



Obedience

Because Saul failed to follow God's instructions, the Lord rejected him as king.

Scripture Passage: 1 Samuel 15:7-23 **Memory Verse: 1 Samuel 15:22**

Every parent wants their child to learn obedience, to honor the directions of parents, teachers, and authorities, along with the basic rules of life. Meanwhile, many dog owners spend a lot of money on obedience training for their canines. They work with their dogs continually teaching them to obey. Cat owners—well, not so much! Just think about why we use the phrase, "trying to herd cats!"

Nothing, however, is as important as learning to obey the God who created us. Because He created us and certainly knows what is best for us, following His direction in life always leads to the very best. To disobey is to miss out on God's best. We will see that truth illustrated in today's sad story of Saul and his propensity to disobedience.

God doesn't expect us to be perfect, but He does expect us to pursue Him with our entire lives. As you dig into today's passage from 1 Samuel 15, take time to evaluate whether your obedience is whole-hearted. Remember . . . partial obedience is really just another way to say "disobedient." Pray that you and the adults in your Bible study experience a renewed commitment to obeying God.

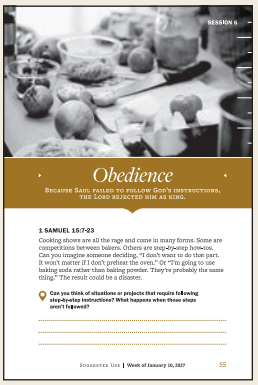
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Cooking shows are all the rage and come in many forms. Some are competitions between bakers. Others are step-by-step how-tos. Can you imagine someone deciding, "I don't want to do that part. It won't matter if I don't preheat the oven." Or "I'm going to use baking soda rather than baking powder. They're probably the same thing." The result could be a disaster. (PSG, p. 55)

Can you think of situations or projects that require following step-by-step instructions? What happens when those steps aren't followed?


SESSION 6

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1 SAMUEL 15:7-23

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Understand the Context (1 Samuel 12:1–15:35)

Three incidents illustrate the spiritual bankruptcy that led to Saul's fall as king of Israel. The context begins with Samuel transferring the nation's authority from a theocracy under the guidance of God-anointed leaders to the first king of the monarchy. Israel had been guided by judges for nearly five centuries. During this transition, Samuel spoke of his integrity and his blameless character. The people affirmed his words.

Samuel concluded his speech by recounting God's faithfulness and the continuing rebellion of His chosen people. Samuel paid special attention to the current act of rebellion—requesting a king to be like other nations. Although the people repented of their request, Samuel and the Lord gave them what they wanted. Saul was installed as king, but Samuel included another warning about the danger of deserting God. Yet, the old priest and judge vowed to remain faithful to God and to continue praying for the people and their king.

First Samuel 13–15 describe the three instances where Saul acted foolishly. Within two years of his coronation, Saul had built an army and fought the Philistines. Saul's forces were outnumbered, and many of soldiers deserted out of fear. Perhaps out of superstition, Saul decided that a sacrifice to the Lord was needed to ensure His presence on the battlefield.

However, Samuel delayed in coming to offer the sacrifice. The reason for this delay might have been a test of Saul's patience and trust in God. Regardless, the impatient king performed the sacrifice himself, an act reserved for priests. When Samuel arrived, he condemned Saul for his blatant violation of God's law. The consequence, Samuel said, was that Saul's kingdom would not last.

Later, Saul foolishly tried to impress his troops by proclaiming a fast until the end of the battle. Such a move prevented a total victory because his men were too weak. Saul's decision also put the life of his son, Jonathan, in danger. Saul sentenced Jonathan to death for unwittingly violating the fast, but the other soldiers intervened on Jonathan's behalf.

Strike three against Saul is the focus of this session. After a battle, Saul directly disobeyed God's order to destroy the Amalekites and all their livestock and property. He claimed to have saved animals for sacrifices, but Samuel made it clear that God was more interested in obedience than burnt offerings.

Through these incidents, we can discern Saul's spiritual shallowness in the form of pride and impatience. We see how dishonesty and disobedience robbed him of a lasting dynasty. God would replace him with David, "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14).

As you read 1 Samuel 15:7-23, identify the words or phrases that show Saul's partial obedience, and the excuses he made for partial obedience. (PSG, p. 56)

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ENGAGE

PREPARE: On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*) and **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Prophets, Priests, Kings*). Prepare copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: 1 Samuel Time Line*).







READ: Invite a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 55 of the PSG. Allow volunteers to describe times when they tried making a dish without using the recipe.

ASK: **Can you think of situations or projects that require following step-by-step instructions? What happens when those steps aren't followed?** (PSG, p. 55)

IDENTIFY: On **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*) point out the nation of Amalek on the southern border of Israel. Explain who the Amalekites were and what they did to the Israelites.

> *The Amalekites were the descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:10-12). Although they had been a semi-nomadic people, they eventually settled in the northeastern part of the Sinai Peninsula. This was a desolate region that bordered on what would be the southern border of Israel. . . . [During the exodus] the Amalekites engaged the Israelites militarily, attacking the stragglers who were at the rear of the throng of Israelites, meaning the most weak and vulnerable. This unprovoked attack demonstrated that the Amalekites were not beyond engaging in barbaric warfare (see Deut. 25:17-19). Because of their military atrocities, God, in essence, told Moses to mark His words—He would wipe the Amalekites from the pages of history (Ex. 17:8-14).* (PSG, p. 56)

TRANSITION: *Today's study begins with Saul fulfilling God's plan to destroy the Amalekites. However, the king did not completely obey God—and he faced consequences for his actions.*

Group Activity Option

Music

Distribute hymnals and guide adults to find "Change My Heart, O God" (*Baptist Hymnal 2008*, No. 529). Guide adults to read aloud the lyrics of this hymn. Ask: ***When and why do we need to ask God to "change" our hearts? How do we demonstrate a heart that is "ever true" to the Lord?*** Explain that today's study examines a time when Saul's heart was not loyal to God, and he faced consequences for his disobedience. Lead adults to sing the hymn.

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Partial Obedience (1 Sam. 15:7-11)

7 Then Saul struck down the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is next to Egypt. 8 He captured King Agag of Amalek alive, but he completely destroyed all the rest of the people with the sword. 9 Saul and the troops spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, goats, cattle, and choice animals, as well as the young rams and the best of everything else. They were not willing to destroy them, but they did destroy all the worthless and unwanted things. 10 Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel, 11 "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned away from following me and has not carried out my instructions." So Samuel became angry and cried out to the LORD all night.

(v. 7) God's instruction to Saul through Samuel was to destroy Amalek completely. This included all the people, as well as the "oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys" (1 Sam. 15:3). Like Jericho (Josh. 6:15-19), all the •***Amalekites*** and their property were put under God's ban. Every trace of their existence was to be wiped away.

The *Amalekites* were relatives of Esau's grandson, Amalek. They lived in the wilderness areas of southern Israel (called the Negev) and were long-time enemies of Israel, having attacked them after the exodus.

Because they opposed Israel, Amalek also opposed God, and the Lord had declared perpetual war against them because of their wickedness (Ex. 17:14-16). Saul's mission was to be God's instrument in bringing His severest judgment on Amalek. Because he was acting on God's directions, Saul had no right to improvise.

The battle stretched from ***Havilah all the way to Shur***. This phrase referred to the entire area from Arabia to the borders of ***Egypt***. With more than two hundred thousand fighting men (1 Sam. 15:4), Saul's army could have engaged Amalek along the entire southern border of Israel.

(v. 8) While Saul and his troops ***completely destroyed*** the Amalekites, they captured ***King •Agag of Amalek*** alive. This amounted to a direct violation of God's command.

Why spare the king? Perhaps Saul intended to execute him later or he might have spared *Agag* as a trophy of battle. Regardless, Samuel would later execute Agag personally (15:32-33).

The passage states that Saul *completely destroyed* Amalek. This probably referred to killing all the Amalekites who were present on the battlefield. The Amalekites would show up again in 1 Samuel 30:1 as enemies of Israel.

(v. 9) A recurring theme in Saul's life was blaming others. His pride left him unwilling to take responsibility for his actions. Verse 9 states that ***Saul and the troops*** spared ***the best*** of the animals. They destroyed everything seen as ***worthless and unwanted***, while keeping the good things for themselves.

Yet, Saul later told Samuel that only his soldiers were to blame (v. 15). But soldiers reflect their leader. Saul had set the example by sparing Agag. Then, he condoned taking anything that seemed valuable. This was a direct violation of God's command (v. 3). This was not an accident or oversight. The phrase ***not willing*** indicates an intentional choice to ignore God's words.

Key Doctrine

God

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. (See Psalm 139:1-6; Proverbs 15:3.)

(vv. 10-11) God expressed ***regret*** twice in the Old Testament. He used that wording two times in the account of Noah (Gen. 6:6-7), and He used it two times in this chapter to describe Saul's reign as king (vv. 11,35). God's *regret* was rooted in Saul's rebellion. God told Samuel that Israel's king had ***turned away from following me***. The leader of God's people had rejected God's ***instructions***.

Upon hearing God's words, Samuel grew ***angry*** and ***cried out*** to God. The object of Samuel's anger is not specified, but it is reasonable to think that he was responding to Saul's actions.

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APPLICATION POINT: God expects His people to obey His commands completely.

RECAP: Use **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Prophets, Priests, Kings*) to summarize the role of kings in ancient Israel, Remind adults that God had chosen Saul as Israel's first king. Point out Saul's anointing around 1050 BC on **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: 1 Samuel Time Line).* Explain that 1 Samuel 15 begins with God telling Saul to destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:3).





READ: **Enlist a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 15:7-11** as adults listen for the actions of Saul and the Israelite troops.

DISCUSS: Guide adults to call out actions that Saul and his troops took that were in obedience to God's command. Direct them to identify ways they did not follow God's directions.

ASK: **Why did the Lord regret making Saul the king of Israel?**

EXPLAIN: Summarize this content to provide insight into God's regret:

> "The only other time we read of the Lord making a similar statement was in Noah's day when God regretted making mankind (Gen. 6:6-7). . . . Here His regret was focused on one man, Saul. That he had not carried out God's instructions showed he had turned away from following Him. Saul had earlier disobeyed God (1 Sam. 13). Fearing imminent military danger, he offered sacrifices—a role reserved for the priest. . . . Samuel confronted him for his disobedience." (PSG, pp. 57-58)

ASK: **What motivated Saul and the Israelites to get rid of only the worthless and unwanted things? How do you think they justified that choice in their minds?** (PSG, p. 58)

APPLY: Challenge adults to spend time talking with God this week about areas where they are not following Him completely.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Trash Can

Place a small trash can in the center of the group. Give each adult two slips of paper. Guide them to draw an image of something they have removed from their lives because it hindered their spiritual growth. Instruct them to tear up that piece of paper and toss it in the trash can. Encourage them to reflect on other things that need to be removed and to draw a symbol of that item on the second slip of paper. Guide them to keep that slip of paper to use as a prayer prompt this week.

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Making Excuses (1 Sam. 15:12-15)

12 Early in the morning Samuel got up to confront Saul, but it was reported to Samuel, "Saul went to Carmel where he set up a monument for himself. Then he turned around and went down to Gilgal." 13 When Samuel came to him, Saul said, "May the LORD bless you. I have carried out the LORD's instructions." 14 Samuel replied, "Then what is this sound of sheep, goats, and cattle I hear?" 15 Saul answered, "The troops brought them from the Amalekites and spared the best sheep, goats, and cattle in order to offer a sacrifice to the LORD your God, but the rest we destroyed."

(v. 12) As he cried to the Lord (v. 11), ***Samuel*** received word from God that Saul's kingdom was doomed. This was similar to the word he had received as a youth concerning the priest Eli and his sons (1 Sam. 3:11-14). Now, God was going to judge the monarchy of Saul.

Samuel rose ***early*** so he could ***confront Saul*** and share God's decision. Samuel expected to find Saul nearby but was told that Saul had gone ***to Carmel*** in order to ***set up a monument for himself***. The *Carmel* mentioned here is not Mount Carmel, which was located in the northern part of the promised land and later served as the site for Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19). Rather, this was an area in the hill country of Judah, south and east of Hebron. Apparently, Saul's monument recognized himself alone and gave no credit to God for Israel's victory over Amalek.

From Carmel, Saul traveled to •***Gilgal***, one of the worship sites on Samuel's circuit as a judge of Israel. *Gilgal* also was an important military and religious center just north of Jericho in the Jordan Valley. This was where Samuel earlier had rebuked Saul for usurping the priestly responsibility of offering sacrifices (1 Sam. 13:7-14).

These movements by Saul told the story of his life. He created a monument for himself before worshiping the Lord. Putting himself before God had become a normal rhythm in Saul's life.

(v. 13) Samuel finally caught up with Saul at Gilgal and rebuked the king for his rebellion and disobedience. Whether he was genuinely clueless or just playing the part of a hypocrite, Saul addressed Samuel with a traditional greeting of God's blessing as if nothing had gone wrong. He told the aging priest and judge, ***I have carried out the LORD's instructions***.

In reality, the instructions God gave in 1 Samuel 15:3 had only been partially followed. As noted, God had called for the destruction of everything, including people and livestock. Saul and his army had destroyed most of the people, along with the worthless part of the livestock. But they had kept the best. Saul was content with partial obedience, but what he failed to realize was that God views partial obedience as disobedience.

(vv. 14-15) Samuel's reply to Saul's claim of obedience was masterful: ***What is this sound of sheep, goats, and cattle I hear?*** Samuel's eyes and ears were telling him something that contradicted Saul's claim of obedience. Of course, the physical evidence of Saul's rebellion simply confirmed what he already knew before even arriving at Gilgal. Saul was guilty of disobeying God's direct command. God had revealed it to Samuel and had sent the priest to the wayward king.

As noted earlier, Saul reverted to doing what he did best when challenged. He blamed the soldiers for his own actions. In addition, he began rationalizing and making excuses. Instead of saving everything for themselves, the best animals were spared ***to offer a sacrifice*** to the Lord. Saul thought that his sin could honor God. Either he was naïve in his understanding of God's requirements, or he was devious in his answer to Samuel.

Again, a pattern of twisted thinking illustrated Saul's lack of spiritual depth. Note also that Saul spoke about the sacrifice being given to ***your God***. Some scholars believe the use of the second person pronoun *your* reflects a disconnect in Saul's relationship with God. If so, this was just one of many clues in the story of Saul that reveals his indifference to the Lord and His ways.

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APPLICATION POINT: **We must resist the temptation to justify our actions when we disobey God's commands.**

READ: **Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 15:12-15.** Direct adults to listen for what Saul had been doing since the victory over Amalek and how he responded to Samuel's visit.

SHARE: Point out that Saul had been on a personal promotion tour after the battle. Highlight his stop in Carmel to raise a monument for himself before heading off to Gilgal, a prominent worship center for the Israelites. Guide adults to imagine and describe how Samuel likely approached Saul.

ASK: **What was Saul's immediate response to Samuel's presence? Why did Saul respond to Samuel this way?**

SUMMARIZE: Point out that Samuel confronted Saul's behavior with evidence of his disobedience.

> *Saul seemed to have no awareness of having done anything wrong. Yet, his explanation of his actions was a direct contradiction of what God had earlier said. The Lord told Samuel, Saul "has not carried out my instructions" (v. 11). Samuel responded to Saul's bravado with a piercing question: Why was he hearing bleating and mooing? Saul was asking Samuel to believe the words he was saying and to ignore the animal noises from nearby. Saul first blamed his soldiers: The troops brought them. This contradicted the report that Saul and the troops spared King Agag and the best animals (v. 9). He next tried to justify why they kept the animals: So, we could sacrifice them. In Saul's mind, this had to be the most noble of intentions.* (PSG, p. 59)

ASK: **What excuses do people use to justify their disobedience to God?** (PSG, p. 59)

SAY: *King Saul thought it was enough to destroy "the rest" of what they had conquered and captured. But we can never justify ourselves when we refuse to obey God's commands fully. In fact, from God's perspective, partial obedience is just another name for disobedience.*

APPLY: Challenge adults to take a few minutes for silent prayer. Encourage them to examine their lives and to confess any areas of partial obedience.

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Humble Submission (1 Sam. 15:16-19)

16 "Stop!" exclaimed Samuel. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." "Tell me," he replied. 17 Samuel continued, "Although you once considered yourself unimportant, haven't you become the leader of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel 18 and then sent you on a mission and said, 'Go and completely destroy the sinful Amalekites. Fight against them until you have annihilated them.' 19 So why didn't you obey the LORD? Why did you rush on the plunder and do what was evil in the LORD's sight?"

(v. 16) Samuel cut off Saul's worthless excuses and blame game. This word ***stop*** is the same Hebrew word translated "stop fighting" in Psalm 46:10. From there, Samuel proceeded to tell Saul ***what the LORD said*** the previous ***night***.

This harkens back to the pair's previous confrontation in 1 Samuel 13:13-14. There, Samuel chastised Saul for being so foolish as to take it upon himself to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. Initially, God had planned to establish Saul's reign over Israel permanently, but his disobedience made that impossible. Now, following the battle with the Amalekites, God confirmed His earlier judgment, stating that He had rejected Saul.

(vv. 17-18) Samuel reminded Saul of his humble start as king over Israel. At first, Saul had protested that he was ***unimportant.*** He was an insignificant member of a relatively insignificant family in what was considered the nation's smallest tribe (Benjamin).

Despite all that, Saul had been chosen by God to be ***the leader of the tribes of Israel***. Saul had been exalted by God to serve as ***king over Israel***. The word ***anointed*** meant that Saul was set aside as God's unique instrument to carry out His will. By disobeying that will, Saul had failed as God's anointed one. The Lord God had given His anointed one a singular ***mission***—to serve as an instrument of God's judgment by wiping out the Amalekites. However, he failed through his disobedience and rebellion.

Samuel repeated God's directions to Saul. He was to ***completely destroy the sinful Amalekites***. The descriptive phrase *sinful Amalekites* is crucial. The Hebrew language here describes "habitual sinners." These were not innocent people. God never punishes innocent people, because there are no innocents. Everyone has sinned and lives under God's wrath (Rom. 3:23). No human who has ever lived, aside from Christ, can be considered righteous (Eccl. 7:20).

Sin warrants punishment. From the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15-17) until today (Rom. 6:23), God has stated that death is the appropriate punishment. Saul was to be the agent of God's judgment against the wickedness of Amalek, but he failed to carry out the will of God by following his own wicked path.

God's desired outcome for the Amalekites is spelled out twice in this verse. They were to be destroyed and ***annihilated***. The phrase *completely destroy* means they were put under the "ban" of death. It is a strong term that suggests a final and ultimate extermination.

There can be no doubt about God's plans for the Amalekites. While His intentions were not carried out by Saul, these enemies of God and His people would disappear eventually. First Chronicles 4:41-43 indicates that the Amalekites came to their ultimate demise during the eighth century BC during the reign of King Hezekiah.

(v. 19) In 1 Samuel 15:13, Saul had greeted Samuel with the assertion that he had done as he had been directed. The Hebrew text literally says: "I have established the Lord's words." Put another way, Saul was claiming that his obedience was an accomplished fact.

But Samuel discounted Saul's answer and pointedly asked, ***Why didn't you obey the LORD?*** Rather than choosing to *obey the LORD,* Saul and his men chose to ***rush on the plunder***. The Hebrew word for *rush* carries the meaning of a "shriek or scream." The wording may convey a vocal reaction associated with the soldiers' frenzy as they hurried to capture the livestock.

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APPLICATION POINT: **We should demonstrate humility by submitting to God's plans.**

READ: **Read aloud 1 Samuel 15:16-19.** Lead adults to call out words that describe Samuel's emotional state in these verses.

SHARE: Allow a few volunteers to suggest how Samuel felt in a single word. Record their responses on the board. Remind adults that Samuel had been upset as he prayed the night before. Suggest that his frustration and anger continued to grow as he listened to Saul justify his sin.

REVIEW: Talk about how far Saul had fallen since the day Samuel first told him that he would be king.

> *Saying that Saul once considered himself unimportant meant he had been humble. Some translations render this as "were once small in your own eyes." Saul had displayed this humility when Samuel came to anoint him as king (1 Sam. 9:21). Even after being anointed, Saul was still reluctant to lead (10:17-25). Despite Saul's humility, God—through Samuel—had anointed him as king over Israel. Although Saul had lived in obscurity, he was now the leader of the twelve tribes of Israel. This was a divine appointment. God, ever true to His character, was exalting the lowly and humble.* (PSG, p. 60)

EXPLAIN: Point out that God had given Saul a specific mission to fulfill, and he had no right to do things his own way. Highlight that God was judging the Amalekites, and He expected Saul to fulfill His plans and purposes. Share that instead of punishing wickedness, Saul ended up committing wickedness—and God was taking the kingdom from him as a result.

ASK: **What do these verses teach about the importance of complete obedience?** (PSG, p. 60)

Group Activity Option

Sacrifices in the Old Testament

Prior to the session, enlist a volunteer to research guidelines for sacrifices in the Old Testament. During the session, allow the volunteer to share a brief report on his or her findings. Facilitate a discussion on why the animals Saul had kept were not acceptable to God as sacrifices from His people.

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Final Judgment (1 Sam. 15:20-23)

20 "But I did obey the LORD!" Saul answered. "I went on the mission the LORD gave me: I brought back King Agag of Amalek, and I completely destroyed the Amalekites. 21 The troops took sheep, goats, and cattle from the plunder—the best of what was set apart for destruction—to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal." 22 Then Samuel said: Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and defiance is like wickedness and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."

(vv. 20-21) Saul took exception to Samuel's assessment: ***I did obey the LORD***. He said that he did fulfill God's ***mission*** successfully. Again, the question is: *Was Saul naïve or covering his disobedience?* Obviously, the mission was incomplete. The livestock and the fact that he could produce ***Agag*** alive and well proved that he had not ***completely destroyed the Amalekites***.

Again, Saul blamed his army for taking the spoils of war, repeating his claim that they were gathering animals for sacrifices at Gilgal. In reality, neither Saul nor his men fully obeyed God's commands. Their concept of obedience fell far short of God's expectations. Like Achan at Jericho (Josh. 7:1,20-21), the Israelites had taken banned items. Achan paid for his sin with his life and the lives of his family. Saul would pay for his sin with the loss of his throne for himself and his descendants.

Once again Saul spoke of the Lord as ***your God*** as if God only belonged to Samuel. One of the results of continued disobedience to God is alienation from Him. Our spiritual lives grow cold, and distance separates us from the Lord.

(v. 22) This verse, likely the most familiar verse in the passage, provides the climax of God's judgment against Israel's king. Saul thought God only cared about religious activities. Samuel corrected this misunderstanding by pointing to the critical nature of obedience, which is always more important than rituals.

Samuel's answer is presented in Hebrew poetic form using four parallel couplets. First came the premise. Rather than ***burnt offerings and sacrifices***, God finds pleasure in obedience. Second, obedience trumps ***sacrifice***, and paying ***attention*** to God's commands means more than presenting ***the fat of rams***.

(v. 23) The third parallel thought contains God's judgment. In the Mosaic law, ***divination*** was strongly condemned and was a capital offense (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 20:27). In this practice, individuals sought omens about the future through idols or various rituals. At times, it even involved consulting the dead. In this couplet, God equated *divination* with rebellion and ***defiance*** with ***idolatry***.

Samuel closed with the final word of judgment from God: ***Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king***. The Hebrew word *rejected* means to "cast away," "to despise," and "to abhor." Saul had treated God's instructions with total disdain. In response God (using the same Hebrew word) cast Saul away from the throne of Israel.

The priest/prophet Samuel finally completed the mission that God gave to Saul. In verse 33, Samuel executed King Agag. Unfortunately for Saul, this example of complete obedience came too late to reverse his situation.

Bible Skill

Reflect on and apply the memory verse for this session.

The memory verse for this session, 1 Samuel 15:22, teaches a critical lesson for living the Christian life. Read it aloud several times in the Bible translation of your choosing. Then, try to quote it from memory. Read it again several more times and then complete the memorization of the verse. *How would you rate your daily obedience to God as opposed to religious activities that you engage in? Why is obedience more important that religious motions?*

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EXPLORE 1 Samuel 15:20-23

APPLICATION POINT: **We should focus on complete obedience to God so we can avoid His judgment in our lives.**

READ: **Call on a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 15:20-23.** Guide half the group to listen for Saul's defense of his actions, while the other half listens for Samuel's reply.

CONTRAST: Guide adults to compare Saul's defense with Samuel's response. Discuss briefly the contrast between Saul's words and attitude with Samuel's response.

EXPLAIN: Highlight the poetic nature of Samuel's words to Saul. Summarize this content from pages 61-62 of the PSG to underscore the significance of the imagery used:

> "God was not saying He no longer desired sacrifices. Rather, His greater desire was that His people obey (see Hos. 6:6). Saul committed two offenses. 'Rebellion' refers to deliberately refusing to obey a rule, law, or expectation. 'Defiance' has to do with being stubborn or insubordinate. The Hebrew word is related to pushing or pressing. We might use the word similarly to refer to a disobedient child or uncooperative employee by saying, 'He's really pushing it.' 'Divination' was the use of signs, omens, fortune-telling, witchcraft, or the occult to obtain information or to help affect the future. These practices involved looking for supernatural guidance beyond what God would provide. Divination is strictly prohibited in Scripture (Deut. 18:10; 2 Kings 17:17). The word 'idolatry' here is plural. Its roots likely come from the tradition of having household gods (Judg. 17:5). Thus, both rebellion and defiance put a person's self-will on the throne, replacing God's rightful place. Samuel previously explained to Saul that being king was contingent on his obeying God (1 Sam. 12:14-15; 13:13-14). Saul failed miserably. Thus, God rejected him as king."

ASK: **Why did God impose such a harsh punishment on Saul?** (PSG, p. 62)

RECAP: Point out that the result of Saul's disobedience was God's judgment on him, rejecting him as king of Israel. Share that even though Saul confessed his sin, Samuel told him that the Lord was tearing the kingdom away from him (v. 28) and giving it to someone else. Mention that Samuel completed Saul's mission by destroying Agag, the Amalekite king.

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CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from Apply the Text on page 63 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *God expects His people to obey His commands completely.*
- *We must resist the temptation to justify our actions when we disobey God's commands.*
- *We should demonstrate humility by submitting to God's plans.*
- *We should focus on complete obedience to God so we can avoid His judgment in our lives.*

DISCUSS: Direct adults to read and respond to the first set of questions on page 63 of the PSG. Guide them to discuss how believers can recognize God's directions and how they can avoid the temptation to follow only a portion of God's Word.

CHALLENGE: Encourage adults to read and reflect on the second set of questions on page 63 of the PSG. Challenge them to be honest with themselves and with God about areas where they are "almost" obedient. Remind them that partial obedience is the same as disobedience. Suggest they use these questions as prayer prompts during the week.

PRAY: Guide adults to pray silently about their obedience to God's commands. After a moment of silence, read 1 Samuel 15:22. Explain that this is the memory verse for this session. Encourage adults to memorize it during the week and use it to close the session in prayer.

AFTER THE SESSION

Follow up this session with an email or text to the group. Encourage them to review the four main points from the Apply the Text page (PSG, p. 63). Suggest they pick the one that seems hardest for them and spend time praying about it during the week. Acknowledge that this week's passage may seem harsh, but God's grace is greater than our sin. Challenge them to continue reviewing and memorizing 1 Samuel 15:22.

LEADER BLOG



Discover helpful tips for using and getting the most from your Adult Explore the Bible resources at **goExploreTheBible.com/blog.**

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