

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF DAVID

Taught in Ambassador's Class of Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, California

April 1979 through December 1979

by

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I Samuel, Chapter 15 Lesson #2 April 8, 1979

Paul, talking about his ministry in I Corinthians, 9: 24-27, says:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

There is a graphic illustration in 1 Samuel, Chapter 15, of the disqualification of a believer whom God personally chose and anointed. Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit and filled "mightily." God equipped him with everything needed to do the work of the King of Israel. He intended for Saul and his line to be the reigning kings of Israel from this point on. Saul was not set up to be knocked down; He disqualified himself. It is critical to understand this since, in our study of the life of David, we will see that he has all kinds of problems yet is never disqualified. We will also see how we can have struggles and failures and sin mightily and still not be disqualified by God. We do not have to be a Saul. We may right now have some besetting sin we cannot break. It is hurting our ministry. It may be destroying our family or wiping out our testimony, and we know it. Thankfully, God does not look at our performance. He looks at our attitude. What is the attitude toward this besetting sin? Are we willing to offer it on the altar to God? Do we really want to be free of it, and are we willing to pay the cost of being free of it or, do we insist on having our own way? "I'll give you ten of these, God, but that one stays." With an attitude like that, I guarantee you, based on the Word of God and on 1 Samuel 15 and 1 Corinthians 9, we will be disqualified. However, I also guarantee you, based on the life of David, which we are about to study, that if we desire to be rid of that sin and are willing to pay the price, even though at the moment we are failing miserably, we will not be disqualified. We will be victorious when God has finished with us!

How does a man chosen of God, anointed by God, promised and guaranteed a ministry by God, empowered by the Spirit of God disqualify himself? We will see how in Chapter 15. Up to now we have just seen a gathering storm, but in Chapter 15 we see it all wrapped up.

At this point the line of Saul has been disqualified even though God himself had promised that not only Saul but also his line would reign in Israel. Saul caused this to happen by failing to obey Samuel. Without waiting for Samuel to appear, as promised, he offered sacrifices that only the priests were allowed to offer. He did this as a dedicated, zealous, religious, albeit fleshly, effort to please God. Interestingly enough, he did it at Gilgal, the very place where, after crossing the Jordan River, the Jews had been circumcised-- God's symbol of the cutting away of the flesh. Now, even though his line has been disqualified, Saul himself is still king. God has not yet disqualified him. God still wants him to succeed. So let's look at what he does to disqualify himself.

God will give Saul one more major test. Chapter 15, verse 1;

Then Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

In other words, every living thing of Amalek's is to be put to death. Amalek was the grandson of Esau. Esau, as we saw in the book of Hebrews, was a fleshly man. He was called "godless" and "immoral." The word "immoral" literally means "secular." He was not immoral in that he had a lot of illicit affairs, but he was a godless man. He married pagan Hittite wives, which he was not supposed to do. He married an Ishmaelite, which he was not supposed to do. He took the purity of the line of God and mixed it with paganism. Then he was also secular. He sold his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew. He wanted the flesh fed now. The birthright was his as number one in the family, the first born. In the patriarchal days, it would have made him the priest in the family and the mediator between his family and God. But he did not care about that. All he wanted was the present fleshly need of the fleshly body taken care of now. So he sold his birthright. He still had the "blessing" which was to come. The "blessing" was the oral binding will of the father given on his deathbed to his first born. It provided the first born twice as much as anyone else and put him over the head of the family. You can see Esau's reasoning, "Who cares about being God's man. Who cares about a birthright. I don't want all the problems of being the religious head of the family. But I will take the double share and the headship, and I'm sure I'll get those since Isaac likes me best. So let Jacob have the birthright. He can play the priest. I'll take the blessing and I'll play king." Of course, in God's scheme of things he lost both the birthright and the blessing. Now, Amalek was his grandson.

In the Scriptures, Amalek is a picture of the flesh at work. He attacked the Jewish nation as they came out of Egypt and headed down the barren rugged peninsula toward Sinai. The Jews were rather soft slaves coming out of Egypt. Although they had spent their time building bricks, which could be strenuous, they were not used to long hard marches. They were not yet the lean, mean, guerrilla warfare people they would be forty years later when God was through with them. When they were weary and straggling, the Amalekites charged down on them, attacked the weak ones in the rear and picked them off one by one. So, the Jews went to war with the Amalekites. As you will remember during that war, as long as Moses pointed his spear up toward God, the Israelites won. As his arm grew tired and his spear sagged, the Israelites were pushed back. So Aaron and Hur, brother and brother-in-law, propped up Moses's arm, and the Jews destroyed the Amalekites. God says from this time on, "exterminate them." They were a picture of the flesh. They deliberately positioned themselves against the Lord God Almighty, who had just delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians with a devastating blow at the Egyptian pantheon of gods.

If you will look at the ten plagues of Egypt and lay them alongside the gods of Egypt, you will see that each plague struck at a god or gods of Egypt. The highest god was Ra, the sun god. All the firstborn were dedicated to him, and God's ultimate stroke against the Egyptians, which broke their backs and broke Pharaoh's will, was the destruction of their firstborn. We have indirect confirmation of this in the so-called "Dream Inscription of Thutmose IV" recorded on an immense granite slab near the Sphinx at Gizeh. [All the details on this are available in Merrill Unger's book "Archaeology and the Old Testament" in the chapter on "The Date of the Exodus." The destruction of the first born of Egypt did actually happen!]

The Amalekites have the audacity to attack these people of Yahweh after he has just wiped out Egypt, the country in control of all that area, part of which is Amalekite territory. The Amalekites are not just fighting the Jews, they are shaking their fists in Yahweh's face. That is not a healthy thing to do. God had said, "There will be continual war between me and the Amalekites. There will never be peace with them. In fact, when I have given you the land of Canaan [which is a picture of the rest of God], and you are at rest there, I want you to exterminate them." He meant man, woman, child, infant, oxen, camel, sheep, goat, everything!

This may seem cruel to you, but if you will remember, God promised Abraham that if there were ten righteous men in Sodom he would spare the whole valley, the whole cesspool, not just Sodom but Gomorrah, Zeboim, Admah, Bella, the whole five cities of the plain. "For just ten righteous men in Sodom, I will give you the whole valley," he said, and he would have. The Lord himself, in Matthew 11:23-24, told Capernaum, his

headquarters in Galilee and the home of Peter, "The works I have done in you, Capernaum, had I done them in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have repented. Therefore, I tell you, Capernaum, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the Day of Judgment than it will be for you." God does not delight in the death of the wicked. He does not delight in judgment. It is called his "strange" work.

In examining this command to "exterminate" the Amalekites you may ask why? It is because the flesh is something like cancer cells in the body. When a doctor operates, he attempts to get every single one. To leave even one in your body could bring you back for another operation. Like cancer cells, the flesh must be continually cut out of our lives to prevent its recurrence. The flesh is incurably evil, incurably malicious. The word used to describe it sometimes is "pernicious." [i.e., Webster, "destructive; having the power of killing, destroying, ruining or injuring; fatal; deadly]. It is also incurably deceitful. It does not broadcast, "Destroyer." Instead it appears enticing and noble.

God has been giving Saul every opportunity to be God's man. He does not want to have to judge him. He is testing Saul to see whether Saul is going to be ruler of Israel or whether God is going to be ruler of Israel through Saul. God is not creating a monarchy after the example of the monarchies in the Ancient East. He wants a theocracy, the king, the prophets and the priests all at the same level.

Getting back to I Samuel, Chapter 15, verse 4:

Then Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, 200,000 foot soldiers [those would be the Northern Tribes] and 10,000 men of Judah [the Southern Tribes]. And Saul came to the city of Amalek, [situated way down in the southern part of Canaan, called the Negev today] and set an ambush in the valley. And Saul said to the Kenites. "Go, depart, go down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the sons of Israel when they came up from Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. So Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as you go to Shur, which is east of Egypt. And he captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But [There is the but] Saul and the people spared Agag [who, of course, is the worst of all. He is their king] and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good [what was good in their eyes] and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

Notice that God never forgets when you have obeyed. The Kenites were a Midianite tribe. In Exodus, Chapter 18, when the Israelites were coming out of the wilderness, Jethro, the priest of Midian and the father-in-law of Moses, met Moses, blessed him and thanked the Lord for what the Lord had done for the Israelites. He noticed Moses trying to govern 2,000,000 people all by himself and said, "That is not good. Why don't you appoint captains over 1,000s and 100s and 10s? Pick people who have maturity, wisdom, ability to discern, and let them make judgments. Then you represent them to the Lord." In Numbers, Chapter 10, Moses asked Hobab, his Midianite brother-in-law, to lead the Israelites through the wilderness. These Kenites were nomads and knew that territory like the palm of their hand. They joined the Israelites and led them through the wilderness. Finally they settled with the tribe of Judah in the Promised Land. Although by this time they had wandered down into the southern part of Judah and may have been dwelling with the Amalekites, 400 years before they had made a choice. That choice was to follow God and be God's instrument. God remembered that. Now, 400 years later, the Kenites are separated and spared during the slaughter of the Amalekites.

You will note that Agag the king of the Amalekites was spared. The ancient kings used to keep the kings they captured. They did not kill them. They kept them alive as a monument to personal success. One king in the Bible chopped off the thumbs and the big toes of the seventy kings he had captured. He kept them under his table and threw them crumbs. Without thumbs, they would not be able to grasp things. Without big toes, they would not be able to stand straight but would sway. He treated them like pet dogs. Incidentally, Judges 1:6-7 indicates he received payment in kind.

So, it appears that Saul fell right in with the pagan kings. He and the people had killed everyone of the Amalekites except the king. What do you suppose went through Saul's mind that he kept the king? Well, Saul

was a man of the flesh. The flesh always feels, "Wasn't it fortunate that I was on God's side today. What a good job I did for the Lord." Agag was a visible monument to Saul's success. The flesh loves that. Have you every had that feeling? Yes, you have, and so have I. Well, the Lord had probably 100 other people who could have done the same job Saul did, or the same job you and I did.

Now, let's look at the "best" of the things? The people's reasoning might go something like this. It's how the flesh reasons. "Could God possibly mean that we should kill even non-moral animals. Surely not! Look at all these fine specimens. What a waste! I know, we'll keep the best. Then we'll take the best-of-the-best and sacrifice them to God. Won't God be pleased." There is only one problem with keeping the "best" and sacrificing the "best of the best" to God. In Leviticus 27 anything that is "devoted to destruction", anything that God puts under the ban proscribed to be exterminated, is already sacrificed to God, already belongs to him. It is not allowed to be used for sacrifice. So, the people are violating one of the principles of Scripture. They are keeping what is God's already, giving it back to God and expecting him to give them brownie points. What they are really saying is, "I am as smart as God. God made a mistake, and I am going to straighten Him out."

Scripture goes on, Chapter 15, verse 10:

Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel saying, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not carried out My commands." And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night. And Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul; and it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul came to Carmel, [not Mt. Carmel up by Galilee. This was down 7-1/2 miles south of Hebron], and behold, he set up a monument for himself, [here's good old Saul again] then turned and proceeded on down to Gilgal."

Here Saul goes right back to the place where God cleansed the Jews from the reproach of Egypt by circumcision, a symbol of the "cutting off" of the flesh.

Verse 13: [Watch these pronouns.]

And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have carried out the command of the LORD." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed." Then Samuel said to Saul, "Wait, and let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." And he said to him, "Speak!"

Notice again how beautifully the flesh rationalizes, how it never accepts responsibility for its actions. Saul says, "I carried out the command of the Lord, but they spared the best." Typically the flesh will obey God as long as it does not cost anything. The people didn't mind killing the men, women, children, infants and worthless of the flocks, but when it came to the best of the flocks what happened? This is when the flesh will never obey God. When it really costs what you want, then the flesh springs into action. That is exactly what you see here.

It is interesting to note, in verse 11, that Samuel himself is greatly distressed that God regrets having made Saul king. Why? Samuel, a known prophet of God, has publicly anointed Saul and publicly declared to the people, "This is the king God has given you." Well, remember Samuel is oriental. He is Mideastern and "face" is very important to them. He has publicly proclaimed, "This is God's man." Now God has said, "This is not God's man." How does that make him look? The flesh is still the flesh even in a prophet of God.

Samuel goes on, chapter 15, verse 17:

And Samuel said, "Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the LORD anointed you king over Israel, and the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD,

but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD?" Then Saul said to Samuel, "I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal.

Notice Samuel says to Saul, "'Though you were little in your own eyes,' Saul, when God chose you." And he was. Remember in chapter 9, verse 21, when Samuel tells Saul he has been picked by God as king, Saul says;

Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak to me in this way?"

Saul was being used of God here, and a man of the flesh cannot handle being used of God without applying it to himself. A good way to tell whether you are walking in the flesh or walking in the Spirit at a time like this is to check your feelings. I hate to tell you how many times the thought has crept into my life, "How lucky the Lord is to have me on his side." You will feel great, but there are two different ways of feeling great. There is one that says with quiet confidence, "Though I am little among the people, God condescended to use me to change lives, and I am grateful to a great God." If there is a very natural, and not put on, gratitude and thankfulness to God, then you are safe. But when your feel, "I was extra special this morning. I did a good job of counseling that couple. I'll have to remember that technique." Then you know you are in trouble. The flesh always takes credit. It always points toward self. It may be disguised, but it always points toward self.

Samuel knows this, chapter 15, verse 22:

And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, [incidentally Saul destroyed all the witches. He put them to death himself] and insubordination is an iniquity and idolatry, because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also reject you from being king."

Since in the Old Testament God himself ordained the sacrifice, why would Samuel say, "to obey is better than sacrifice?" What are you sacrificing when you obey God that you are not sacrificing when you sacrifice an animal? Self. I give up my rights to my actions, to my person, to my thought processes. Here are these goodly animals. They would make a great sacrifice. But, if I bring them into the nation of Israel, I am questioning God. However, if I don't bring them in, I am sacrificing me, my will, my rights, my thought processes. That is when the going gets tough.

Chapter 15, verse 24:

Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice."

Here is another mark of the flesh. Saul fears the people rather than the voice of God. We fear the response of our peers rather than the voice of our God.

Verse 25:

"Now, therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the LORD." But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." And as Samuel turned to go, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. [literally, 'it was torn off,' in the original]. So Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you. [Saul is disqualified.] And also the Glory [or the Eminence] of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind." Then he [Saul] said, "I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship the LORD

your God." So Samuel went back following Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

The flesh is told Saul is no longer king of Israel. What does it do? It still demands. Saul still demands to reign. God has told him, "Today you are no longer king." If he had been a godly man, he would have said, "O.K., I accept the will of the Lord, and I will abdicate." But that was not Saul's response. God had said, "The [Eminence] Glory of Israel will not change His mind. He is not a man that he will repent." There is no turning God back from what he has just finished saying. What is Saul's attitude toward that? "Make me look good in front of the people. I am still going to be king. I am still going to reign." This will show up every time in the flesh. The flesh will keep on trying in every way possible to reign in your life even though it has been rendered inoperative, has been crucified and even is alien there. That is exactly what is going on in Saul here.

Interestingly enough what did Samuel do at this juncture? He said he wouldn't go back, and then he did. Why? Samuel understands the New Covenant. So, when Saul insists, Samuel says, "O.K., I'll leave it up to God. It is not my issue. It is between you and God, and I'll go back with you." Saul never understands this. Why do you think David twice spared Saul when Saul was delivered into his hands, as we will see later on? David allowed God to be God and to work things out in his own time and in his own way. He did not touch Saul because Saul was God's anointed. He left him in God's hands.

In verse 22 we have seen God reject Saul as king of Israel and yet Saul actually reigns for some time to come. We are going to see Saul used as a training tool for David. God chooses David and Samuel anoints him in the very next chapter, but Saul still reigns. In our lives why does God leave the flesh? God can do anything, so, why doesn't he remove the flesh from our lives and leave just Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God, as our new nature with no "Old Man" hanging around? We learn through struggle. We learn faith and obedience. God is going to teach that to David, and we are going to see a man after God's own heart as he learns it.

Chapter 15, verse 32:

Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully. And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." [I have been beaten. You have won. I am a slave.] But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal.

Here is a helpless man, probably in chains, whom Samuel chops up into little pieces while doing the will of God. That should give us some idea that our attitude toward the flesh should be utterly ruthless and without mercy.

Finally, verse 34:

Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

It is intriguing that both God and Samuel have deep emotional hurt over this situation. What does Saul have? Nothing. He just goes on being king.

Prayer:

Father, we thank you now for the way you demonstrated the flesh and what it is like and how it acts. Father, we just pray that we might not be disqualified, that we might realize that each one of these things that you ask us to do pleads for obedience, that obedience is better than the fat of rams, is better than any sacrifice, for obedience involves our will. So, Father, we just give you ourselves and ask you to be Lord and God in our lives and bring up each little area of our lives that needs dealing with and let us be ruthless, Father, as you are ruthless, to something that you know will hurt your children. Thank you, Father, for being a ruthless, loving God, who will not allow anything that is hurting us to live, but will take whatever step

is necessary, without mercy, to deal with that thing in our lives that could disqualify us.
Thank you, Father, in Jesus's name. Amen.

[Lesson #3](#)

[Return to Bob Roe's Index Page](#)