

## Lesson 38

### God Rejects Saul as King



**Teacher, please remember that the commentary below is intended to help you in your study, not to be read to your students. Make your own list of applications, using the help from the commentary, but don't necessarily try to cover everything! Think of the students in your class, then be prayerfully selective.**

Contents:

1. Preparation
2. Memory verses
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8. Possible Activities to choose from
9. Bible Text (in full, without commentary)

### **1. Preparation**

- 1) Choose memory verse
- 2) Select attention grabber to start off lesson / break the ice - optional, recommended for younger classes. See point 7.
- 3) Suggested activities- optional, recommended for younger children. See point 8.

### **2. Choose memory verse**

**Younger children:**

“To obey is better than sacrifice” 1 Samuel 15:22b

**Older children:**

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.” 1 Samuel 15:22

### **3. Theme**

**It's better to obey God's instructions than to go through the motions of a sacrifice.**

### **4. Lesson introduction**

**To the teacher:** This is a **combined lesson** on how King Saul was rejected as king over Israel. It includes some background information on how unwise Saul was even with respect to his own son Jonathan. You will not have enough time to develop 1 Samuel 14, but become familiar with it and summarize it before moving on to chapter 15. Chapter 14 illustrates how impulsive and unwise Saul was, and this led eventually to his making disobedient decisions about how to fight against the Amalekites, people who wanted to wipe out the Jews and keep God from sending His Messiah through them at the right time.

### **5. Verse by Verse Commentary**

#### **1 Samuel 14:1-46**

As background for the account of Saul's rejection as king, summarize the story of how Saul unwisely forced his soldiers to make an unwise and unnecessary vow.

Jonathan had a strong faith and confidence in God. He knew that God could give the victory in battle even with just a few men. So Jonathan resolved to attack the outpost of the Philistines at the pass of Michmash, with just his armor-bearer and the Lord. Jonathan did not tell his father what he was planning to do, for Saul may not have approved of Jonathan's bold decision. But the young man said that God could save by either many or by few, so he and his armor-bearer climbed up a sheer cliff to attack the Philistine soldiers atop the cliff. This left them exposed to attack from above, but Jonathan was sure God was going to give him and his fellow-soldier the victory. Indeed, he then “climbed up the rock on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer after him; and the Philistines fell before him, they were smitten down by him, and his armorbearer was slaying behind him.” The first blow of Jonathan and his armor-bearer struck killed about 20 men.

Jonathan's heroism had shocked and frightened the Philistines. The spies of Saul at Gibeah saw how the “multitude in the

camp of the Philistines melted away and was completely beat.” Saul thought that this must have come about because of something the Israelites did so he commanded the people to find out who had undertaken this bold and independent action. Saul then decides to consult God through the priest Ahijah as to what he should do; whether he should go out with his army against the Philistines or not. But while he was talking with the priest, the commotion in the camp of the Philistines became greater and greater, so much so that he stopped the priest from seeking the Lord for direction. He went out on his own, so easily distracted from seeking God.

As the confusion grew in the Philistine camp, Saul and the people who were with him came to the battle and saw the confusion. God had caused the enemy to turn on themselves and flee. The Israelites followed hard after them in the battle. But the men of Israel became distressed because they were hungry. Saul had commanded all his men to fast until they had been victorious over the Philistines. Even though the men were hungry, they refused to eat anything, even some honey in the forest because they feared the curse that went along with their vow to fast.

Jonathan had not heard his father’s oath, so he dipped his staff in the new honey, and put it to his mouth in his pursuit so he would not have to stop. His lost strength, which showed in his eyes, came back to him from eating the honey. When the people told Jonathan of his father’s oath, Jonathan condemned his father’s restriction on the people. The people continued the battle even though they were weak. But, unfortunately they became so weak that after the victory they took the Philistine animals, slaughtered them and ate them without properly draining of the blood. They were so hungry that they killed the animals and just started eating. When Saul was told what had happened he rebuked them for the sin. But what Saul didn’t do was realize that he was the one who had caused them to sin with such a foolish command.

Saul was beginning to make some mistakes in his reign as king. He didn’t continue to seek the Lord as he should have. He also gave a very foolish command, out of his pride, to keep the people from eating. This only caused the people to sin. Truly, Saul was to blame for the actions of the people.

Now Saul is determined to pursue the Philistines and to pick up all the spoils. This time he decides to ask for direction from the Lord, but he gets no answer. Saul believed that someone had violated the fast, and was determined to find out who it was by lot. To find the guilty one, he made the people stand on one side, while he and his son Jonathan went to the other and the lot fell on Jonathan. When Saul asked his son what he had done, Jonathan confessed that he had tasted a little honey and was willing to take the punishment of death as so decreed hastily by his father. Saul would have killed him but the people interceded saying, “Shall Jonathan die, who has achieved this great salvation in Israel? God forbid! As truly as Jehovah lives, not a hair shall fall from his head upon the ground; for he has wrought the victory with God today.”

Saul now sees that it was not Jonathan but it was himself who had sinned and through his oath caused God to not answer him. With a feeling of guilt Saul gave up any further pursuit of the Philistines. And the Philistines went back to their own land. All the time and energy this situation took stopped the pursuit of the Philistines, losing an opportunity of completing the victory against the enemy. Because Saul did not ask God for direction he made bad mistakes, and that habit is going to continue in our main text for today . . .

### **1 Samuel 15:1-9**

God had promised Joshua that the Amalakites would be destroyed because of their evil ways and their hatred for the God of Israel and His chosen people. The Amalakites had defied God by attacking the Israelites and refusing to allow them to cross their land when they came out of Egypt. God sent Saul and his army against them. Samuel gave Saul definite and clear orders from God not to take captives and to destroy everything. But Saul flat out disobeyed God. He not only took the king captive, but he kept everything of value. He also erected a monument to himself. Rather than giving the honor and glory to God, Saul set himself up as a great king, a hero who had won the battle by conquering the enemy.

God was grieved that He selected Saul as king because Saul had refused to obey and follow Him. Saul, however, was a part of God’s plan. Prior to Saul, God had been their king and ruled through His judges and prophets. When the people demanded a physical king, He gave them exactly what they wanted and demanded. Saul was a big, strong, and handsome man that they could follow with pride, “a king” just like the nations around them. But, Saul did not have the heart for the people or for God. God does not look at the outer appearance; He looks at our hearts, our motives. Because Saul refused to obey and was taking the glory and honor that belongs only to God, Saul lost God’s blessing. God rejected Saul as king and anointed another who would love and honor God and take care of God’s people. [Obedience is better than sacrifice.](#)

### **1 Samuel 15:10-15**

Samuel was a prophet of God sent to lead God’s people. God had instructed Samuel to anoint Saul as king. When Saul turned from God in disobedience, Samuel was sent by God to reject Saul as His chosen king. [Obedience is better than sacrifice.](#)

### **1 Samuel 15:12-16**

Then Samuel said to Saul, "Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night." And he said to him, "Speak on." The next morning, Samuel went looking for Saul but was told that Saul had gone to Mount Carmel to set up a monument to himself. Saul was parading around and wanted everyone to give him praise for the victory that God had given to the nation. Samuel finds out that Saul had already left for Gilgal. When Samuel reached Saul, Saul greeted him but lied about what he had done. Saul even said that he had "obeyed the command" of the Lord. Samuel replied by asking about the sounds of the sheep and cattle that Saul had kept for himself in direct disobedience of God's command. When Saul realized that Samuel knew, he tried to blame the soldiers for his sins and then claimed the reason they kept only a few of the sheep and cattle was to sacrifice them to God, which was not true. Samuel told Saul to stop lying. God knows everything. He told Saul to listen to what God had told him.

Sometimes we like to try to make excuses for our sin and disobedience. We do not want to admit that we were wrong or that we sinned. We may even try to blame our sin on others or say that we really meant to serve God, but it just is not as it appears. We may also believe that we are being obedient, but not be completely obedient in what the Lord has asked us to do. We need to be careful to do exactly as the Lord commands us. [Obedience is better than sacrifice.](#)

### **1 Samuel 15:17-23**

In essence, Samuel is saying, "When you had a proper view of yourself and were humble before the Lord, did you not become the head over all of Israel? The Lord was the one who made you king. God sent you on a mission. You were to go to war and destroy the Amalakites and everything they owned because they were evil. Why did you not obey? Why did you keep everything of value, the things that did not belong to you, which God told you to destroy?" Saul refused to repent and accept the responsibility for his sin. He tried to rationalize and excuse himself. He said he destroyed the Amalekites just like he was told to do. He also said that he only brought back one hostage, the king, just like the other nations would do. He blamed the people for taking the sheep, cattle, and the plunder. He tried to excuse himself by claiming he was going to sacrifice these animals to the Lord. Samuel replied that God has more pleasure in obedience to His Word than the sacrifice of animals. He is more interested in our listening to Him than the burning of the fat of sheep. Rebellion against God is as bad as witchcraft. Pride and stubbornness are as bad as worshipping idols. Because he rejected the Word of God, Saul was rejected by God. [Obedience is better than sacrifice.](#)

### **1 Samuel 15:24-31**

Finally, Saul admitted that he had disobeyed God's commands and Samuel's instructions. He said that he feared the people and obeyed their voice. That was not true; he was the one who gave the commands. He was finally admitting that he sinned, but he was not taking the responsibility. Saul asked for Samuel's forgiveness even though he had not truly repented or asked for God's forgiveness. He was still looking to man instead of looking to God. [Obedience is better than sacrifice.](#)

Saul should have realized, a person can not fool God. God is able to look at our hearts and know exactly what is going on. Samuel stood firm. Saul had rejected God's Word. He had been rejected as king. As Samuel started to leave, Saul grabbed at him. He caught his clothing and it tore. Samuel used this as a symbol to show Saul that he had lost his kingdom and God's blessing. Samuel also told him that his kingdom would be given to another who would honor and obey God's Word.

God always stays true to His Word. He never lies. He is not a man that He changes His mind or His Word. Saul finally admitted his sin; he asked Samuel to come back with him so that he would look good to the leaders of the people. Could it be that Saul thought more highly of man's opinion of Him than of God's opinion? Note, Saul says, "that I might worship the Lord your God." Saul, perhaps, addresses God as "Samuel's God" because he was not experiencing a personal relationship with God himself. Samuel was close to the Lord and could see the pride in Saul's life, even when Saul was blind to it. Samuel reminded Saul that when he was humble, God had exalted him. Now, Saul had become big in his own eyes and refused to obey God. Let us be careful of pride. Pride is blinding. Sadly, the last person to ever recognize pride is the person who has it. We think we are doing okay when everyone else can spot pride in our lives. May we never become "big" in our own eyes; may we keep our eyes upon Jesus, our example.

### **1 Samuel 15:32-33**

Samuel had to finish the job that God had assigned to Saul. The Amalakite king, Agag, deserved the death penalty because of the murders and the evil he had done. Samuel carried out the justice that was deserved by putting Agag to death. God's will was still accomplished, but it was done through someone else other than whom God had intended. God has a plan for our lives. If we are disobedient, His plans will always continue with or without us. His kingdom will never rise or fall based on what we do or do not do. The blessing of obedience is all ours when we realize how wonderful it is that He would even want to include us in His plans. Let us be responsible and obey Him. [Obedience is better than sacrifice.](#)

## **1 Samuel 15:34-35**

Then Samuel and Saul returned to their homes. Samuel never went to see Saul again, even though he mourned for him. Saul not only disobeyed God's command, but he lied, trying to cover his sins. Even after he was caught, he made excuses and tried to blame others. He blamed his army and later, the fear of his people. When he finally admitted his sin, he downplayed it by saying that he only sinned a little—"only one captive and only a little plunder to sacrifice to God." He never truly took responsibility for his actions or humbled himself in repentance to God. [Obedience is better than sacrifice.](#)

It is more important to God that we obey and follow Him than to make sacrifices in His name. God loves us and wants what is best for us. He has reached out to us through His Son, Jesus. If we turn away from Him and reject His salvation, we will be rejected. He knows everything about us. He can not be fooled. He does not want excuses, He wants us to love and obey Him. God looks at our hearts and our motives.

## **6. Prayer:**

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to obey the Lord no matter what. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them the opportunity.

## **7. Attention Grabbers**

In this activity you will play a **variation of "Simon Says."** The theme of our lesson today is [obedience is better than sacrifice](#). This activity will help to reinforce that theme. For older children, just state the theme to them a couple of times. For younger children, write the theme on the chalk or dry erase board. Explain to the children that you will say a word. If that word is in the theme, the children should all stand up. If that word is NOT in the theme, the children should remain sitting (or sit down if standing). For the younger children, you can allow them to look at the board as you have everyone stand up to practice. Have several words written down before class, including each of the words from the theme. Here's an example of how the game works: Say, "Samuel says better. Is "better" part of the theme for today? Yes! Everyone should be standing because it's part of the theme." Now say, "Samuel says truth, this is not part of the theme, everyone should sit down if the word does belong to the theme." After you have practiced, have younger kids turn their back to the board and start the game. Some words that you can use in addition to the words in the theme are love, joy, altar, greater, nicer, if, maybe. Play a few rounds of the game until you feel that all of the children have a good understanding of the theme. This is a good exercise for hearing and doing the Word of God as we learn from today's lesson.

## **8. Activities:**

### **Mission Impossible Relay**

The object is for the children to go on a mission for the Lord. But they will have to listen very closely to the directions. Divide the children into two groups. Have them form two lines at one end of the room. Place two rows of cups (Styrofoam will work) 3 ft. apart in the middle of the room length wise. Set a tape strip for a starting line. Have the children line up behind the line. Using two old books (one's you are willing to have fall on the ground), have the children place the book on their heads. When you say go they are to balance the book on their heads and weave in and out of the cup "obstacle" course and return. Next they are to pass on the book to the next child who will do the same thing. If the groups are uneven, have the first child go a second time to make it even. Younger ones may need to hold the books. Only give the children the instructions once. After the relay, ask the children how well they think that they followed instructions. Why is it important to follow instructions? What happens when we do not follow instructions?

### **Obedient In All We Do**

Often the Bible will use the symbol of our hands to illustrate what we do. For example, we should set our hands to doing God's work. Part of this is obeying what He commands us to do. This craft will show that we should obey the Lord in everything that He wants us to do.

Fold a piece of construction paper in half. Have each child outline their hand. Line up their little finger on the edge of the fold. Cut around the thumb and the fingers, but do not cut the side where the little finger is. After cutting around your outline (again leaving the area near the little finger as a connecting point), unfold it to make two hands. Glue on to another sheet of construction paper as a background. Using the enclosed template, you can cut out the memory verse and glue it onto the hands.

## **9. Bible text (NIV):**

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup> Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy<sup>[a]</sup> all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.”

<sup>4</sup> So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim—two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand from Judah. <sup>5</sup> Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. <sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. <sup>8</sup> He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. <sup>9</sup> But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves<sup>[b]</sup> and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

<sup>10</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: <sup>11</sup> “I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the LORD all that night.

<sup>12</sup> 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.”

<sup>13</sup> When Samuel reached him, Saul said, “The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD’s instructions.”

<sup>14</sup> But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?”

<sup>15</sup> 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.”

<sup>16</sup> “Enough!” Samuel said to Saul. “Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night.”

“Tell me,” Saul replied.

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.’ <sup>19</sup> Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?”

<sup>20</sup> “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. <sup>21</sup> 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.”

<sup>22</sup> But Samuel replied:

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices  
as much as in obeying the LORD?

To obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

<sup>23</sup> For 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.”

<sup>24</sup> Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned. I violated the LORD’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. <sup>25</sup> Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD.”

<sup>26</sup> 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!”

<sup>27</sup> As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.”

<sup>30</sup> 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.” <sup>31</sup> So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

<sup>32</sup> Then Samuel said, “Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites.”

Agag came to him in chains.<sup>[a]</sup> And he thought, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.”

<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. <sup>35</sup> Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.