

October 25

Scriptures: Read 1 Samuel 15

Key Verse: “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice”. (1 Samuel 15:22)

Overview

As the leader of Israel, Saul was used by God to accomplish His purpose of deliverance. Yet, at the same time, Saul was being tested. Once again, Saul failed miserably. He did not fully obey God when told through the prophet Samuel to utterly destroy every Amalekite and their animals. Royal succession to the throne was lost to his family when he failed the first test by disobediently offering the sacrifices (13:13-14). Personal and final rejection of his kingship by God resulted from the failure of this second test.

The Amalekites, descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:12), had been constant enemies of Israel. The reason given for their extermination was their cruel surprise attack upon Israel’s weak rear ranks (likely many women and children) in the Sinai, shortly after the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 17:8, 14; Deuteronomy 25:18-19). Their sin had reached the point of intolerance; therefore, they were put “under the ban” and “doomed to destruction” by God (Leviticus 27:29). As such they were accursed and to spare any of them or take any spoil would be a sin against God (just as it had been with Achan, Joshua 6:17-18; 7:1, 11, 20-21, 25).

Saul had most certainly understood the divine command, for Samuel had made it very clear. Rather than obeying and pleasing God, he was more interested in pleasing the people and allowed them to take the best of the spoil. He set up a monument for himself, thus taking the glory for the victory rather than giving it to God (15:12). Saul’s pride was also evident in his taking the Amalekite king Agag alive to show everyone his own accomplishment. Samuel’s words, “when you were little in your own eyes...” imply that once Saul had been humble, but now he considered himself “big” in his own eyes. A servant of God must always remain humble before Him. This is done by always remembering that without God we can do nothing.

When confronted by Samuel, Saul spoke words of repentance, but they did not come from his heart, for he still tried to make excuses and put the blame on the people rather than confessing his own guilt. He also tried to rationalize the taking of the animals by saying they were to be sacrifices to the Lord. Samuel responded forcefully with the classic, well-known Bible truth: “To obey is better than sacrifice” (15:22; cf. Hosea 6:6; Isaiah 1:11-17). No amount of religiosity can take the place of obedience, true devotion to God, and purity of heart. This was the very reason Jesus so often rebuked the Pharisees (Mark 12:30-33).

Samuel accused Saul of rebelliousness, which is equivalent to the abomination of witchcraft, and stubbornness against the will of God, which is equivalent to the sin of idolatry. He said that because of these sins, Saul had rejected the word of God, and therefore God rejected him as king (15:23). Saul had violated the main requirements for the king, which were to “fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the Lord” (12:14).

And so the Lord regretted making Saul king (15:11). We know our God never makes mistakes, nor changes His mind, as verse 29 clearly states; yet without closer examination this is what

verse 11 seems to imply. Some versions of the text refer to it as God repenting that He had made Saul king. The repentance of God, unlike that of man, refers to a change in the administration of God's plan according to the new situation of man. God's promises and threats are often conditional, because He created mankind to have a free will. When there is a change (like the change of heart in Saul) in the person God is using, He in turn has a corresponding change in His plans toward that one. In the case of Saul, even though God had to reject him, it did not change His overall purpose of salvation for the nation of Israel. God had already chosen another human instrument to fulfill His purpose.

Prayer

O Lord, keep us small in our own eyes, as King Saul originally was, so that You will be big in our eyes. We worship You, great and mighty God. Our souls magnify You.