

Saul Disobeys God

(1 Samuel 15:1-31)

Introduction

What have you heard people say when they are caught doing something wrong? Sometimes people make excuses for not doing what they know they should do. [Teacher, lead the children into a discussion of some of the excuses they have heard such as the following:

- “I was late to class because...”
- “I didn’t do my homework because...”
- “I forgot to brush my teeth because...”
- “I didn’t clean my room because...”

If you don’t do what you’re asked to do or if you only partly obey, you are really being disobedient. In our Bible story today, we’ll hear about someone who made excuses for doing wrong instead of obeying God.

Opening Prayer

Father, In Your word You tell us to obey our parents in all things, to love our enemies, and to be kind and tenderhearted to each other. Sometimes we fail to do those things. We don’t always obey our parents and sometimes we aren’t very loving to others. Yet, Lord, You want us to do the right thing. Teach us this morning how very important it is to You for us to be obedient. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

I will hurry, without delay, to obey your commands. (Psalm 119:60 NLT)

Lesson

Israel had been ruled by judges for over 200 years. Samuel was the last of the judges and he was Israel’s greatest judge.

When Samuel was getting on toward the end of his life, he appointed his worthless sons to take his place as judges over Israel. But the people didn’t want Samuel’s sons to rule over them. They insisted that God give them a king because they wanted to be like all the nations around them.

God told the people that it was going to be hard on them to have an earthly king. But, they refused to listen. So, even though it disappointed God, He told Samuel to appoint Saul king over Israel.

When we pick up the story this morning, Saul had been the king of God’s people for many years.

Saul had started as a good king. But after awhile he became full of pride. He got to the point that he wasn’t as interested in obeying God as he used to be. He seemed to want to do everything his own way instead of God’s way. So God gave Samuel a message for King Saul.

1 Samuel 15:1-3

One day Samuel said to Saul, “It was the LORD who told me to anoint you as king of his people, Israel. Now listen to this message from the LORD! This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies has declared: I have decided to settle accounts with the nation of Amalek for opposing Israel when they came from Egypt. Now go and completely destroy the entire Amalekite nation—men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys.”

Why did God command such utter destruction? The Amalekites were a band of guerrilla terrorists. They lived by attacking other nations and carrying off their wealth and the families. They were the first to attack the Israelites in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land.

Remember, Moses had told Joshua to pull together an army to fight them (Exodus 17:9). But Joshua didn’t wipe them out. So, they continued to raid Israelite camps at every opportunity ever since – for hundreds of years.

God knew that the Israelites could never live peacefully in the Promised Land as long as the Amalekites existed. He also knew that their corrupt, idolatrous religious practices threatened Israel's relationship with Him. The only way to protect the Israelites was to utterly destroy the people of this warlike nation and all their possessions, including their idols.

The Amalekites had heard about Israel's true and living God. They probably watched God part the Red Sea. Surely they knew about the miracles God performed in Egypt before the Pharaoh finally let them go. The Amalekites had every opportunity to come to Him and make Him their God. But they refused to believe in Him. Their sinful unbelief caused them to do wicked things. Because God is holy, He must punish sin (Romans 6:23).

You and I also deserve to be punished for our sins, just like the Amalekites. But in His love, God sent His perfect Son, the Lord Jesus, to take the punishment for our sins. Jesus was beaten and put on the cross. He gave His blood for you as He died (1 John 1:7b). When you believe in the Lord Jesus, He will save you from the punishment of your sins. The Amalekites refused to believe in God, and now God was going to judge them for their wickedness.

God told Saul to attack the Amalekites and to get rid of everything that belonged to them. And God expected Saul to obey!

1 Samuel 15:9

Saul and his men spared Agag's life and kept the best of the sheep and goats, the cattle, the fat calves, and the lambs—everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality.

King Saul gathered a great army and set out after the Amalekites. But then, after the mighty battle had been fought and won, Saul and his army only destroyed the people and the goods that they considered worthless; they kept Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and they kept the best of the animals for themselves.

Why did Saul return with the king and some of the animals? Hadn't he been told to completely destroy the Amalekites, all the people and their animals, and everything? Saul didn't believe God; he didn't take God at His word; and, he decided to do things his own way. Saul deliberately disobeyed what God had told him to do.

God wants you to be obedient to Him; even if what He asks you to do seems hard. There are times when you and I are tempted to do only part of what God says. For example,

Ephesians 4:25

So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth...

Do you ever purposely tell only half the truth? [Teacher, discuss.]

Colossians 3:20

Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord.

When Mom or Dad tells you to do something, do you ever obey only part way?

Matthew 5:44

Love your enemies...

Do you show love only to people who do nice things for you?

When God gives a command, He expects His children to obey Him. We please God by showing our love for Him through our obedience. Saul deliberately disobeyed God when he kept the king and some of the animals alive. And this made God very sad.

1 Samuel 15:10-11

Then the LORD said to Samuel, "I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command." Samuel was so deeply moved when he heard this that he cried out to the LORD all night.

Samuel was so sad about this situation he prayed all night to God.

The next morning, Samuel went out to meet Saul on his way home. And Saul told Samuel that he had done all that the Lord had told him to do.

1 Samuel 15:13

When Samuel finally found him, Saul greeted him cheerfully. "May the LORD bless you," he said. "I have carried out the LORD's command!"

This was a big lie! So, Samuel confronts Saul with his lie.

1 Samuel 15:14

"Then what is all the bleating of sheep and goats and the lowing of cattle I hear?" Samuel demanded.

Samuel could hear the sheep and the cows. He knew that Saul hadn't completely destroyed all of the animals.

What excuse do you think Saul made for bringing home some of the animals?

1 Samuel 15:15

"It's true that the army spared the best of the sheep, goats, and cattle," Saul admitted. "But they are going to sacrifice them to the LORD your God. We have destroyed everything else"

First Saul tried to blame it on his soldiers. Then, he said they kept some of them alive to give them to the Lord! They knew that because God is holy, their sin had to be punished. So in those days, they sacrificed animals to God as a way to make up for their sins. Maybe Saul thought that a good excuse would make things right!

This made Samuel very angry at Saul! Here's what he told Saul.

1 Samuel 15:18-19

And the LORD sent you on a mission and told you, 'Go and completely destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, until they are all dead.' Why haven't you obeyed the LORD? Why did you rush for the plunder and do what was evil in the LORD's sight?"

Saul kept insisting that they brought the animals home to give to the Lord.

Do you think gifts are more important to God than obeying Him?

1 Samuel 15:22

But Samuel replied, "What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.

God wants us to be obedient to Him more than anything else. And, He wants us to be completely obedient. When we only do part of what we're asked to do, like Saul did, you are still being disobedient.

God expects you and me to obey Him completely and humbly. Sometimes you may not want to do all that God says. But, you must ask God to give you the strength and the "want to" to obey Him. You must count on God's strength to enable you to obey Him. Saul had refused to do what God had told him, and Samuel had to face Saul with his sin.

1 Samuel 15:26 [Teacher, read...]

...Since you have rejected the LORD's command, he has rejected you as king of Israel."

Because Saul disobeyed God, He didn't want Saul to be king anymore. It was a sad day for Samuel and for all Israel. Their king had deliberately disobeyed God.

God doesn't lie or change His mind. When He tells you to do something, He means it! The Bible calls disobeying God *sin*. Next time you do something wrong, instead of giving excuses, confess your sin – admit that you were wrong – and ask God to forgive you and to help you obey Him in the future.

Closing Prayer

Father, help us to take Your commandments very seriously. You have told us not to lie or cheat or steal, yet so often we only obey You part way. We are sinners, deserving of punishment. Thank You for sending Jesus to die in our place on the cross. His death took the punishment that we deserve. And, because we are thankful to You, we want to obey You in all things every day. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. True or False: God had given Samuel a message for King Saul. (True.)
2. True or False: God's instructions were to get rid of a few things that belonged to the enemy. (False.)
3. True or False: Saul did what God told him to do. (False.)
4. True or False: Saul gave excuses for not obeying God. (True.)
5. True or False: God still loved Saul, but his kingdom would be taken away. (True.)
6. When might a child make an excuse for not obeying God? (You were asked to do one of these chores, but you didn't: clean your room; to do the dishes; feed the dog; take out the trash; pick up your toys; put your bike away; brush your teeth...)
7. When do you need to ask God's help in obeying Him?
8. According to our Memory Verse, what is a good way to obey God? (Hurry to obey. Don't put off doing what is right.)
9. In our story today, God told Samuel what King Saul was supposed to do, but King Saul made excuses. What is something God wants people to do? (Tell the truth. Be patient. Help others.)
10. What are some excuses people give for not obeying God? What excuses might a kid make for not doing what is right? (Obeying God is too hard. Nobody else has to obey. I'll obey next time.)
11. When we do not obey God, instead of making excuses we can ask God to forgive us. What can you do this week to obey God?
12. What excuses did Saul give for not obeying God's commands? (The soldiers did it. We kept the animals for God!)
13. What are some commands God wants us to obey? (Worship God. Honor parents. Tell the truth. Be satisfied with what you have. Be kind. Show God's love. Tell about Jesus.)
14. When are some times that it is hard to obey God's commands? When is it hard to do what we are told to do? (When you're mad at your mom or dad it's hard to honor and respect them. When your friend has a nifty new toy, it's hard not to desire the same thing for yourself—that's coveting.)

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