

1st Samuel Chapters 15 – John Karmelich

1. I can summarize this chapter in two words: Obedience and Judgment.
 - a) There, all done. We can go home now. ☺
 - b) This chapter marks the “beginning of the end” of Saul as king of Israel. By the end of the chapter, the prophet Samuel tells King Saul that he is no longer king. Technically that won’t happen for another (roughly) 20 years, as David is only a boy at this time.
 - c) Saul is stripped of his title for one reason: Lack of complete obedience.
 - d) One of the great lessons to get out of this chapter is “partial obedience is not obedience”.
 - i) Partial obedience is like being a little bit pregnant. It can’t be done. ☺
 - e) Let’s discuss obedience God’s grace.
 - i) Grace is un-earned blessings. It is the idea of giving something good to someone that doesn’t deserve it. God saves us for eternity not because we are good people, but because of “un-earned blessing”, he saves us out of his love. The price for our sins is paid for on the Cross.
 - ii) God’s grace does not mean we are now free to sin as much as we want. What God demands for us in exchange for His grace is obedience.
 - iii) It would be like someone saving your life and you never say thank you. If someone saves your life, you are eternally in debt to them and owe them your eternal gratitude. Since God saves us for eternity, we “owe” Him that obedience.
 - iv) Let’s not mix us “faith and works”. The bible clearly teaches we are saved by faith alone (Galatians 2:16, et.al.) Yet if we are trusting in that faith, then are actions should “naturally” follow. For example I may have faith to believe an elevator will hold my weight, but I act on that faith by getting in the elevator.
 - f) If we have committed our lives to serving God, then we are no longer living for our desires but His desires. That is what the bible is all about: An “instruction book” on how to live our lives out. To do “God’s will” is to live in complete obedience to God’s will.
 - i) Obviously it is a little more complicated than that. Some parts of the Old Testament are applicable to the Jewish people only. Christians are not required to “keep Kosher” on the food laws. Acts Chapter 15 covers some of those issues.
2. Getting back to my opening theme, the other issue is judgment.
 - a) We tend to think of judgment as sending one to hell after they die.
 - b) While that is an important part of judgment, Judgment is also punishment in this lifetime as well. God can punish us in our lifetime for whatever sins we have committed.
 - c) God does not do this out of hatred. It is done to make us better people. The same way a parent punishes a child for bad behavior, so God punishes “His children”. The same way a parent punishes a child to make them better people, so God treats us the same way.
 - d) Judgment can also be done as an example. “Locations” are often judged. Nations of people are often judged. Those judgments can mean that a particular town or a particular nation will no longer exist. That is often God’s judgment for sinful behavior.
 - i) We’ll get into some specifics of that later in this lesson.
 - ii) In this chapter, Saul will be judged for a lack of complete obedience. It is important to state he is not sent to hell for his actions, but he does lose his kingship. It is an example of God’s judgment.
 - iii) At the same time, we are going to read of the Israelites completely destroying a particular nation called the Amalekites. It is another example of God’s judgment. Notice how God can use one group (the Israelites) to judge another (Amalekites).
 - e) Now that I’ve given this happy and upbeat bible lesson, it’s time to start. ☺

3. Verse 1: Samuel said to Saul, "I (Samuel) am the one the LORD sent to anoint you (Saul) king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. ² This is what the LORD Almighty says: `I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. ³ Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.' "
- a) Samuel is giving a tough message to King Saul. That message is to destroy a tribe called the Amalekites. Samuel's orders from God are to destroy every man, woman and child of this tribe, along with their possessions.
 - b) Before we discuss the reasons for this judgment, first notice Verse 1:
 - i) Samuel emphasizes the fact that he was sent by God.
 - ii) Samuel reminds Saul that he was the one who anointed him king.
 - iii) The reason for those reminders is that the task at hand is difficult. The Amalekites are spread over a large territory. Further, it is difficult to have to tell a soldier, let alone a king that he has to kill innocent women and children.
 - iv) The point is when God calls you to do something difficult, or, if you are in a situation where you know the biblically "right thing to do" is difficult, remind yourself of how God has worked in your life. Sometimes that assurance can help you get through the hurdle of doing a difficult thing.
 - c) Now, onto the big moral question. Why would God want the Israelites to do this?
 - i) After all, it is cruel to have to kill innocent people. Is that a God of love?
 - ii) The first thing to contemplate is that this order was only to kill the Amalekites.
 - a) For example, God never ordered the Israelites to go kill all the Egyptians after the Exodus. God never ordered the Israelites to kill all the Philistines. God did want the Israelites to conquer the land, but never gave the order to kill every man, woman and child to any group other than the Amalekites.
 - iii) So, what did the Amalekites do to "earn" such a judgment?
 - a) First of all, the Amalekites attacked the Israelites when they exited from Egypt. It is the first recorded battle after the Exodus (Exodus Chapter 17).
 - b) Years later, when Moses was near the end of his life, he gave one big speech to the Israelites, as they were about to enter the Promised Land. Most of that speech is the book of Deuteronomy. Here is a quote:
 - (1) "Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. When the LORD your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" (Deut. 25:17-19 NIV)
 - (2) A few key points from that Deuteronomy passage:
 - (a) The Amalekites attacked the weakest aspect of the Israelites.
 - (b) God ordered that after the Israelites had "rest" in the Promised Land, then the Amalekites should be completely destroyed.
 - iv) With all of that in mind, it is now over 400 years since the time Moses gave the command to destroy the Amalekites. Why the judgment now?
 - a) After all, all the Amalekite soldiers who did the damage are now long dead. Why punish their descendants?

- b) First of all, it is a reminder that when God proclaims a judgment, we are reminded that this judgment does not go away with time. God may be “long suffering” before judgment occurs, but it does eventually occur.
- c) Also remember that part of the command by Moses is that the judgment against the Amalekites was not to occur until “they had rest from all their enemies”. During the period of the Judges, the nation of Israel was not organized under any king. There was no army. One possibility is that God was waiting until the first king to come along with the first significant Israelite army before executing this command.
- v) Now the next issue: Why do this judgment in the first place? After all, other nations and tribes fought the Israelites. What was so special about them?
 - a) First of all, they were the first nation to attack Israel. Second, as implied in the Deuteronomy passage, they were especially cruel in that they only attacked the weakest parts of the Israel. They picked on the stragglers.
 - b) Remember that God wanted to show the surrounding nations that God of Israel is far greater than all of the surrounding gods. Therefore, he “allowed” Israel to win wars over surrounding nations. It was God’s way of showing the superiority of the Israelite God.
- vi) Finally, why the completeness of the judgment? Why not just kill the soldiers?
 - a) One reason is that when Saul failed to kill all the Amalekites, it came back to haunt them.
 - (1) An Amalekite eventually killed Saul. (2nd Samuel 1:8)
 - (2) King David will have to go fight the Amalekites (1st Sam. Chap. 30).
 - (3) A descendant of the Amalekites, centuries later was Haman of the story of the book of Esther. (See Esther 3:1 and 1 Samuel 15:8).
 - (a) Haman tried to kill every Jew alive in the book of Esther. If Saul had killed all the Amalekites, Haman wouldn’t live.
 - b) The next reason is to show the surrounding nations that when the God of Israel does make a condemnation judgment, it is complete.
 - c) As to the “God of Love” and “God of Judgment” issue, I sleep well at nights knowing God is perfect. If God is perfect, he is perfect in judgment. In Revelation Chapter 20, there is a final judgment of all individuals. Nonbelievers will be judged individually based on their lives. I suspect there will be many children in heaven who come from “bad” parents.
 - (1) My point is I let God sort all of that out. Eternity is a lot longer than our time here on earth. God will judge individuals fairly.
 - (2) This is about corporate judgment. God judges tribes, nations, and people “corporately” as well as individually.
 - (3) Jesus said, “Woe to you, Korazin! (a city) Woe to you, Bethsaida! (a city) If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon (more cities), they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matthew 11:21).
 - (4) Jesus’ point is He is judging cities for their lack of repentant. Those cities of Korazin and Bethsaida are not part of modern Israel. They were “judged” and destroyed”.
- d) OK, we’re almost done with the first three verses. ☺

- e) Now comes the personal application:
 - i) As we live for God, our entire lives become an internal struggle between doing God's will and doing our will. "Our will", when it is in contradiction to God's will, is sin. Sin means to "miss the mark".
 - ii) A common Christian buzz-term for doing our will in contraction to doing God's will is called "living in the flesh". The "flesh" is a word-picture of our skin. The idea is we focus is on ourselves (our "flesh") and not God.
 - iii) The Amalekites are a word picture of "the flesh". Again, when I use the term "the flesh" I am referring to the desire to do our will and not God's will.
 - iv) When the Israelites first left Egypt, the Amalekites attacked the "weakest". What does our "flesh" do when we are trying to seek God? It wants to take over our lives again. It attacks the weakest areas of our lives trying to get a "foothold".
 - v) To destroy the Amalekites is God's desire for us to destroy our own desires and to do His will in every aspect of our lives. A reason (not the reason) that God wanted the Israelites to destroy every Amalekite along with all of their possessions, is that it is a word-picture to destroy every possible temptation of the flesh.
 - a) After Moses fought the Amalekites in Exodus 17, he proclaimed:
 - (1) "The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." (Exodus 17:16b NIV)
 - b) That does not mean that every generation of Israelites had to go fight the Amalekites. It is another word-picture about fighting "our will" in order to do God's will. It is a life-long war. Remember the word "Israel" means to "struggle with God". It refers to that life long battle we all have.

f) We have actually made it to Verse 4. ☺

4. Verse 4: So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim--two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men from Judah. ⁵ Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. ⁶ Then he said to the Kenites, "Go away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites.

- a) Verse 4 mentions that Saul raised an army of 210,000 men. For the second time in 1st Samuel, the tribe of Judah was singled out as specifically having 10,000 men.
 - i) The reason Judah is singled out is not known. They may have been the largest tribe. Other speculation is that the Book of Genesis hints that the Messiah comes from the tribe of Judah and therefore, a "special mention" is given.
- b) Before the actual attack, King Saul told a tribe called the Kenites to separate themselves from the Amalekites so they wouldn't be killed. That separation teaches us a few things.
 - i) It teaches us that God didn't want to hurt the innocent with the condemned. There was no judgment pronounced on the Kenites, so there was a specific warning to them to separate themselves.
 - ii) The Kenites were "hanging around" with the Amalekites. That wasn't good. ☺
 - a) Yet still, they were spared judgment as they were not condemned.
 - iii) Verse 6 gives the reason they were spared: "They (Kenites) showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt". (Reference: Joshua 2:12-14).
- c) Notice in Verse 5, Saul set up an ambush.
 - i) First notice Saul's partial obedience. His failure, coming up in a few verses, was to not completely wipe out the Amalekites. He did partially obedience by mustering up an army and attacked. His failure was one of a lack of total obedience. That failure cost Saul his kingship.

- ii) Second, notice that Saul didn't just march in there and say, "God told me to wipe you out, so stand still while I kill you." ☺ Saul still had to be sneaky and attack them. When God does not give specific orders as to how to be obedient, I will argue it is acceptable to improvise as long as there are no biblical violations.
 - iii) God was also working in the background that no Amalekite was aware of the ambush, even though the Kenites exited the scene.
- 5. Verse 7: Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, to the east of Egypt. ⁸ He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. ⁹ But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs--everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.
 - a) To summarize, the Israelites killed a lot of Amalekites. The territory covered was from "Havilah to Shur". This is a good-sized territory that is today part of the Sinai Peninsula.
 - b) What they failed to do is to completely follow God's orders to destroy everything.
 - i) King Saul spared the King of the Amalekites.
 - ii) The soldiers spared the best of the animals. Notice in Verse 9 that everything "weak and despised" were destroyed. "Everything that was good" was spared.
 - iii) One has to wonder if the soldiers were thinking, "Hey, if King Saul can spare the King of the Amalekites, why can't we spare the best of the stuff for ourselves?" It is another example of poor leadership.
 - iv) Remember this is about executing God's judgment. To spare the "best of what is left" was to disobey what God had intended.
- 6. Verse 10: Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹ "I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the LORD all that night.
 - a) Here we have God telling Samuel that He (God) was grieved about Saul being king because Saul did not carry out God's instructions. Further, the text says that Samuel cried out to God all that night.
 - b) First, let's talk a little about this from God's perspective.
 - i) God is not an old man crying his pillow because King Saul messed up. ☺
 - ii) God, by definition, is perfect. A perfect God cannot learn. A perfect God knows all things. (Reference: Isaiah 46:10). Therefore, God knew in advance that King Saul was going to mess up before Saul was ever born.
 - iii) What is important to understand is God uses terminology that we can understand.
 - a) The idea of God grieving is not to be taken extremely literally, but to be understood that from the standpoint of human suffering it "grieves" God when we are disobedient. When we are disobedient to God's will, we suffer and those around us suffer. That is why the grieving comes in.
 - c) Next, notice Samuel grieves all night over this.
 - i) Samuel did not say, "Well of course King Saul messed up. You told me a long time ago this guy would be trouble and now look at the mess he's made. I can't wait to go chew him out and all of Israel while I'm at it". ☺
 - ii) There is a classical expression that measures Christian maturity that applies here:
 - a) How much do you hate sin? How much do you love the sinner?
 - b) Another way of putting this test, "Do you love the things that God loves? Do you grieve over the things that God grieves over?"
 - c) That is a sign of our love of God, when we desire the things God desires for our lives and grieve over the things God doesn't want for us.
 - d) Samuel grieves for Saul because God grieves for Saul.

- d) Keep in mind the word-picture of the Amalekites as a type of “flesh”. When we fail to fully eliminate our own desires for our lives it comes back to haunt us.
 - i) Here is Saul failing to be obedient to God and “killing” our own desires.
 - ii) His soldiers follow suit and keep the best of the capture for themselves.
 - iii) God does not count “partial obedience” because what we don’t kill (in this word-picture) does come back to haunt us.
7. Verse 12: Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal."
- a) The most important thing to notice is the fact that King Saul went to go “set up a monument in his own honor”.
 - i) Even if you didn’t know about the “partial obedience” and Saul’s failure to do what God told you to do, a clue that Saul is messing up is the fact he is setting up a monument in his own honor. Saul was giving himself credit for the victory.
 - b) There is an old cliché about an owner of two fighting dogs. When asked which dog usually wins the fight, the answer is “the one I feed the most that week”.
 - i) That illustration applies to our relationship with God. Here is Saul failing to be obedient to God. His ego was “feed” because he thought he was obedient. King Saul’s focus is now on himself and not God. He “fed himself” by giving himself credit for the victory and not God.
8. Verse 13: When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions." ¹⁴ But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"
- a) This is the great confrontation scene between King Saul and the Prophet Samuel.
 - i) Notice in Verse 12, Saul made a monument to himself. Now that Samuel was in front of him, now Saul says, I have carried out the Lord’s instructions.
 - ii) (Technical note: When you see the word “LORD” in all capitals, it simply means the most holy name of God is used. This is often transliterated “Jehovah”.)
 - b) You have to love Samuel’s response. Let me paraphrase: “Hey Saul, you are claiming you obeyed all of God’s orders? If that is so, why do I hear the “baah-ing” of sheep and the “moo-ing” of cows in the background?”
9. Verse 15: Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."
- a) What we have here is an excuse. King Saul knew he was disobedient and is now coming up with excuses.
 - b) This reminds me of my favorite quote about sorrow and confession:
 - i) “The blood of Christ has never covered one excuse”. Corrie Ten Boom.
10. Verse 16: "Stop!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." "Tell me," Saul replied.
- a) What was Samuel’s response to Saul’s excuse? To paraphrase, “Shut Up!” It was Samuel stating the fact that God will not accept excuses for disobedience.
 - b) Now that Samuel got King Saul to stop moving his lips, Samuel starts to tell Saul what God wanted him to do.
11. Verse 17: Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸ And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.' ¹⁹ Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?"

- a) If you remember when King Saul was first anointed king, he stated that he was from the smallest of the 12 tribes. (1st Samuel 9:21). Even when Saul was publicly proclaimed as the king, Saul was hiding and didn't want to face the crowd as king. (1st Samuel 10:22).
 - i) The point is the prophet Samuel is reciting Saul's history that God has raised him from a lowly person to be king.
 - ii) We are now many years after that event. King Saul now has a king sized ego. ☺ That ego got in the way of submitting his will to God's will.
 - b) The first key word in this paragraph is the word "completely" in Verse 18.
 - i) Saul failed to completely destroy the Amalekites.
 - ii) God is not interested in partially obedience, but full obedience.
 - iii) The next key word is "do evil" in Verse 19.
 - iv) Samuel is saying for King Saul to not do complete obedience is "evil".
 - v) My point is that God does not give half-credit. God does not say, "Oh well, you partially did what I asked you to do. I'll give you a "B-" today and let you go!" ☺
 - vi) As a Christian, we over emphasize God's grace and underestimate obedience.
 - a) Don't get me wrong. Our salvation begins and ends with God's grace. Grace is unmerited favor (and love) from God himself.
 - b) That grace should drive us to total obedience. Out of gratitude for God's grace, we need to be in full submission to God and live a life of total obedience to God. If you get nothing else out of this lesson, learn that!
 - vii) When we think of "evil", we think of killing someone or some horrible crime.
 - a) Here, God calls "evil" when we fail to be in full submission to Him.
 - b) Jesus said "If you (believers!) then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11 NIV)
 - c) God considers a lack of total obedience to be evil because "what we don't kill comes back to haunt us". Our lack of obedience leads to greater sin, as it does in Saul's case here.
 - d) God sees our lack of obedience as evil. That realization should make us even more grateful for God's mercy as well as His grace.
12. Verse 20: "But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king.²¹ The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal."
- a) Remember a few verses back Saul told Samuel to shut up. That only lasted 4 verses. ☺
 - i) Here is Saul making more excuses.
 - ii) It makes you wonder that if Saul simply confessed his sin without making excuses that God would have kept Saul as king.
 - b) It is interesting to contrast Saul's attitude with King David's attitude in 2nd Samuel, Chapter 12 when David had adulterous relations with Bathsheba. When David realized what he did was wrong, he confessed his sin without making excuses. While David had to suffer for that sin, he didn't lose the throne over the issue.
13. Verse 22: But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.
- a) Here is your memorization verse of the week. I'll even make it easier for you. ☺ All you have to do is to remember the expression "To obey is better than sacrifice".
 - b) For an Israelite, to sacrifice meant to take one of your animals and to kill it for God's sake. To kill the innocent animal is to remind yourself that when you sin, innocent suffer.

- c) To be obedient is to change your lifestyle to do what the bible teaches and do God's will.
 - d) Sacrifice means to give up something you own. Obedience involves you changing. This is why obedience is superior to sacrifice.
 - e) Think of sacrifice as a visual, outward commitment to be willing to change. Obedience is the actual change of the lifestyle.
 - f) Sacrifice emphasizes the "external", while obedience emphasizes the "internal".
14. Verse 23: For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."
- a) This is the "heaviest" verse in the chapter and has a lot of theological implications behind it. It is time to remember the riddle: How do you eat an elephant? The answer is one bite at a time. Whenever you come to a complicated issue, "eat it" slowly and steadily.
 - b) This verse starts by saying that rebellion is like the sin of divination. First of all, what is the sin of divination? Here is a clue:
 - i) "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God." (Deut. 18:10-13, NIV)
 - ii) Paul states that among the sinful acts is sorcery or witchcraft. (Galatians 5:19).
 - c) Why is God so anti-sorcery? The answer is "You're playing on the devils' turf".
 - i) If God wants us to choose Him out of our own free will, then God must make other alternatives "appealing" in order for us to freely choose Him.
 - ii) Because of that, God allows Satan all sorts of power. Among that power is sorcery, and divination. Does this mean that all people who practice sorcery and divination are Satan worshippers? No. A better answer is that they are naïve in terms of what powers they are using. They are accessing Satanic powers whether they realize it or not.
 - iii) There have been a number of psychological cases studies of people who have been demon possessed. (The movie "The Exorcist" is actually based on a number of case studies. The movie did add things not in the studies.) One of the most common "entryways" for demon possession is when people were experimenting with some sort of sorcery or divination.
 - iv) God is saying, "Don't touch that stuff because it is bad for you". That is why it is condemned as a death penalty in the bible. (See Exodus 22:18)
 - a) I am convinced most people aren't aware of how bad it is. It is like a parent telling a small child not to play in the street. The children don't realize the potential danger.
 - v) Which leads us back to the verse itself. Samuel is saying the sin of rebellion is like the sin of divination.
 - a) "Rebellion" in this context is to willfully not do what God has commanded us to do. For example, to willfully steal something is a direct violation of one of the 10 Commandments. For someone who claims to follow God and believe the bible is the Word of God, and then go out and steal is a sign of rebellion. It is the worse category of sin.

- b) Rebellion is compared to divination as in both cases, you are doing “Satan’s will” as opposed to “God’s will”. “Satan’s will” is not necessarily that you bow your knees to him. Satan’s primary purpose is to prevent and at the least, slow down God’s redemptive plan for mankind. By Satan getting you to not do God’s will, you become a bad witness for God and whether you realize it or now, you are doing “Satan’s will at the moment.”.
- c) Getting back to Samuel and King Saul, Saul understood that divination was a “no-no” and punishable by death. Samuel wanted Saul to understand that rebellion against God was equal a sin in that category.
- vi) I warned you this verse is heavy with theological thought. Let’s eat a few more bites of this “elephant”. Take a break here if you need to. ☺
- d) The next thought of this verse is “arrogance like the evil of idolatry”.
 - i) One of the Ten Commandments is to “Not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them” (Exodus 20:4-5a NIV).
 - ii) Idolatry is to make a god of anything other than the true god. When we think of idolatry, we think of making little statues and bowing down to them or treating them as good luck charms. Idolatry is much bigger than bowing down to a statue.
 - iii) Idolatry is to depend upon anything other than God for our sustenance. For example, if we believe we are successful in life due to our wonderful talents and hard work and not give God any credit, we are making an idol out of ourselves. If we think happiness comes from family or children or pleasure or money, we are making an idol out of those things.
 - iv) Again, this verse compares arrogance to idolatry.
 - a) Arrogance is about putting our will above God’s will. It is arrogant to say, “I know better than God what is best for my life right now”.
 - b) That is why arrogance is compared to idolatry. In both cases, you are making something other than God’s will a priority in our life.
- e) Even if you forget all the details of the last two pages, here is something to remember.
 - i) God takes sin seriously. God does not “brush off” sin and say to us, “Oh well, I know they are not perfect, I’ll let it slide this time”. ☺
 - ii) God does not forgive any sin. Jesus paid the price for all sin.
 - iii) This gets back to the opening them that God demands obedience. God does not say to us, “I love you and now go live however you want”. He loves us too much to let us go astray. The reason God requires obedience is to make us better people. To do God’s will is to make us a better witness for God let alone live a better life.
- f) Which leads us back to the prophet Samuel and King Saul.
 - i) King Saul was given the privilege of being the king over God’s chosen people. With privilege comes responsibility. God cannot let King Saul get away with disobedience. Because King Saul failed to kill all the Amalekites, God has proclaimed that Saul will no longer be the king. God has striped Saul of that role due to a lack of complete obedience.
 - ii) King Saul, as the leader, must also lead by example. If God allows Saul to get away with anything, the people will follow as they look to Saul as the leader.
 - iii) Some of you can see where I’m going with this. ☺ God calls us to be His “ambassadors” to nonbelievers. We have to act responsibility because His reputation is on the line. This is why God is stricter on believers than nonbelievers because we are his “witnesses” to the world.

15. Verse 24: Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them. ²⁵ Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD."
- a) I discussed this verse a little in the last lesson, but I want to repeat a key point:
 - i) Saul said, "He was afraid". Saul didn't say, "I'm sorry, period." Saul said in effect, "I'm sorry and here are my excuses for my sin."
 - ii) God is not interested in our excuses. He just wants a straight-forward confession and know that there is a desire in our hearts to change for the better.
 - iii) Saul was a man of fear. At this point in history, the Nation of Israel was a nation of fear. The Israelites wanted a king to be "just like everyone else". They were afraid of the surrounding nations and wanted a king to rule over them.
 - iv) God picked Saul to be the king as Saul is a reflection of what the people wanted. It goes back to something I said a few lessons back: Remember the Chinese curse, "Be careful what you wish for". The idea is what you wish for may not be the best thing for you. Saul is a reflection of what the people wanted.
 - v) To me, the opposite of "faith" is "fear". To be afraid of one's circumstances is about not trusting in God for the outcome. Out of fear, Saul sinned. I would argue that most of our sins come from trying to get out of whatever circumstance we are in and not trusting God at that one moment.
 - b) On the surface, it appears like King Saul is sorry for what he does and asks forgiveness.
 - i) Verse 25 is Saul begging Samuel for forgiveness. You would think God in His love for us, would say, "OK Saul, I love you. You asked for forgiveness and I'll grant it to you. Come over here and give me a hug." ☺
 - ii) Let's get an important point out of the way here and now.
 - a) Saul is "saved". I am convinced Saul is in heaven because he believed and trusted in the God of Israel.
 - b) At the same time, Saul had to deal with the consequences of his actions.
 - c) The same applies to us. When we confess our sins, God does forgive us of our sins (1st John 1:9). For the eternal perspective, our report card has been "erased" of all sins we have committed.
 - d) That does not in any way shape or form prevent God from punishing us "here and now" for our sins. We still have to suffer the consequences of that sin. Sometimes God himself intervenes and punishes us. Sometimes the sin itself has enough consequences that God lets us wallow in that sin long enough to realize the pain it has caused us.
16. Verse 26: But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!"
- a) In this verse, Samuel is making a public declaration that he will not travel another step with King Saul because God has rejected Saul to be king. By Samuel leaving in the opposite direction of Saul, Samuel wanted to make a public statement of rejection.
 - b) Samuel was looked upon as the religious leader of Israel. Saul was of course, the king and therefore the government leader of Israel. When these two got together, that was "news". For Samuel to leave in the opposite direction of King Saul would have been a visual sign to the people that Saul had messed up.
17. Verse 27: As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore.
- a) To summarize, a Samuel was about to leave, King Saul grabbed the hem (bottom edge) of the robe and it tore. Samuel is going to respond in Verse 28 to the tear by saying, "Just as you've torn my robe, so has God torn the kingdom of God from you. Further, God isn't changing His mind on this decision, so deal with it." ☺

- b) One of the things I'm going to discuss in a moment and in the next lesson is that King Saul wasn't dethroned there on the spot. In fact, it is going to be roughly another 20 years before David became King over all of Israel and Saul was officially dethroned.
 - i) I was thinking about the slow-dethroning of Saul in comparison to the robe tear. Tearing the hem of the robe doesn't mean you can't wear the robe for clothing, it just means it is "ruined" in its appearance. That word-picture is what we are going to see of Saul for the remainder of 1st Samuel. Like the robe that is still worn but "ruined by the tear", so is King Saul's remaining reign as king.
 - c) There is a cultural word-picture that doesn't come across in the English language.
 - i) For Jewish people, one wears ranks and symbols on the hem of their garment.
 - ii) Think of an American army general who has stars on his soldiers. Those stars tell anyone looking at the general what is his rank. In the same way, Jewish people would have symbols of their "rank" on the hem of their garment. Tearing of the hem is often a symbol of the tearing of power.
 - iii) Obviously the prophet Samuel did not lose his rank as prophet by King Saul tearing the garment. What is relevant is that God dethroned Saul of his rank. The tearing of the hem of the garment is a subtle word-picture of that prediction.
18. Verse 28: Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors--to one better than you.
- a) Here is Samuel's response to the tearing of the garment. I've already discussed that to death, so I'm move on.
 - b) Here is the first prediction about the rise of King David.
 - c) Samuel said the next king is "one of your neighbors". That doesn't mean that David lived on the same block as King Saul. It just means the next king would be another Israelite.
 - d) A key phrase about David in Verse 28 is that (paraphrasing) "He will be better than you".
 - i) How is David better than Saul? We'll read of David having an affair with Bathsheba. We'll read of David killing the husband of Bathseba. We'll read of David lying to the Philistines and pretending he was mad in order to save his life. How are these sins any different than Saul failing to kill all the Amalekites?
 - ii) Great question. ☺ The key difference coming up is that when David confessed his sins, he just confessed without offering excuses. Further, we'll get the sense that David tried to live his life to please God and not himself. David messed up, but then always sought God. Contrast that life with King Saul's, who was constantly afraid and acted on his fears.
 - iii) One also has to remember that this is not the first time Saul has told Samuel that he would not be king forever. Let's re-read something from Chapter 13:
 - a) "But now your (Saul's) kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart (David) and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD'S command." (1st Samuel 13:14)
 - b) The prediction in Chapter 13 was that the King Saul would not have a dynasty where his children would be kings. This prediction is that someone else would start a dynasty. The prediction is David is a "man after God's own heart". From David comes a dynasty of kings over Israel that lasts for centuries.
 - iv) My point is David is a "man after God's own heart" not because he is perfect, but he always sought to do God's will. When David messed up, he confessed and moved on. One of the big picture ideas to see about the book of 1st Samuel is to contrast Saul and David's life. God wants us to live to do his will and not be a man of fear like Saul.

19. Verse 29: He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."
- a) First of all, let me say it is good news that God does not lie or change his mind. If God were even capable of lying, then God's Word is not trustable. If God were capable of lying, then we could not trust in God's promises nor could we trust in Jesus as payment for our sins.
 - b) This verse gets back to the fact that God, by definition is perfect. If He is perfect, then he is all knowing and is incapable of changing His mind. Like the concept of lying, if God is capable of changing His mind, then we can't trust in any of God's promises.
 - c) Remember back in Verse 10 of this chapter, God said he was "grieved" that He made Saul king over Israel. Again, this is not God saying, "Oh my, I made a big mistake, sorry about that one. My fault." ☺ In Verse 10, God is using "word-pictures" that we can understand. He is "sorry" in Verse 10 in the sense that the sins caused by Saul grieved God, even though God was fully aware of what was going to happen.
 - i) Let me give you an illustration. Suppose as a parent, your child asks to do something that you are 100% certain will hurt them. You let them do it to teach them a lesson. After they get hurt, it grieves you to see them in pain, even though you knew in advance what was going to happen. That illustration is how God is working in this situation. God is all knowing, but God grieves because God knew what was best. God allowed rebellion against His will to teach obedience.
20. Verse 30: Saul replied, "I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God." ³¹ So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.
- a) This verse is about "saving face". That cliché refers to a situation where one does not want to be embarrassed in front of other people. It is not about what is actually happening as much as to not to be publicly embarrassed. Saul asked Samuel to walk back with him and not publicly embarrass Saul in front of his people.
 - b) One of the interesting words in Verse 30 is "your". Notice King Saul asks Samuel that he may go with Samuel to worship "your God".
 - i) It is as if God is of secondary importance. Saul was more concerned with losing his kingship than about who is Saul's God.
 - ii) Many commentators suspect King Saul was sorry he got caught and did not truly repent of his actions. The fact that Saul said "your God" here is a clue that Saul has not, deep down, changed his heart toward God.
 - c) In Verse 31, Samuel agreed to go with Saul and Saul worshipped God.
 - i) A few verses back, Samuel appeared to be headstrong against the idea of going back with King Saul. Samuel was saying in effect, "Look Saul, God has rejected you and since it is my job to obey God, I must walk away from you".
 - ii) In Verse 31, Samuel is saying in effect, "Sigh, ok Saul. You still lost your kingship, but in order to make you look good in front of the people, I'll concede."
 - iii) Remember that, as best we can tell, God never commanded Samuel to avoid Saul like the plague. ☺ That was Samuel's idea. For Samuel to concede and go with Saul was not necessarily a sin.
21. Verse 32: Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites." Agag came to him confidently, thinking, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." ³³ But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women." And Samuel put Agag to death before the LORD at Gilgal.

- a) A few chapters back we had Samuel saying in effect, “Look, I’m an old man now and my kids are out there in the audience while I’m up here on stage about to make Saul a king.” I visualized Samuel as an old man with a beard. Yet here we see Samuel killing King Agag. Not only killing Agag, but killing him aggressively and violently.
 - i) The NIV translation says here, “Samuel put Agag to death”.
 - ii) The NKJV translation says, ‘Samuel hacked Agag in pieces”.
 - iii) The NIV translation is not literal enough in what happened.
 - iv) Further, it shows that despite Samuel’s age, God can use anyone “physically” to accomplish His mission.
 - b) Remember that Saul’s sin was a lack of full obedience before God.
 - i) Samuel completes the obedience by killing the King of Agag.
 - ii) Samuel teaches us that Agag was no innocent king. Verse 33 implies that he killed children. God was showing Saul (not Agag, he was about die!) and the Israelites that God does not tolerate those who kill the innocent. Samuel was carrying out God’s judgment on Agag.
 - iii) This reminds me that God does believe in the death penalty for certain sins.
 - a) That is not a contradiction to “Thou shall not kill” (Exodus 20:13 KJV).
 - (1) That commandment is about not murdering the innocent.
 - (2) That commandment does not apply to killing the condemned.
 - (3) The bible does teach in giving a fair trial (e.g., Deut. 17:6), but if one is found guilty of a capital crime, then it is a fair punishment.
22. Verse 34: Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. ³⁵ Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.
- a) This last verse is an epilogue statement. There are a couple of key points:
 - i) Samuel and King Saul parted here, never to see each other again.
 - ii) Samuel still mourned for Saul after his disobedience and “de-throning”.
 - iii) God “grieved” that He made Saul King.
 - b) Notice “Samuel grieved as God “grieved”.
 - i) I’ve already discussed the idea that God is not sitting around grumbling about Saul being king. The idea of God “grieving” is written from “our perspective” to help us understand the sorrow that takes place when sin occurs.
 - ii) Samuel grieved for Saul even though Saul knew of his shortcomings. The grieving was not so much “poor Saul” as it was that Samuel understood how King Saul’s lack of obedience had hurt Saul as well as the people.
 - iii) The lesson for us is that “Christianity is not intended to be a solo act”.
 - a) For example, if we see someone who trusts in God “fail”, we are not to say, “Well, too bad for you. Who’s next? ☺ One of the goals for Christians is to help others mature in their faith. Samuel was like a “teacher” to Saul. For many teachers, “when the students fail, the teacher’s fail”. Samuel grieved because he prayed for Saul, he ministered to Saul, yet Saul out of his own free will still was not obedient to God.
 - b) The lesson to us is when we see fellow believers failing, we too should grieve and not take a “holier-than-thou” attitude toward them.
23. This chapter marks the end of Saul’s “official” end of King.
- a) In the next chapter, David is anointed king, but he won’t be in charge for many chapters and some believe is roughly a twenty year period.

- b) The remainder of 1st Samuel is about the fall of Saul and the rise of David as king.
- c) Next week I'll get into the issue of why David was chosen as a young man (most suspect he was between 10-15 years old when Samuel anointed him) as opposed to anointing David when he was an adult. I'll also talk about why Saul was "de-throned" here, when he doesn't officially lose his title for 20 more years.
 - i) (OK, I can't wait. ☺) The word-picture is to see Saul as a type of the "flesh" and our old sinful nature. David is a picture of a person doing God's will. Let's just say the "flesh dies slowly" and for one to mature as a Christian, one must "fight our human nature". That is what David will do for the next (approx.) 20 years.

24. Let's Pray: Heavenly, father, we thank you for these lessons about obedience. Help us to remember daily that we are saved by Your grace, but that grace demands obedience as gratitude for what You've done for us. Search out our lives, and show us ways where we are still not doing Your will in our lives, even if that revelation is painful. Guide us, and give us the boldness to go forth to do your will, as we live to glorify You. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.