

# Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.  
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.  
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.  
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

## **The Rejection Of Saul**

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**1 Samuel 15**

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### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles this morning to 1 Samuel 15. I want to take the next couple of Sundays and deal with some of the theologically rich texts that we have been reading in the Old Testament column of our WTTB reading plan. Let me read this text to you in its entirety:

<sup>1</sup>Samuel also said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. <sup>2</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek *for* what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. <sup>3</sup>Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”

<sup>4</sup>So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah. <sup>5</sup>And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley.

<sup>6</sup>Then Saul said to the Kenites, “Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. <sup>7</sup>And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. <sup>8</sup>He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. <sup>9</sup>But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all *that was* good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

<sup>10</sup>Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, <sup>11</sup>“I greatly regret that I have set up Saul *as* king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.” And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night. <sup>12</sup>So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, “Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and

gone down to Gilgal.”<sup>13</sup> Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed *are* you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD.”

<sup>14</sup> But Samuel said, “What then *is* this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?”

<sup>15</sup> And Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.”

<sup>16</sup> 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.”

<sup>17</sup> So Samuel said, “When you *were* little in your own eyes, *were* you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel?”<sup>18</sup> Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’<sup>19</sup> Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?”

<sup>20</sup> And Saul said to Samuel, “But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.”<sup>21</sup> But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.”

<sup>22</sup> So Samuel said:

“Has the LORD *as great* 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.

<sup>23</sup> For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft,

And stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,

He also has rejected you from *being* king.”

<sup>24</sup> Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.”<sup>25</sup> Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD.”

<sup>26</sup> 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.”

<sup>27</sup> And as Samuel turned around to go away, *Saul* seized the edge of his robe, and it tore.<sup>28</sup> So Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, *who is* better than you.”<sup>29</sup> And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He *is* not a man, that He should relent.”

<sup>30</sup> Then he said, “I have sinned; *yet* honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God.”<sup>31</sup> So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

<sup>32</sup> Then Samuel said, “Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me.” So Agag came to him cautiously.

And Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.”

<sup>33</sup> But Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.”

And Samuel hacked Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

<sup>34</sup> Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul.<sup>35</sup> And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel. (1 Samuel 15:1-25. NKJV)

This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God. There are several verses in this chapter that never make their way onto worship banners in the modern day church: “Go and utterly destroy the sinners” v.18; “the Lord has rejected you” v. 26 and “Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the Lord in Gilgal” v. 33. So why is this story in the Bible? I think its in the Bible because it tells us some things about who God is that we need to hear. I think it tells us something about ourselves that we don’t want to hear. And I think it helps us appreciate why Jesus is the Messiah and Saviour that we so desperately need. Let’s look at the text on that basis.

## What This Text Teaches Us About God:

In terms of what this story teaches us about God, I think we'll start with the obvious and sobering:

### 1. God punishes sin

There's no real way around that fact in this story. The whole point of this expedition is stated as being punitive.

<sup>2</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek *for* what he did to Israel (NKJV)

Saul's failure in terms of this expedition is related directly back to that purpose:

<sup>18</sup>Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and **utterly destroy the sinners**, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' (NKJV)

This aspect of God's character is very difficult to accept in our culture. Nowadays it is becoming increasingly common for us to hear about a God who sounds suspiciously like Santa Claus or great uncle Fred. Great Uncle Fred has lost his hearing and so he just smiles dumbly at us and seems pleased simply to have been included in our gatherings. That's the God of the modern day church but that is not the God of the Bible. God is not Great Uncle Fred, God has not lost his hearing – he hears all, he sees all and he is not slack in punishing evil. The God of the Bible punishes sin and he does not spare the sword. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a holy God.

### 2. God is concerned for the public display of his holiness

Sometimes we read these stories and we can't really figure out what the bad guy has done wrong that warrants this reaction from God. Think about this for a second: Saul is rejected as king because he doesn't kill enough people and livestock. David on the other hand, gets to stay king even though he commits adultery and murder – how does that square? Why does this sin of Saul so anger God? To understand what's going on here you have to pay attention to the details. God tells Saul to do something very unusual. He tells him to go on a military expedition that is purely

PUNITIVE – that is motivated not by imperialism, not by economics but solely by the concern for God’s holiness and justice. This is Holy War. In normal war the soldiers were paid out of the spoil. You attack a city and you kill all the men and you take the women and children and you sell them as slaves. You take the livestock and you sell them at market and the soldiers and the king get rich. That’s how it was done. But God says: “Kill everybody – take no slaves, and kill the livestock – take no payment.” God wants it to be very clear to everyone in the region that this is not about money, this is not about politics, this is about justice.

The Amalekites were bandits. They murdered and harassed people along trade routes. They weren’t farmers or herdsmen they were hi-way robbers – they were terrorists essentially. They had harassed the people of Israel as they made their way from the Red Sea to Mt. Sinai and God has now commissioned his kingdom of priests to execute a Divine sentence of judgment to let everyone know that this sort of behaviour would not be tolerated. But Saul messes it up. By taking the spoil he makes it look like this is just another economically motivated massacre. He makes it look like God’s people are no better than the Amalakites. God’s people are just one more band of self righteous pirates. He has blasphemed the Name of God. That’s why this is such a big deal. When people begin to suspect that God’s servants have monetary motivations, we quickly lose the moral high ground. This is why when televangelists buy golden toilet seats and Rolls Royces the rest of us get annoyed. God is blasphemed among the nations because of such things.

God desired a public display of his holiness so as to encourage other people to repent. Samuel understood this, that’s why when Samuel showed up he publically executed King Agag. He hacked him to pieces before the Lord. Let the people know that the God of the Universe sees and executes judgment. This by the way is why church discipline has a public component to it in the New Testament. Jesus in Matthew 18 makes it clear that if a person truly repents of their sin when confronted with it, then it can be kept private. But if they persist in that sin and they are not repentant, then they must be excommunicated publically.

<sup>17</sup>And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. (Matthew 18:17. NKJV)

God in his mercy is concerned for the public display of his holiness so that people are warned and turn back from sin and ruin.

### **3. God rejects leaders who disregard his justice**

God simply cannot have leaders among his people who discount and disregard his justice. Saul cannot be king. There is a verse in Jeremiah that also does not make its way onto many worship banners these days in the Evangelical church:

<sup>10</sup>“Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness, and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from bloodshed. (Jeremiah 48:10. ESV)

The Protestant Reformers were very concerned to define the marks of a legitimate church. They were entering a world where for the first time in living memory there would be multiple churches in a town, how could a person know what was a true church and what was a false church? They stated that there are three definitive marks of a true church: 1. The right preaching of the Word of God. 2. The right practice of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Table. 3. The presence of church discipline.

If a church was slack in practicing discipline it was not to be considered a Christian church. I find that very alarming. In the modern day free market approach to church, where people can go wherever they like and if they don’t like it here they can walk across the street and go someplace else – in that context it is widely considered suicidal for a church leadership to practice church discipline. And yet according to the Bible God rejects any leader of his people who is slack with regards to discipline, holiness and the execution of justice.

### **4. God requires his creatures to hear and obey his every Word**

Saul’s great sin ultimately was his failure to heed the word of the Lord:

“Has the LORD *as great* 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. (1 Samuel 15:22. NKJV)

All throughout this chapter there has been a bit of word play around the issue of hearing. There is no word in Biblical Hebrew for “obey”. Every time you see the word “obey” in your English Bibles you are seeing the translation of the Hebrew word *shaw-mah* which means “to hear”. So Samuel sends Saul on this mission reminding him to be careful to HEAR the voice of the words of the Lord in verse 1. When Samuel comes to confront Saul, Saul pre-empts him by saying in verse 13:

I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” (NKJV)

Saul uses a different word here, he uses the word *koom* which means “I did it”. Samuel then says: “No you didn’t. Do you know how I know that you didn’t do it? Because I hear – I *shaw-mah* the sound of sheep. If you had heard God then I would not hear sheep.”

You didn’t hear God. You heard what you wanted to hear. Your heart is hard and so your ears are closed to the voice of God. Saul thought that he could placate God with some religious observances, maybe a nice offering will quiet God’s rage? But the Lord delights in obedience – in HEARING HIS WORD – more than in offerings and sacrifices. Do you hear that church? God’s favourite part of the worship service is when we HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD! That’s why we put the services together the way we do. We do 90 minute services here and fully HALF of that is given to the hearing of God’s Word because that is God’s favourite part. Experts will tell us that people today prefer music and drama and interaction and that the sermon needs to be shorter but we say that we don’t CARE WHAT THE EXPERTS LIKE WE CARE WHAT GOD LIKES! God likes it – God requires – that his creatures hear and obey his word.

this is the one to whom I will look,  
to the humble and contrite in spirit,  
who trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2. NRSV)

### **What This Text Teaches Us About Ourselves:**

That’s what this story teaches us about God but I think this text also has something to say about us. Fundamentally I think the message here is that as fallen human beings:

## 1. **Pride, greed and fear keep us from hearing the Word of the Lord**

We've already noted that Saul claims to have performed the word of God as he understood it, but clearly he did not understand it aright. The text clearly states that Saul's confusion was not due to the complexity of his mandate or the scarcity of detail, on the contrary, the Bible states that Saul's ignorance was wilful – it was wilful self deception that was rooted in his pride, greed and fear. Look carefully at the particular edits that Saul makes to his mandate. The first thing he does that he was not supposed to do is that he spares the life of King Agag; now why would he do that? In the ancient world if you wanted to be taken seriously as a king you needed to have some reminders of your power and that was generally done by keeping a few deposed kings around as trophies. It was common practice to chop off the thumbs of kings so that they could never draw a sword and to keep them under your table so that everyone who visited you would know that you were not just a king – you were a king of kings, you were an emperor. It was the vanity of Saul that spared Agag's life.

The second thing he did was to spare the best of the breeding stock. In those days cattle were commodities – they were units of exchange. Breeding stock then, as now was incredibly valuable. Saul couldn't bring himself to throw good money into the fire. He saw in this raid an opportunity to grow his name and to fatten his account.

Then thirdly we have Saul's own confession. When finally pressed to the wall by the prophet admits the root cause of his failure to heed the Word of the Lord:

“I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, **because I feared the people** and obeyed their voice. (1 Samuel 15:24. NKJV)

Boy that sounds a lot like the first sin in the Bible. God said to Adam:

“Because you have heeded the voice of your wife ...“Cursed *is* the ground for your sake (Genesis 3:17. NKJV)

As soon as there is another voice that you fear and that you heed instead of God's voice you are in trouble and you are headed for ruin. There is a warning in text for us and a terrible truth we need to deal with. The truth is pride, greed and fear cause us to edit, ignore and update the word of God.

Pride tends to make us feel like we are capable of understanding advanced things that somehow permit us now to make changes to God's Word. Today this manifests in terms of our advanced scientific and technological understanding. You hear people say: "Given what we know about DNA and human evolution I think we need to update the Bible's teaching on gender and sexuality. We know things today that Paul didn't know and Moses didn't know and Jesus didn't know and so we need to get with the times." That is nothing more than the voice of pride. You know things now? Every generation has thought themselves the caretakers of new, unique and enduring truths. And every subsequent generation has mocked, edited and abandoned those once trustworthy truths. Everything I learned in High School Biology is now under fire in the scientific community. Everything my parents learned in High School physics is now rejected out of hand. Go tell someone in the scientific community about the steady state theory and see how they respond. My parents were told that an atom was the smallest unit of matter and that it could not be divided. Go tell that now to all the countries who own nuclear bombs. Every generation thinks they have it figured out and they make all kinds of over-reaching declarations and they demand that we update our Bibles based on their new certainties. Pride.

Greed too changes the way we hear God's Word. Now we have the prosperity Gospel. How do those words even fit together? Jesus said, "unless you deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me you cannot be my disciples" – how did that become a promise for you to be rich and have your best life now? Greed. It changed how we heard God's Word.

And fear. Fear has silenced the Evangelical church. We don't want to be mocked. So we lie and we say that this message is for the newcomers – that is why we don't preach on the Bible anymore. In reality we're embarrassed and we want social currency. Fear of man has changed our hearing of God's Word.

Well if what we learned about God in this story is true – that he is holy, he punishes sin and that he expects us to hear and obey his word perfectly – if that's true, and if this is true – that we don't hear God's Word very well because of our pride, our greed and our fear – then we have a really serious problem. We can't do what God requires us to do. And if that God punishes sin then we are toast. We are lost and we need a Saviour. We need Messiah.

That is exactly the conclusion you are meant to draw. This passage actually functions in the Biblical narrative in about the same way that Judges 19 does. You are supposed to read it and say: “Woe are we. We need Messiah.” That is why the very next chapter in 1 Samuel tells the story of the anointing of King David. David is the foreshadow of Messiah, he is the anticipation, the black and white outline, if you will, of the Messiah. As you follow the story of David to its conclusion you quickly realize that David is not the Messiah. David is like us. Pride, greed and fear live in his heart too and they keep him from hearing God’s Word so as to do it. David commits adultery and murder and in his old age he becomes weak and fearful. David is not the Messiah but he points us in the direction of the greater David; the Son of David who is Jesus Christ. And so we’ll close this morning by looking at why Jesus is the Messiah and Saviour that we so obviously need.

## Why Jesus Is The Messiah and Saviour That We Need

### 1. Because only he hears and obeys the will of God perfectly

Look at Hebrews 10:5-7:

<sup>5</sup>Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

*“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,  
But a body You have prepared for Me.*

<sup>6</sup> *In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin  
You had no pleasure.*

<sup>7</sup> *Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—  
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—  
To do Your will, O God.’” (Hebrews 10:5-7. NKJV)*

That sounds a lot like 1 Samuel 15 doesn’t it? It means to. Hebrews is saying that Jesus is the Messiah Saul wasn’t and David wasn’t because Jesus knew what God wanted – he saw and perceived the will of God perfectly and he did it – even unto the end of his own sacrificial death upon the cross. Jesus obeyed the will of God perfectly.

### 2. Because he is zealous in his pursuit of God’s justice

One of the things we hear today that makes no sense to me whatsoever is that God is wrathful and intolerant in the Old Testament but then in the New Testament, he becomes Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild – God becomes a Christian and he adopts the meekness and gentleness of Jesus. Where does that idea come from? Anyone who thinks that Jesus is somehow not like God in wrath obviously has not read the last book of the New Testament. In the Old Testament God can be found wiping out the odd tribe; but in the last book of the New Testament Jesus comes back and he's wiping out entire PLANETS! Jesus comes back bearing the sword and working JUSTICE and he does not need Uncle Samuel to do the job for him, his own sword is zealous for God's holiness. Revelation 19 says:

<sup>15</sup>Now out of His mouth goes a <sup>£</sup>sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. <sup>16</sup>And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (Revelation 19:15-16. NKJV)

Saul wanted to be the King of Kings but he was rejected because he was slack in the work of the Lord and he kept back his sword from God's justice – not so Jesus. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and Revelation says:

<sup>21</sup>And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Revelation 19:21. NKJV)

In the end Jesus Messiah saves us from our sins, if we trust in his work upon the cross, or he executes us for our sin if we have despised the mercy of our God. This is the Christ of the Bible and from his justice, we mustn't turn our faces.

### **3. Because on his cross we see at last the display of God's justice and mercy**

Saul was supposed to have made a public display of God's justice ultimately as an act of mercy and warning to the nations. He failed. He didn't understand or see this concern; he saw only an opportunity for fame and wealth. Jesus saw the cross and he understood. He understood that only on the cross could both the justice and the mercy of God be displayed for all to see. God's justice, in that a fair price is paid for human sin. God's mercy, in that God himself offers to pay the price on our behalf. That is the Gospel and that is why Jesus is the Messiah and Saviour that we need.

## **Conclusion:**

I did a funeral this past week for my great aunt Hilda Parks. She was 104 years old. She was a born again Christian and for her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday my cousin Dawn gave Hilda an olive wood cross. For the last four years of her life she has gone almost nowhere without it. And when she died the nurses found that cross buried in her right hand. She clung to that cross as she passed from this life to the next because she understood that the cross is the centre and the symbol of our faith. The cross tells the truth about who God is. The cross tells the truth about God's holiness and his hatred of sin. The cross tells the truth about God's mercy; his patience and his love desiring that none should perish but all should come to repentance. The cross tells the truth about who we are. The cross is a challenge to human pride – because on it the Son of God – exalted in dignity, humbled himself and obeyed – even to the point of death. The cross is a challenge to human greed – because on it the Lord of the Universe died naked, poor and penniless for you. The cross is a challenge to human fear – because death could not hold him and the grave could not keep him. And it is only when we meet God at the cross in the body of his Son Jesus Christ that we get our ears back, that we get our eyes back and that our hearts are softened and renewed to once again receive the implanted and saving Word of God. The cross says it all. Thanks be to God for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Jody, will you come and lead us in response?