



# Community Group Discussion Guide

November 17, 2024

1 Samuel 15: 1-35 | Saul's Rejection

## MOTIVATE

⇒ **Starter Question: Think of a time when you deliberately disobeyed a rule or a law and were confronted with the result. How did you respond?**

*Optional Activity: Play a quick round of the Telephone Game. Pick one person to start. That person will whisper a short sentence into the ear of the person next to him or her, who then whispers the same sentence to the next person, and so on. The last person shares out loud the sentence they heard, then the first person shares the original sentence. To wrap up the activity, ask "Who was the first person to get it wrong?" See if anyone owns up to being the first person to translate incorrectly, or if people are eager to pass the buck to someone else. This silly game highlights how easy it is to make mistakes and how likely we are to justify them.*

⇒ **What does it feel like to be confronted with a mistake, small or large?**

## DISCUSS

In 1 Samuel 13, Saul lost his prospects for an enduring royal dynasty. In 1 Samuel 14, he lost an opportunity to route the Philistines as well as the respect of his own people. In 1 Samuel 15, Saul lost his kingdom. The rest of 1 Samuel narrates Saul's continued decline and the rise of another to take his place. (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for more information.)

1 Samuel 15:1-35 doesn't contain any chronological indicators, but this chapter marks a significant event in Israel's history, giving further answers to the question: Why did God reject Saul as king? This passage contains challenging material: verses that seem to question God's omniscience, verses that appear to contradict each other, and descriptions of violence that are hard to grasp. But it has a lot to teach about repentance, obedience, God's nature, and the need for our true King, Jesus Christ.

⇒ **How should we approach Scripture that is confusing or shocking?**

**1 Samuel 15:1-3** *And Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. 2 Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. 3 Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"*

After reminding Saul of his anointing, Samuel indicated that God had given him a clear word for the king: attack the Amalekites and completely destroy them and all they had. The Amalekites, from the line of Esau, were a nomadic tribe that lived south of Judah. They were plunderers who had attacked the Israelites shortly after their exodus from Egypt. God prophesied that He would entirely blot out the Amalekites because of their pagan practices and for the way they came against His people. (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19; Numbers 14:39-45)

Because God is holy and just, He could not allow the sin of the Amalekites to go unpunished. He pronounced total judgment on them. The Hebrew word translated "totally destroy" is *charam*, which invokes holy war. In a holy war, the people and the possessions of an entire city were set apart or devoted to God and destroyed. Saul was instructed to not spare anyone or anything.

⇒ **Discuss God's command to totally destroy the Amalekites. Is this challenging for you to accept? Why or why not?**

⇒ **How can you apply this concept of "total destruction" to your faith journey?**

**1 Samuel 15:4-6** *So Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand men on foot, and ten thousand men of Judah. 5 And Saul came to the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the valley. 6 Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart; go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.*

Saul called up an army of 210,000 men and led them just beyond Israel's southern border. Before attacking the Amalekites, Saul released the Kenites. This was also a nomadic tribe that lived in the hill country of southeast Judah. Moses' father, Jethro, was described as a Kenite in Judges 1:16. The Kenites lived among the Amalekites during the time of Saul. This grace was extended by Saul because of the kindness the Kenites showed to Israel during their Exodus (there is no Old Testament reference to what this kindness entailed).

⇒ **What does this release of the Kenites teach about God's grace as well as His heart for His people?**

**1 Samuel 15:7-9** *And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. 8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.*

Saul waged an extensive war against the Amalekites. There are not many details as this was not the narrator's focus. However, Havilah to Shur covered the modern area of the Arabian Desert to the Mediterranean coast (about 60 miles). The population as a whole was slaughtered, but the king, Agag, was captured and spared, as well as some of the choice livestock.

The original Hebrew emphasizes that Saul was primarily responsible for keeping Agag alive. But the text also indicates that the people disobeyed by only destroying the undesirable items and keeping the best for themselves. Saul had an opportunity to show his covenant leadership by being obedient to this task, yet he did not hold himself or his soldiers accountable.

⇒ **What are other biblical examples in which God gave an explicit command that was not obeyed? (Examples: collecting manna on the Sabbath or Jonah running away to Ninevah.)**

⇒ **Have you ever received a directive from God that you ignored? What was the result?**

**1 Samuel 15:10-12** *The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 11 "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. 12 And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal."*

God spoke to Samuel about Saul's conscious decision to turn away from following His commandments. The verb "regret" with God as the subject is also used in Genesis 6:5-7, where God grieved over the wickedness of man and sent the Great Flood. In both situations God knew that the people and Saul would disobey. Despite His foreknowledge, God was still pained by these choices.

This is not to say that God made the wrong choice in appointing Saul as king. Since God is perfect and all-knowing, He cannot make the wrong choice. But God is not devoid of feeling and He takes no pleasure in sin, which led Him to grieve over Saul's decisions. Saul had stopped following God and had turned back to follow his own desires.

⇒ **Discuss what it means for God to have regret over Saul's kingship. How can God regret, but not have made the wrong decision?**

⇒ **Why does sin grieve God?**

Samuel was intensely bothered by what transpired, as indicated by his cries to God throughout the night. It's possible he was concerned for the future of the nation or was disappointed by Saul's tenure as king. This feeling must have intensified when he learned that Saul built a monument to himself at the site of the battle. In doing this, Saul demonstrated that he saw this victory over the Amalekites as a personal accomplishment, instead of ordained and given by God.

⇒ **What did Saul's actions reveal about his character?**

**1 Samuel 15:13-16** *And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." 14 And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?" 15 Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction." 16 Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak."*

Saul returned to Gilgal (where he was anointed as king) and Samuel met him to confront his disobedience. Saul seemed to be pleased with himself, seemingly ignorant of his transgression and the impending consequences. When Samuel pointed out the spoils of war that proved Saul's disobedience, the king blamed the people. As the covenant leader, Saul should have taken ownership even if he was unaware of their choices.

Not only did Saul shift the blame, but he attempted to justify the choices by claiming the livestock were taken to make sacrifices to God. Saul used a phrase, that was subtle but critical in showing where his heart lay: the LORD *your* God. He did not say, "my God," or even, "our God," but instead identified Yahweh as Samuel's God. Samuel commanded Saul to stop--an action not typical of a layperson to a king. Samuel could not abide the excuses or lies anymore and prepared to tell Saul what God had decided.

- ⇒ **When confronted with sin, Saul blamed others. Can you think of other examples in the Bible where humans defaulted to this type of blame? Is this often your first response when confronted with sin?**
- ⇒ **Why is the phrase "the LORD your God" so impactful here? What does it say about Saul's relationship with God? How does this impact his choices?**

**1 Samuel 15:17-21** *And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. 18 And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' 19 Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?" 20 And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. 21 But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."*

Samuel reminded Saul that it was God who appointed him as king and gave him authority and notoriety. God took a nobody and made him a covenant leader. Yet Saul's self-centeredness led him to ignore God's commands. Samuel made it clear that Saul had disobeyed, but Saul did not see God's perspective.

God gave an explicit command to destroy everything associated with the Amalekites. Even if Saul had good intentions, he still did not follow the command. Samuel, being a descendant of a Levite, was not discouraging Saul from making sacrifices. Rather, Samuel knew that the sacrifices would not compensate for the disobedience. God did not need sacrifices, like the surrounding gods of the nations did. The people needed the sacrifices to make them holy before the Lord. So a sacrifice given without obedience did nothing for the people and was meaningless to God.

⇒ **How should the knowledge that God had raised him up to lead the people have impacted Saul's decisions?**

**1 Samuel 15:22-23** *And 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 listen than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.*

Samuel drove home his point by stating, "To obey is better than sacrifice." He compared Saul's rebellion here to divination, implying that Saul attempted to use the sacrifice to manipulate God. The Hebrew word translated to idolatry here is *teraphim*. These were handmade idols that the people offered food and gifts to when making requests or to gain blessings. Saul was using the spoils of war as sacrifices to gain blessings, just like the pagan Amalekites he was commanded to destroy. Saul's clear rejection of God's commands and values resulted in God's rejection of his kingship.

⇒ **Discuss Samuel's words: To obey is better than sacrifice. How can you apply this principle?**  
 ⇒ **What are the "teraphim" in your life? How do you attempt to manipulate God's responses to your requests?**

**1 Samuel 15:24-31** *Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. 25 Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD." 26 And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." 27 As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. 28 And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. 29 And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret." 30 Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God." 31 So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the LORD*

Only after hearing the consequence of his actions did Saul attempt to repent. However his response was to request Samuel to forgive him, indicating that Saul likely did not understand the divine dimension of his offense. Saul continued to focus on his appearance before the people by asking Samuel to return with him.

⇒ **Compare Saul's response to David's in Psalm 51:1-4. What do you notice about the way each king repented?**

Saul knew that conflict between him and Samuel would tarnish his image, as the people still respected Samuel's leadership. Samuel must have doubted the sincerity of Saul's repentance. The prophet also trusted God's decision, so he declined to go with Saul and validate his reign before the people.

Knowing this would result in public humiliation, Saul began to act more desperately. When Samuel turned to leave, Saul grabbed the hem of Samuel's robe and it tore. Samuel used this dramatic moment to further the point that God's decision to reject Saul was final and a succession plan was already in place. The phrase "this day" is a legally binding pronouncement. The phrase "neighbor of yours" indicates a fellow Israelite who would be better than Saul.

Samuel also pointed to God's character as another indicator that the decision was final. He called God "the Glory of Israel," a name that speaks of His radiance, eminence, and perfection. God cannot lie, nor can feelings cause Him to reverse His judgment. Saul pleaded for a third time, but his self-centeredness could not be clearer. He still spoke of Yahweh as "the Lord *your* God," and "the elders of *my* people." Both statements indicate his misunderstanding of his position and his actions. Even through this exchange, Saul still thought about appearances. He continued to plead with Samuel to honor him before the elders by returning with him. Samuel reluctantly agreed.

- ⇒ **What does Saul's desperate response reveal about him?**
- ⇒ **Compare the way the word "regret" is used in verse 11 to verse 29. How can these verses both be true? What is the difference between the way they are being used?**

**1 Samuel 15:32-35** Then Samuel said, "Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." **33** And Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal. **34** Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. **35** And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

What Saul had failed to do; Samuel carried out. When they returned, Samuel called for Agag, the Amalekite king. Agag thought that his time for death had passed, but God would not allow him to be spared any longer.

Agag was slain publicly, and "before the LORD," probably meaning on the altar at Gilgal. The word "hacked" appears only here in the Old Testament. The precise meaning is unclear, but it likely indicates this was not a normal death. This act of divine justice carried out by Samuel was a public rebuke of Saul's disobedience. While this public display finalized the rift between Samuel and Saul, Samuel continued to mourn Saul's actions and the resulting consequences. There is no further indication of repentance on Saul's behalf, which is reinforced in the last sentence by God's continued grief over his reign.

- ⇒ **What is the impact of Samuel carrying out divine justice instead of Saul?**
- ⇒ **How does the complete failure of Israel's first king pave the way for Christ as King?**

## TRANSFORM

**1. Make personal application:** Much like Saul, God has given us clear commands in the Bible, yet we often add our own twist to His Words, resulting in disobedience. We are prone to shift blame or attempt to justify instead of confessing and repenting. We rely on religious rituals or spiritual traditions instead of pursuing a deep, meaningful relationship with our Creator. When we face suffering or uncertainty, we may attempt to bargain with God for answers or blessings. Or we turn to idols, like money, jobs, or relationships, to protect or satisfy us. All of this creates disconnection from the Lord and starts the downward spiral of disobedience to Him.

- ⇒ **Share a personal example of when you were confronted with sin and responded negatively. What further consequences or experiences did that create?**
- ⇒ **Are you more likely to rely on religious traditions or turn toward an idol when feeling disconnected from God? Why are both options insufficient?**
- ⇒ **Why are obedience and repentance still important as redeemed, forgiven children of God? What happens to your relationship with your Father when you disregard one or both of these acts?**

**2. Pray:** Praise God for His holy, just, and merciful nature. Confess when you have fallen short of His commands and ask for His forgiveness. Thank Him for His grace in your life and for Jesus, the true King.

## STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Christian Standard Study Bible* (2017), pages 432-434.
- *English Standard Version Study Bible* (2008), pages 579-581.
- *ESV Expository Commentary: 1 Samuel-2 Chronicles* (2019), pages 162-172.
- *Holman Old Testament Commentary I & II Samuel* (2009), pages 98-107.
- *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pages 54, 978-979.
- *NIV Application Commentary I & II Samuel* (2021), page 223.
- *Wiersbe Bible Commentary, OT* (2007), page 519.