FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 15

*The Lord Rejects Saul as King*

**Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the Lord. 2 This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. 3 Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’ ” 4 So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim—two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men from Judah. 5 Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. 6 Then he said to the Kenites, “Go away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites. 7 Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, to the east of Egypt. 8 He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. 9 But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed. 10 Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: 11 “I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the Lord all that night. 12 Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, “Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.” 13 When Samuel reached him, Saul said, “The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord’s instructions.” 14 But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?” 15 Saul answered, “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.” 16 “Stop!” Samuel said to Saul. “Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night.” “Tell me,” Saul replied. 17 Samuel said, “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. 18 And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.’ 19 Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?” 20 “But I did obey the Lord,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. 21 The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.” 22 But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. 23For 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.” 24 Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned. I violated the Lord’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them. 25 Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord.” 26 But Samuel said to him, “I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!” 27 As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. 28 Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. 29 He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.” 30 Saul replied, “I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God.” 31 So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord. 32 Then Samuel said, “Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites.” Agag came to him confidently, thinking, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” 33 But Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel put Agag to death before the Lord at Gilgal. 34 Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. 35 Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.**

**15:1–35** The event that occasioned Saul’s rejection. Although no time designation is given, it evidently occurred after the conflicts of 14:47, in a time of relative peace and security. It is likely that David was anointed (16:1–13) shortly after the rejection of Saul (v. 22, 26, 28), thus c. 1025 b.c. (CSB)

**15:2** *Amalekites.* A Bedouin people descended from Esau (see Ge 36:12, 16) usually located in the Negev and Sinai regions (see 27:8; 30:1; Ge 14:7; Ex 17:8; Nu 13:29).

*what they did to Israel.* See Ex 17:8–13; Nu 14:43, 45; Dt 25:17–19; cf. Jdg 3:13; 6:3–5, 33; 7:12; 10:12. (CSB)

**15:3** *totally destroy.* See NIV text note and Lev 27:28–29; Dt 13:12–18; see also notes on Jos 6:17–18. Saul is given an opportunity as king to demonstrate his allegiance to the Lord by obedience in this assigned task. (CSB)

**15:4** *Telaim.* Probably the same as Telem in Jos 15:24, located in the southern part of Judah. (CSB)

**15:5** *city of Amalek.* A settlement of Amalekites, most likely located between Telaim and Kadesh Barnea, possibly the residence of their king. (CSB)

**15:6** *Kenites.* A Bedouin people of the Sinai, closely related to the Midianites. Moses had married a Kenite woman (see Ex 2:16, 21–22; Nu 10:29; Jdg 1:16; 4:11), and some of the Kenites had accompanied the Israelites when they settled in the land of Canaan (see 27:10; Jdg 1:16; 4:17–23; 5:24; 1Ch 2:55). (CSB)

**15:7** *Havilah to Shur.* The location of Havilah is uncertain. Shur was on the eastern frontier of Egypt (see 27:8; Ge 16:7; 20:1). Ishmael’s descendants occupied this area (see Ge 25:18). (CSB)

**15:8** *all his people.* All the Amalekites they encountered. Some Amalekites survived (see 27:8; 30:1, 18; 2Sa 8:12; 1Ch 4:43). (CSB)

**15:9** When Israel refused to obey the Lord’s command (v. 3), their holy war against the Amalekites degenerated into personal aggrandizement, much like that of Achan at the time of the conquest of Canaan (see Jos 7:1). Giving to the Lord by destruction only what was despised and weak was a contemptible act (see Mal 1:7–12), not to be excused (see v. 19) by the protestation that the best had been preserved for sacrifice to the Lord (vv. 15, 21). (CSB)

**15:11** *grieved.* See note on v. 29. *he has turned away from me.* A violation of the fundamental requirement of his office as king (see notes on 12:14–15). (CSB)

**15:12** *Carmel.* Located about seven miles south of Hebron (see 25:2; Jos 15:55). (CSB)

*monument in his own honor.* Saul’s self-glorification here contrasts sharply with his self-abasement after the victory over the Ammonites (see note on 11:13; cf. v. 17; 2Sa 18:18). (CSB)

*Gilgal.* Saul returns to the place where he was inaugurated and instructed in the responsibilities of his office (see 11:14–12:25). This was also the place where he had been told that he would not have a continuing dynasty because of his disobedience (see 13:13–14). (CSB)

**15:13** *I have carried out the Lord’s instructions.* Here and in v. 20 Saul is clearly less than honest in his statements to Samuel. (CSB)

**15:15** *The soldiers … spared the best … to sacrifice.* Saul attempts to shift responsibility from himself to the army and to excuse their action by claiming pious intentions. (CSB)

*the Lord your God.* Saul’s use of the pronoun “your” instead of “my” here and in vv. 21, 30 indicates an awareness of his own alienation from the Lord (see 12:19 for a similar case), even though he speaks of obedience and the intent to honor God by sacrifice. (CSB)

**15:17** *you were once small in your own eyes.* See 9:21; 10:22. (CSB)

**15:22** Samuel does not suggest that sacrifice is unimportant but that it is acceptable only when brought with an attitude of obedience and devotion to the Lord (see Ps 15; Isa 1:11–17; Hos 6:6; Am 5:21–27; Mic 6:6–8). (CSB)

*fat of rams.* The fat of sacrificed animals belonged to the Lord (see 2:15; Ex 23:18; Lev 3:14–16; 7:30). (CSB)

**15:23** *rebellion.* Samuel charges Saul with violating the central requirement of the covenant condition given to him when he became king (see 12:14–15). (CSB)

*sin of divination.* A serious offense against the Lord (see Lev 19:26; Dt 18:9–12), which Saul himself condemned (28:3, 9). (CSB)

*you have rejected the word of the Lord*. A king who sets his own will above the command of the Lord ceases to be an instrument of the Lord’s rule over his people, violating the very nature of his theocratic office. (CSB)

*he has rejected you as king.* The judgment here goes beyond the one given earlier (see note on 13:14). Now Saul himself is to be set aside as king. Although this did not happen immediately, as chs. 16–31 show, the process began that led to his death. It included in its relentless course the removal of God’s Spirit and favor from him (16:14), the defection of his son Jonathan and daughter Michal to David, and the insubordination of his own officials (22:17). (CSB)

**15:24** Saul’s confession retains an element of self-justification and a shift of blame (contrast David’s confession, 2Sa 12:13; Ps 51). Previously (vv. 15, 21) he had attempted to justify his soldiers’ actions. (CSB)

**15:25** *come back with me.* Saul’s greatest concern was not to worship God but to avoid an open break with the prophet Samuel, a break that would undermine his authority as king (see v. 30). (CSB)

**15:28** *one of your neighbors.* David (see note on 13:14). (CSB)

**15:29** *Glory of Israel.* A title of God used elsewhere only in Mic 1:15, though in Ps 106:20; Jer 2:11; Hos 4:7 he is called “Glory” (see note on 4:21). Cf. 2Sa 1:19; Ps 89:17; Isa 13:19. (CSB)

*does not lie or change his mind.* See Nu 23:19; Ps 110:4; Jer 4:28; Mal 3:6 and notes. There is no conflict between this statement and vv. 11, 35, where the Lord is said to “grieve” that he had made Saul king. God has real emotions (one of the marks of personality). (CSB)

**15:31** *So Samuel went back with Saul.* Samuel’s purpose in agreeing to Saul’s request is not to honor Saul, but to carry out the divine sentence on Agag and in so doing to reemphasize Saul’s neglect of duty. (CSB)

**15:34** *Ramah.* Samuel’s home (see 7:17). (CSB)

*Gibeah of Saul.* See note on 10:5. (CSB)

**15:35** *Samuel mourned.* Samuel regarded Saul as if dead (see the use of “mourned” in 6:19). Even though his love for him remained (see v. 11; 16:1), he sought no further contact with him because God had rejected him as king. Saul did come to Samuel on one other occasion (see 19:24). (CSB)