack of obedience has led him to be rejected by God as king over Israel.

### **What does it mean?**

Saul refused to acknowledge or take responsibility for his disobedience to the Lord. First, he told Samuel that he had obeyed the Lord, and he said that he only kept the animals in order to sacrifice to God. When Samuel further confronted him, Saul then shifted the blame to the men who fought with him, saying that they kept the animals. Saul thought he could appease the Lord by giving Him sacrifices, and when he was backed into a corner he decided to blame those under his leadership. This is the tell-tale sign of an ungodly leader: they fail to acknowledge their mistakes and they blame others. If we want to be godly leaders, then we must learn to acknowledge our own mistakes and resist the temptation to blame failure on others.

### **Conclusion:**

In the life of Saul, we see an example of someone who wasted the opportunity to be a great leader. Saul had all the natural tools to successfully lead the people of God, but he missed out on his calling because he did not obey the voice of the Lord. This story should serve as a warning to all of us because we are all capable of ignoring the voice of the Lord. God does have a calling for each one of our lives, and if we lean into that calling then we can experience fulfillment and joy. However, if we are stubborn, selfish, and unwilling to obey the commands of the Lord, then we will lose our calling just as Saul lost his kingship.