

1 Samuel 15:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

Analysis

Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

Saul's failure demonstrates that partial obedience is disobedience, and religious activity cannot substitute for heart surrender. His pattern of excuses, blame-shifting, and selective compliance while maintaining outward religious appearance warns against external religion without internal transformation. The pronouncement that 'to obey is better than sacrifice' establishes that God desires humble submission over impressive religious performance. Saul's rejection teaches that prolonged disobedience, even mixed with apparent faithfulness, eventually results in God's withdrawal of calling and blessing.

Historical Context

The establishment of monarchy around 1050-1010 BCE represented a dramatic political and theological shift for Israel. Unlike surrounding nations where kings were considered divine or semi-divine, Israel's kings were supposed to function under God's ultimate authority as laid out in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. The Benjamite tribe occupied strategic territory between Ephraim and Judah, making Saul's selection a politically astute choice to balance tribal rivalries.

Archaeological remains from this period show increased fortification and centralization of settlements, confirming the transition to state-level organization.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does this passage clarify the relationship between genuine faith and concrete obedience, and what does it teach about partial compliance?
2. Are there areas where you practice selective obedience, substituting religious activity for heart-level surrender to God's commands?
3. How does this passage connect to the larger biblical narrative of redemption and point toward Christ and the gospel?

Interlinear Text

כָּל	אֶת	וְהִכְרַמְתֶּם	עַמֶּלִי ק	אֶת	וְהִכִּיתָ ה	לְךָ	עֲתָה
H3605	H853	H2763	H6002	H853	H5221	H1980	H6258
		and utterly destroy	Amalek		and smite		
וְהִמַּתָּ ה	עַל יו	תַּחֲמֹל ל	וְלֹא א	ל ו	אֲשֶׁר		
H4191	H5921	H2550	H3808	H0	H834		
	them not but slay	all that they have and spare					
וְעַד	בָּשׂ ור	יֹנֵק ק	וְעַד	מְעַלְל	אִשָּׁה	עַד	יָמָא יֵשׁ
H5704	H7794	H3243	H5704	H5768	H802	H5704	H376
	ox	and suckling		infant	and woman		both man
חֲמֹר:	וְעַד	מִגֶּמֶל ל	שֶׁ ה				
H2543	H5704	H1581	H7716				
	and ass	camel	and sheep				

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 24:20 (Parallel theme): And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.

Numbers 31:17 (Parallel theme): Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him.

1 Samuel 22:19 (Parallel theme): And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org