

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 10**

**FIRST SAMUEL**

**CHAPTER 15**

**INTRODUCTION**

The first section of 1 Samuel dealt with the birth and the appointment of Samuel as God's anointed prophet and priest in place of Eli, who failed to perform his sacred duty. The second section recorded the people's desire to have a king like all the other nations. Saul, a Benjamite, was chosen by God to be king over Israel. Saul showed great promise in the beginning. But his victories over Israel's neighbouring enemies revealed a proud and self-centred man. The third and final section begins with Chapter 15 which recorded God's rejection of Saul as the king of Israel.

The main thrust of chapter 15 is given in the opening verse –“now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD”. The word “hearken” is the Hebrew word “*shama*” which means “to hear, listen and obey”. It occurred eight times in this chapter (vv.1, 4, 14, 19, 20, 22, 24). Saul was given a very simple task by God. He was to destroy the Amalekites completely. He disobeyed God thus confirming his spirit of pride, rebellion and obstinacy. God would choose another man to rule Israel -- one after his own heart. This was the final nail on Saul's kingly coffin.

**COMMENTARY**

**A Fearful Thing to Fall Under a Living  
& Holy God—vv. 1-3**

Samuel went to Saul and reminded him that the LORD had sent him to anoint him to be king over His people Israel. Samuel's behaviour might seem strange. But recall that Samuel had chided Saul for being foolish in breaking the commandment of God when he made the burnt offering and told him that the Lord would look for a man after His own heart. So a strained relationship could have arisen between them. Hence, Samuel reminded Saul that he was still the LORD'S prophet. Some time could have lapsed since the incident in chapter 14.

Samuel now called him to obey the commandment of the LORD to “utterly destroy” the Amalekites. The Amalekites were a nomadic people who lived during the days of Abraham (Genesis 14:7). Their king bore the hereditary name of Agag (Numbers 24:7). Saul's given duty was to carry out the commandment of God. The command to “utterly destroy” is the Hebrew word “*cherem*” which means “to devote to religious use” and in this case, use by God Himself. The word is used seven times in this account (vv. 3, 8, 9, 15, 20, 21). It emphasizes the solemnity of the duty to consecrate everything unto the LORD. This command is the same as the one the LORD gave to Joshua when they destroyed Jericho.

Now Saul was given this awesome duty to carry out God's punitive judgment on the Amalekites. They had tried to stop the Israelites from marching through their land by attacking them at Rephidim (Exodus 7:8-13). They attacked them from the rear. This made their attack a most despicable act. Only women, children, the elderly and the infirm lag behind at the rear of the long march. This meant that the Amalekites attacked the defenceless and helpless. They attacked the Israelites again at

Hormah (Numbers 14:45). When Moses rehearsed God's dealings with Israel a second time at the threshold of entering into the Promised Land, he specifically told them that they must "blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven, thou shalt not forget it" (Deuteronomy 25:19). The time of God's judgment had come. Saul was assigned this task of carrying out God's command. The command was very clear. Saul was to utterly destroy all that they have. He was not to spare them, not any living creature – man, woman, infant and suckling, ox, sheep, camel and ass (15:3). This is "a holy war" because God gave specific instructions to perform it and to mete out the judgment there and then. The people in those days could understand this command.

Today we might find it barbaric but remember that it was God who had issued the command to utterly destroy the Amalekites. God is the Creator. He is sovereign over all. He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy (Exodus 33:19, Romans 9:15, 18). His holiness and righteousness is a consuming fire. He does not act capriciously. He will not tolerate sin and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). If this severe judgment by God upon the Amalekites is difficult to accept, it is due to a lack of understanding of sin, God's holiness, love and mercy. It would be more difficult to understand and accept God's final judgement at the end-time upon all those who had sinned against Him. God has appointed a day which is described as the Judgement of the Great White Throne when everyone whose name is not written in the book of life will be judged by their works and then cast into the lake of fire which is the second death (Revelation 20:11-15). This revelation should awaken people to the realization that it is a fearful thing to oppose the living God.

### **Carrying Out God's Command in half measure—vv. 4-9**

Saul hearkened to the voice of the LORD and immediately rallied the fighting men in Telaim which was a city on the southern border of Judah. It was specifically mentioned that the tribe of Judah joined the forces to attack the Amalekites (15:4). Before Saul attacked the Amalekites, he called the Kenites to leave the Amalekites lest they too would be destroyed. Since this divine judgement was upon the Amalekites, it was not appropriate that other people should be killed. The Kenites were nomadic Midianites (Numbers 10:29; Judges 1:16). They had a good relationship with Israel and were her allies. They were the people of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (compare Judges 4:11). They were not under the "*herem*", and so Saul was not disposed to destroy them. The Kenites having been informed departed from among the Amalekites. This act of Saul demonstrated that he understood the command from God to "utterly destroy" all the Amalekites.

Saul had a resounding victory over the Amalekites. He destroyed all the people except Agag, the king of the Amalekites. He kept the best sheep, oxen and lambs, and all that was good, and he destroyed completely all that was "vile and refuse". Saul did not fully obey the LORD. This partial obedience was disobedience. The divine command stated that "every thing that was vile and refuse" he utterly destroyed. Saul had put himself in the place of God. God had said very clearly that all must be killed but Saul redefined for God what "all" meant.

One wonders whether he kept the best sheep and cattle because he was following popular opinion to gain the support of the people. If so, it was a very bad decision. Be that as it may, whether he did it on his own or at the

behest of the people, Saul should have sought to please God and not man. God had placed a “*herem*” (ban) which required that nothing be taken, that is, every living thing had to be consecrated to God (compare Joshua 6:17-19). Saul acted foolishly by bending the will of God to suit his own selfish gains.

### **Judgment cannot be avoided**

#### **—vv. 10-23**

Then the LORD spoke to Samuel saying: “It repents me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back, from following me, and hath not performed my commandments” (15:11). The LORD saw what Saul had done and it “repenteth” Him. The Hebrew word for “repent” is *nacham* which has a few shades of meaning – to be sorry, to repent, to regret, to suffer grief. In the context, the best understanding is that Saul’s disobedience grieved the LORD. The LORD does not repent like men do when they have committed a sin. The LORD does not make a mistake. It must be understood that the LORD does not force anyone to obey Him. He has given every man a free will to obey or disobey Him (Genesis 2:15-17). God chose Saul hoping that he would obey Him. Saul had the free will to obey or to disregard God’s commandment. But he “hearkened not to the voice of the LORD. Instead, he did according to his own thoughts and will. He robbed God of His authority. Saul’s disobedience as king of Israel and the consequences of his sin is a solemn lesson for us. Let us not grieve God or we will, likewise, be severely punished.

Samuel was “grieved” too. The word “grieved” used here to describe Samuel’s feelings is “*charah*”. It means “to be incensed, furious, and angry”. Samuel was very angry with Saul. That night, he cried unto the LORD and prayed for Saul.

Samuel woke up early the next day to meet Saul. He journeyed south to

Negeb where the battle was fought but on the way, he was told that Saul had gone to Carmel (not Mt Carmel) enroute to Gilgal. Samuel had gone in the opposite direction so he turned around to make his way to Gilgal.

In the meantime when Saul was in Carmel, he erected a monument to celebrate his victory. When Samuel met Saul, the latter greeted him confidently: “Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD” (15:13). It looked like Saul was very happy and confident that he had done well. Then Samuel asked him for an explanation for the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen. Saul replied that the men who fought with him were the ones who spared the best of the sheep and oxen to sacrifice unto the LORD “thy” God (15:15). Note that he referred to the LORD (YAHWEH) as “your” God — Samuel’s God — instead of “our God” (also see v.21). That speaks a lot about Saul and his lack of a personal relationship with YAHWEH. Saul blamed the people for sparing the sheep and cattle. He maintained his innocence. One wonders who he was trying to deceive. Was he not the captain who led the attack against the Amalekites?

Surely, it was not the people who wanted to offer the animals for sacrifices to the LORD. We know that in making the peace offerings, almost all the animals were consumed by the worshippers. Saul, having answered Samuel, tried to move away probably sensing that Samuel would have nothing good to say to him. But Samuel would not let him go that easily. Samuel called Saul, “Stay...” (15:16a). Samuel immediately disclosed to him what the LORD had said to him that night. Saul replied, “Say on.” Samuel then posed a question to him: “Did not the LORD make you the head of the tribes of Israel and anointed you king over them? Why

do you not obey the voice of the LORD?" (15:17-19). As king and commander of the army that invaded the Amalekites, he was held accountable for all the actions of the people. This means that Saul could not blame the people. Samuel continued that the LORD sent him to fulfil His will and purpose to destroy the Amalekites but he had not obeyed (hearkened) the LORD. Instead, he "did fly upon the spoil". Samuel was openly direct with Saul. "To fly" (Hebrew *eet*) means "to dart greedily, swoop upon" the spoils. He had done this evil in the sight of the LORD.

Saul stood his ground and still maintained that he was innocent and had obeyed the LORD. Yet at the same time, he said that he brought back Agag the king alive. He repeatedly put the blame on the people for keeping the best of the animals for sacrifices to the LORD. He absolved himself from any blame. Saul was blinded to his own culpability. He could not see or understand that he was liable as he had not kept the commandment of the LORD. This reveals a lot about the level and depth of his knowledge of God and the condition of his heart. Saul was truly a man after his own heart. His opportunistic behaviour was clearly seen here. If there was credit to be gained, he was quick to lay claim but when there was blame, he would point fingers at others. He even blamed God indirectly when he said that the offerings were kept for Him!

Samuel had some strong words for Saul. He remarked that the LORD did not take delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as obedience. Samuel stressed that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (15:22). This is a great revelation of the nature of God. Obedience to God is what really counts. God is not saying that the offerings were

wrong for he was the One who gave Israel the book of Leviticus which described the different types of offerings. The problem with what Saul did was that he used one part of God's Word to pit against another. He used offerings to God as a cover-up for not obeying God.

Samuel's strong rebuke was measured by the words of condemnation. He said that "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (15:23). Performing outward sacrificial rituals to God and yet disobeying Him was like practising witchcraft or divination. Being stubborn or obstinate was actually exalting self-will to do as one pleased. That was sin and idolatry. Self had usurped the place of God. Samuel then pronounced that because Saul had rejected the Word of the LORD, the LORD had also rejected him as king. Saul had disqualified himself from continuing as king of Israel.

### **Confession & Consequences**

#### **—vv. 24-31**

Saul now admitted, "I have sinned" (Hebrew *chata*). But he continued and said, "for I have transgressed (Hebrew, *abar*) the commandment of the LORD and thy words" (15:24). The word "transgressed" is a milder term for sin. It means "to pass over", in modern term, "to overlook". It seemed that the seriousness of Samuel's words had not sunk into his heart. He went on to say that he feared the people and obeyed them. He still pushed the blame to the people. Saul lied. The text is clear. It was SAUL and the people who kept the animals and SAUL alone who spared Agag's life. Why kill all these good animals? It would be a waste. So he together with the people kept the animals so that they could have some material gain from the victory. Saul pleaded with Samuel to pardon his sin (15:25). Samuel could not do so

because Saul had sinned against the LORD. Saul pleaded with Samuel, “turn again with me,” pleading for his presence with him so that he would not lose face. But Samuel repeated his words that he would not return to worship the LORD with him because he had rejected the Word of the LORD and the LORD had rejected him from being king over Israel.

As Samuel turned about to go away, Saul grabbed his garment and caused his robe to be torn apart. Samuel used this incident to vividly illustrate that the LORD would rent the kingdom of Israel from him that day. The sentence of judgment against Saul had been given. The kingship was to be given to another who was better. Samuel added that “the Strength of Israel”, a term which referred to the LORD, would not lie nor “repent”. This meant that the LORD would not change His mind.

It was obvious that Saul had not genuinely repented. Saul once again admitted his sin but he wanted to save his face. He asked Samuel to honour him before the elders of the people with his presence as he worshipped the LORD. Samuel relented and accompanied him. Saul proceeded to worship the LORD. Forgiveness of sin can be given but the consequences of sin will not be changed. One has to live with the consequences of one’s sin.

**Dare to Say, Dare to Perform**  
—vv. 32-35

Samuel then instructed that Agag, the king of the Amalekites, be brought to him. Agag walked cautiously (the Hebrew, *ma’adan*, is used only here) to Samuel and remarked, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” Agag expressed that as Saul had spared him, his life should not be in danger. Samuel reminded him that he had treated others cruelly. Then Samuel killed Agag before the LORD in Gilgal. This was the first

time that Samuel ever killed a person. Saul failed to do what Samuel had instructed him to do in the LORD. Samuel now fulfilled what he had told Saul to do. By this act, he showed others that he was willing to perform what he told others to do. But above all, he obeyed the commandment of the LORD. Samuel returned to Ramah where he lived and Saul to his home in Gibeah. Samuel saw Saul no more until the day of his death. However, Samuel grieved over Saul because he had known him when he was young and had been fond of him. Even the LORD was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.

**PRACTICAL VALUE**

Saul was assigned the task of destroying the Amalakites. It might seem that he was given a second chance to redeem himself. That was one possible view but again Saul failed miserably. His actions confirmed his self-will, pride and self-confidence. The inspired record is for our learning that complete obedience to God is the sacred duty of every Christian. God’s work must be done in God’s way in order to receive God’s blessing. We may be motivated by objectives that look commendable but the ends may not justify the means. At the same time, it must be said that if we are given a second chance to prove our sincerity about repentance, we must not waste it.

The reason why Saul did not utterly destroy every living thing but kept the best sheep and cattle was because he wanted to do things his own way. He was a self-willed king. This was his grave error and the consequences were irrevocable. However, we cannot say that God made a mistake by setting him up as king over Israel. God’s dealing with His people is dynamic not static or fatalistic (Deuteronomy 7, 8). If Saul had

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

obeyed, he would have been blessed and his reign over Israel established. He should fear God and carry out His commands.

Samuel's declaration that God desired obedience more than religious rituals teaches us that all external religious acts which are required by God are in vain if they are not performed truly from the heart. God is able to see the heart and know whether our service for Him is genuine or premeditated to gain popularity and the praise of men. It is not the things that we have done that counts with God but why we did them. It is our love and obedience that please and delight Him.

Forgiveness, confession and repentance are inter-related. Forgiveness is an attitude of the heart and a Christian virtue which should be present in every Christian. A person who wrongs a Christian can always expect the other party to forgive him. But if there is no confession or admission of the transgression, forgiveness cannot effectively take place. It is through confession of the particular transgression that will result in meaningful forgiveness and repentance. Then the transgression will not be committed again. There can be no repentance if there is no confession. It is easy for Saul to ask for forgiveness and expect Samuel to forgive unconditionally. But this is not God's way. If the transgressor expects forgiveness, he must not put the blame on others but sincerely repents from his heart.

This chapter has taught us some precious truths and profitable spiritual principles of living.

AMEN

**Daily Readings**

**Monday:** 1 Samuel 15:1-5; Exodus 17:8-16.

**Tuesday:** 1 Samuel 15:6-15; Judges 4:17-21; 5:24.

**Wednesday:** 1 Samuel 15:16-23; Jeremiah 18:5-10.

**Thursday:** 1 Samuel 15:24-31; Isaiah 59:12-13.

**Friday:** 1 Samuel 15:32-35; Psalm 119:153-160.

**Analysis:**

Text	Practical Value
1 Samuel 15:1-5	
1 Samuel 15:6-9	
1 Samuel 15:10-15	
1 Samuel 15:16-23	

1 Samuel 15:24-31	
1 Samuel 15:32-35	

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4. Was Saul's repentance genuine? Explain your answer.

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**Discussion Questions**

1. Was the command given by God to Saul too difficult for him to obey?

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2. Were the excuses of Saul justified?

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3. Were the condemnations of Samuel too harsh? Explain your answer.

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5. What have you learnt about God's nature, His expectations of His people, and His dealings with people in this chapter?

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