

BECAUSE OF YOUR HARDENED HEART
UNIT 10 • SESSION 3

SAUL THE FAILED KING

MAIN POINT

Jesus will give you the power to obey Him in every situation.

1 SAMUEL 13:5-9,13-14 • KING SAUL DISOBEYS GOD IN A CRISIS

5 The Philistines also gathered to fight against Israel: three thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and troops as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Michmash, east of Beth-aven. **6** The men of Israel saw that they were in trouble because the troops were in a difficult situation . . . Saul, however, was still at Gilgal, and all his troops were gripped with fear. **8** He waited seven days for the appointed time that Samuel had set, but Samuel didn't come to Gilgal, and the troops were deserting him. **9** So Saul said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." Then he offered the burnt offering. . . . **13** Samuel said to Saul, "You have been foolish. You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. It was at this time that the LORD would have permanently established your reign over Israel, **14** but now your reign will not endure. The LORD has found a man after his own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over his people, because you have not done what the LORD commanded."

1 SAMUEL 15:13-23 • KING SAUL DISOBEYS GOD IN A VICTORY

13 When Samuel came to him, Saul said, "May the LORD bless you. I have carried out the LORD's instructions." **14** Samuel replied, "Then what is this sound of sheep, goats, and cattle I hear?" **15** Saul answered, "The troops brought them from the Amalekites and spared the best sheep, goats, and cattle in order to offer a sacrifice to the LORD your God, but the rest we destroyed." **16** "Stop!" exclaimed Samuel. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." "Tell me," he replied . . . Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams. **23** For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and defiance is like wickedness and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.

1 SAMUEL 15:24-28 • GOD REJECTS SAUL AS KING OF ISRAEL

24 Saul answered Samuel, "I have sinned. I have transgressed the LORD's command and your words. Because I was afraid of the people, I obeyed them. **25** Now therefore, please forgive my sin and return with me so I can worship the LORD." **26** Samuel replied to Saul, "I will not return with you. Because you rejected the word of the LORD, the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." **27** When Samuel turned to go, Saul grabbed the corner of his robe, and it tore. **28** Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingship of Israel away from you today and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you."

INTRO OPTION 1

LEADERSHIP

SUPPLIES LIST

NO SUPPLIES NEEDED.

Have students talk with you about what they think makes a good leader. Have them answer questions like: Who is a good leader you know? What makes them a good leader? How do you want to be like them? Then, have them talk through how to develop themselves as leaders in their middle school. In today's session, we will learn that when those in authority fail to obey God, they may be disqualified from leadership. Saul looked to be the king God's people needed, but his failure to trust and obey God led to God rejecting him.

INTRO OPTION 2

CAMPAIGNING

SUPPLIES LIST

NO SUPPLIES NEEDED.

Split students up into two teams. Have students come up with a mock campaign as if they were running for president, governor, or some other leadership role. Have them decide what kind of leader they would desire to be. Have them list out priorities, agendas, important factors, etc. Then, have them explain how they would better the people they are leading (Note to Student Leader: The goal of this is to not have students "bash" any current leader. Instead, it's to think through how leadership affects those they lead). In today's session, we will learn that when those in authority fail to obey God, they may be disqualified from leadership. Saul looked to be the king God's people needed, but his failure to trust and obey God led to God rejecting him.



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

Jesus will give you the power to obey Him in every situation.

1. KING SAUL DISOBEYS GOD IN A CRISIS

READ 1 SAMUEL 13:5-9,13-14

The Philistines were Israel's most formidable enemy in the land. They gathered a large army, far outnumbering Saul's army. The Israelites were afraid, and many soldiers were deserting Saul. He grew impatient and desperate while waiting for Samuel. Deciding he could wait no more, Saul made an unauthorized sacrifice to the Lord to seek God's favor before battle.

HOW WAS SAUL THINKING WRONGLY ABOUT SEEKING GOD'S FAVOR?

Saul knew he wasn't permitted to make the sacrifice without Samuel. When Samuel arrived, he said, "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you" (1 Sam. 13:13). So, Saul knew he was disobeying God. Defying all reason, Saul sought the Lord's favor by plainly disobeying God's command.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM HIS MISTAKE?

We can learn at least two things from Saul's bad decision. First, desperate situations can cloud our moral judgments. When faced with a stressful situation, we should be careful to think twice before making a big decision. It's generally wise to seek someone else's advice, and even when things are uncertain, never disobey what God has plainly commanded. Second, we must be careful not to aim to please people under the guise of trying to please God. The main reason for Saul's disobedience was probably to boost morale among his troops and secure their allegiance before more deserted him. We are all capable of doing things "for God" while our motivations are more to please people than God.

2. KING SAUL DISOBEYS GOD IN A VICTORY

READ 1 SAMUEL 15:13-23

HOW DOES DISOBEYING GOD AFFECT OUR WALK WITH HIM?

Saul did not fully obey God's command. Again, he aimed to please his troops rather than God. Everything was supposed to be devoted to destruction, much like at the battle of Jericho. God was using the Israelite army as an instrument of judgment against the Amalekites for how they'd treated Israel after the Exodus (see 1 Sam. 15:2-3).



1 SAMUEL 13:5-9,13-14

13:5-9. “When the Israelites witnessed this overwhelming show of Philistine force, they understood ‘that their situation was critical’ (v. 6); troop defections (cf. 14:21) and mass desertions quickly resulted. The deserters either hid (v. 6) or left the Promised Land entirely, going east of the Jordan (v. 7).”¹⁹

13:13-14. “It is ironic—and symptomatic of Saul’s spiritual dullness—that the king believed he could obtain the Lord’s favor through an act of disobedience . . . No line of reasoning, however compelling, could ever justify disobedience to the Lord.”²⁰

13:13-14. “The events included in the telling of this episode serve to create a tragic parallel between Saul and Adam (cf. Gen 3). Both men were the heads of their respective social institutions; both violated commands given them by the Lord; both expressed an unwillingness to take personal responsibility for their actions. Because of sin Adam lost the opportunity for eternal life in the garden; for the same cause Saul lost the opportunity for an enduring dynasty in the Promised Land. These parallels are not accidental but result from a consistent theological perspective that views loss of position and privilege as inevitable consequences of violating the Lord’s commandments.”²¹

13:13-14. “While this phrase primarily emphasizes Yahweh’s choice of David, it also [tells us] something positive about David’s character over Saul’s. The new king will genuinely act in accordance with Yahweh’s wishes in a way that Saul does not. He will exhibit a certain ‘like-mindedness’ with Yahweh.”²²



BIG QUESTION

WHY DO I NEED TO OBEY GOD IF I AM SAVED BY GRACE ALONE?

We are saved by grace alone when we put our faith in Jesus (see Eph. 2:8-9). Yet, there are commands all over the Scriptures for the believers who originally received the Scriptures and for us. Why do we need to obey? First, we obey because we love God. You want to honor those you love, so if you love God, you will want to obey Him. Second, we obey because we trust that God’s commands flow from His love for us. It is for our own benefit that we obey the God who loves us. And finally, we obey because of our new identity. We are united with the sinless Savior. As John Piper has said, “Believers are commanded to become in practice what we are in Christ: dead to sin and alive to God.”¹⁸



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

Jesus will give you the power to obey Him in every situation.

But Saul disregarded God's instructions in favor of what he thought was wise and best. Of course, he tried to justify his decision by spiritualizing it—"I did it to bring sacrifices to God." But "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22).

HOW MIGHT THESE VERSES CHALLENGE US TO LIVE OUT WHAT WE SING AND LEARN ON SUNDAYS?

We gather to praise God each Sunday, singing about how much we love Him and how great He is. We offer a "sacrifice of praise" (Heb. 13:15). But God desires our obedience Monday through Saturday, too. Do our habits and choices match the songs we sing and the sermons we hear? It is easy to see the faults in Saul, but we, too, can be guilty of offering God sacrifices rather than obedience. By God's Spirit, we can do both. We can worship Him and give Him the praise that He deserves, and we can obey as an act of worship that is pleasing to God (see Rom. 12:1).

3. GOD REJECTS SAUL AS KING OF ISRAEL

READ 1 SAMUEL 15:24-28

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SAUL'S REPEATED REJECTION OF THE LORD'S COMMANDS?

Just as Saul tore a piece of Samuel's robe, so God tore the kingdom away from Saul. He and his descendants would not rule over Israel. Like a torn cloth, it would not be neat or pretty. Years of rivalry, jealousy, and strife would characterize the rest of Saul's kingship. He had rejected the word of the Lord, so God rejected Saul as king.

HOW MIGHT SAUL'S STORY SERVE AS A WARNING TO US?

Saul began so well, but he did not finish well. His early rule was marked by humility and unity. His later years were marked by pride and division. He is a reminder that past successes do not guarantee future victories. We must continue to humble ourselves, to honor the word of the Lord, and to seek to please God more than man. Only then will we be able to persevere in our spiritual journey and finish well.



1 SAMUEL 15:13-23

15:13-21. “As in the previous confrontation between Saul and Samuel at Gilgal, the king blamed others for any sins that were committed.”²³

15:13-21. “Samuel . . . could not permit God’s primary political and military representative to get by with only partial obedience. Partial obedience was in fact disobedience. Saul’s sin was the sin of Achan, who had also spared the choicest plunder . . . (cf. Josh 7:21). Achan and his family died for his sin; Saul’s sin would bring him misery and death and would cause his family’s loss of kingship.”²⁴

15:22-23. “Even sacrifice is unacceptable if it becomes only a ruse for real submission to God’s will.”²⁵

15:22-23. “Clearly the Torah integrated sacrifice into the life of obedience to God; however, it never envisioned it as a substitute for obedience.”²⁶

15:23. “God’s rejection of Saul’s position of authority was caused by Saul’s rejection of God’s authoritative Word.”²⁷

1 SAMUEL 15:24-28

15:24-28. “For all practical purposes, this statement of the loss of relationship with Samuel means Saul’s reign has ended. He will technically continue as Israel’s king for many years, but his legitimacy has eroded. He has disqualified himself as the representative of Yahweh.”²⁸

15:24-28 “[Saul] simply cannot continue as the anointed king of Israel because he has consistently repudiated the very structure that made his kingship possible. His sin has knocked over the pillar that has supported his own rule.”²⁹



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE

CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

Because God gave us His Word as authoritative in all matters related to life and faith, we believe His Word was written in a way that can be understood with the help of the Holy Spirit. Believing the Scriptures are clear does not mean that every part is equally easy to interpret, neither does it mean we will never make mistakes in our interpretation. It does mean that with God’s help, people are capable of understanding the biblical text for themselves as they employ correct methods of interpretation.

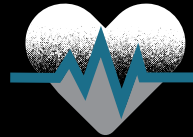


CHRIST CONNECTION

Saul looked to be the king God's people needed, but his failure to trust and obey God led to God rejecting him. Jesus did not look like the King God's people needed, but through His total obedience to God even to His death on the cross, He pleased the Father who accepted His sacrifice on behalf of the people. All who trust in Jesus are accepted by the Father.



HEAD



HEART



HANDS

HOW MIGHT PEER PRESSURE AFFECT HOW YOU OBEY OR DISOBEY GOD?

In both instances where Saul disobeyed God, the outside pressure from his soldiers played a key role. Peer pressure can be both good and bad. The presence and encouragement of others may help us choose the right thing even when it is difficult. But the influence of others may also lead us toward unwise choices. Recognizing the influence others have on you in the decision-making process is critical to your effort to obey God.

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO OBEY GOD WITH YOUR WHOLE HEART? WHAT DISTRACTS US FROM DOING SO?

Saul defeated the Amalekites, but he only partially obeyed God's instruction in the process. We can also do things halfway. Saul's story challenges us to obey God with our whole heart. That means, in part, following His instructions entirely rather than picking and choosing what we prefer. It also means giving God our best in each task and responsibility. Whatever you do—worship, school, job, prayer, etc.—be all in for Jesus.

HOW CAN WE HELP EACH OTHER OBEY GOD MORE FULLY?

It takes a community of believers who love and are committed to each other for all of us to grow. We all need people like Samuel in our lives, who can challenge us and tell us the truth. Mentorship, friendship, and accountability are things we all need if we are going to obey God more. Discuss how you can leverage your relationships to encourage one another to follow the Lord.