

Saul's Disobedience

King Saul fails crucial tests of obedience—offering a sacrifice in impatience and sparing what God commanded to be destroyed. God rejects him as king.

1 Samuel 13:1-15 • 1 Samuel 15:1-35

CHARACTERS: Saul, Samuel, Jonathan, Agag

THEMES: Obedience, Pride, Partial obedience, Rejection, Consequences

SAUL'S REIGN BEGAN with promise but soon revealed a fatal flaw: he valued results over obedience, appearance over reality, and his own judgment over God's explicit commands.

The first crisis came at Gilgal. Saul and his army were preparing to fight the Philistines, whose forces were vast—chariots, horsemen, and soldiers as numerous as sand on the seashore. Israel's army was terrified. Men hid in caves, thickets, rocks, pits, and cisterns. Others fled across the Jordan.

Saul waited at Gilgal for seven days, the time Samuel had appointed to come and offer sacrifices. But Samuel did not arrive, and the men began scattering. In desperation, Saul said, 'Bring me the burnt offering and fellowship offerings.' And he offered the burnt offering himself—something only priests were authorized to do.

Just as he finished, Samuel arrived. 'What have you done?' Samuel asked.

Saul made excuses: 'When I saw the men scattering, and you did not come at the set time, and the Philistines were assembling, I thought, "Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord's favor." So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.'

Notice the reasoning: pressure of circumstances, fear of consequences, and the belief that the ends justified the means. But Samuel's response was devastating: 'You have done a foolish thing. You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command.'

It was a terrible verdict. But Saul would have another chance—a final test that would seal his fate.

God commanded Saul through Samuel: 'Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.' This was divine judgment against Amalek for their treacherous attack on Israel during the exodus.

Saul assembled his forces and attacked. But he did not obey completely. He totally destroyed all the people with the sword—except King Agag. And he took the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs, and everything that was good, claiming it was too good to destroy.

The word of the Lord came to Samuel: 'I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.' Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the Lord all that night.

In the morning, Samuel went to meet Saul. When Saul saw him, he said cheerfully, 'The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions.'

But Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?'

Caught in his lie, Saul shifted blame: '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.'

'Your God,' not 'our God.' The distance was already forming.

Samuel interrupted: 'Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. 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.'

Those words echo through time: obedience is better than sacrifice. God wants hearts surrendered to His will, not religious performances that mask disobedience.

Only then did Saul confess: 'I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin.'

But it was too late. 'I will not go back with you,' Samuel said. 'You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!' As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said, 'The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one better than you.'

Samuel put Agag to death and then went to Ramah. He never went to see Saul again, though he mourned for him. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

Partial obedience is disobedience. Good intentions do not excuse disobedience. And no religious activity can substitute for a heart that says, 'Not my will, but Yours be done.'