



LESSON 16

Saul disobeys God

1 SAMUEL 13:1-15:35



God rejects those who reject His word.



“And 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 listen than the fat of rams . . . Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king’” (1 Sam 15:22–23).

Supporting Truths

1. Disobedience is not doing all that God says.
2. Disobedience comes from a heart that despises God’s word.
3. Disobedience comes from an idolatrous heart.
4. Doing good things does not excuse disobedience.
5. Disobedience without repentance leads to trouble and rejection by God.

Objectives

1. List two examples of Saul not doing all that God said.
2. List three examples of Saul despising God’s word.
3. Identify what Saul most valued, feared, and trusted in his heart.
4. Explain Samuel’s response to Saul’s “sacrifice.”
5. Describe the troubles Saul faced and the privileges he lost by his disobedience.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Summary

God had warned Israel that a human king was not the answer to their problems. Saul's failure as king proved this. He repeatedly ignored and disobeyed God's word. He feared man instead of God, trusted himself instead of God, valued wealth more than God, and loved his own fame more than God's glory. He was an idolater at heart. He defied God, worshiped himself, and refused to repent. Because he disobeyed God's clear instructions, God rejected Him and his descendants as king.

Spotlight on the Gospel

The story of Saul's failure shows that God has a plan to save. He had already chosen David as a king after His own heart, and through David He would send the Messiah. Unlike Saul, the Messiah would perfectly obey God's word. By His obedient life, death, and resurrection, the Messiah is able to give a new heart to those whom He chooses so that they can trust in Him and obey Him. Those who trust in Jesus will never be rejected.

LAST WEEK



Israel rejects God as King

1 Samuel 8:1–12:25

THIS WEEK



Saul disobeys God

1 Samuel 13:1–15:35

NEXT WEEK



God sees David's heart

1 Samuel 16:1–23

UNITED KINGDOM

Lesson Commentary

God rejects those who reject His word.

Israel sinned by trusting a human king instead of trusting God. So God gave them the king they deserved, a physically impressive but spiritually shallow man. Saul never valued God's word or submitted to it. Instead, he disobeyed repeatedly. By rejecting God's word, Saul rejected God. And because Saul rejected God, God rejected Saul.

Saul rejected God's word about the sacrifice (13:1–23)

Though Saul enjoyed initial success in his struggle against the Philistines, there are hints of trouble in his first victory. First, it was Jonathan who took the initiative to attack Geba, not Saul (1 Sam 13:3). But Saul took the credit for it in his official report (13:4). Second, despite Saul's posturing, his troops quickly began leaving him when the Philistines sent a massive army in retaliation for Jonathan's raid on the garrison at Geba (13:4–7). Now would have been a good time to cry out to God.

But Saul did not cry out to God. Instead, he took matters into his own hand. Because he feared man rather than God (Jer 17:5–8), he impatiently offered the sacrifice himself (1 Sam 13:9). When Samuel confronted him, Saul said he forced himself to offer the sacrifice because there was no other option (13:12).



THINK ABOUT IT

We disobey when we fear man rather than God.

Saul's actions show that he did not value God's word spoken through Samuel. He also despised the sacrifices of the LORD. The sacrifices were a mere ritual to him—a hoop to jump through in order to get the blessing he wanted (13:12). But God never rewards disobedience with blessing (Deut 28). Finally, rather than confess his sin, Saul blamed everyone but himself. Samuel was late, his troops were disloyal, and the Philistines were threatening (13:11). In his eyes, he was the victim.

In reality, Saul was himself to blame. The consequences of his rejection were severe. He could have had an eternal dynasty (13:13). Instead, he got trouble.

Samuel left him, and his own forces were overwhelmed by the Philistines. Outnumbered and under supplied, the Israelites were incapable of stopping Philistine raiding parties from roaming wherever they pleased (13:16–22).

Saul is a warning to all who will listen. We have God's word, the Bible, but do we hear and obey it? When pressure mounts and anxiety builds, do we trust and wait upon God (Isa 40:31)? Or do we take matters into our own hands, disobeying the command of God? At the heart of obedience is godly **fear**, reverential awe and respect. The question is: Who do we fear most? God or man?

Saul rejected God's word in battle (14:1–52)

As the Philistines closed in, it was again Jonathan, not Saul, who took action. Jonathan's faith emphasizes Saul's lack of faith. Jonathan believed God could save by many or by few, but he also left the matter up to God (1 Sam 14:6–10). Through his faith God saved Israel that day (14:10, 15, 23). In contrast, Saul did not entrust the battle to God, nor did he leave the matter in God's hands. He called the priest to seek God's guidance, but in his impatience, Saul stopped the priest (14:18–19). Later, Saul did not even bother calling the priest. This time it was the priest who interrupted Saul, reminding him to seek God's approval regarding his plans (14:36).

Because of Saul's **disobedience**, rejecting God's commands to follow his own desires, Israel's victory was not what it might have been had he obeyed. While despising God's perfect word, Saul required everyone to follow his own foolish words (14:24). He even vowed to kill his own son, who was a model of what a king should be (14:44). However, Saul's own people defied him, rescuing Jonathan from his hands (14:45). In the end, Saul gave up his pursuit of the Philistines, allowing them to continue their retreat unhindered.

So Israel got what they asked for, a king like all the other nations (8:20). Though successful in battle, Saul was spiritually blind (14:47–48). He was not fit to lead

THINK ABOUT IT

We disobey when we are too impatient to seek God's will.



STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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God's people. With his lips he praised God, but his foolish actions revealed a heart that was far from God. Similarly, all who ignore God's word are foolish because they live as if God does not exist (Ps 14:1).

Saul rejected God's word about the Amalekites (15:1–35)

God gave Saul another opportunity to obey when Samuel told him, "Listen to the words of the LORD" (1 Sam 15:1). His mission: to kill all the Amalekites—every man, woman, child, and animal. The Amalekites became a doomed people when they attacked Israel in the wilderness after leaving Egypt (Deut 25:18). Despite 300 years of God's patience, the Amalekites had not changed (1 Sam 15:33). Because God loves His people, He severely judges those who try to destroy His people (2 Thess 1:6). So He called Saul to carry out this judgment.

Sadly, Saul did not obey. Motivated by greed and fear of man, He spared Agag and the best of the animals (1 Sam 15:9, 19, 24). Like Achan before him (Josh 7:21), he kept back some of what was devoted to destruction. Saul even

had the audacity to tell Samuel that he had obeyed, and when confronted by Samuel, he continued to maintain his innocence (1 Sam 15:13, 20).

Saul made an excuse that the animals were taken in order to be sacrificed to God (15:21). However, Samuel responded: "To obey is better than sacrifice" (15:22; Ps 51:15–17; Isa 1:11–17; 1 John 2:3–4). While sacrifice was a part of worship, it could never be a substitute for obedience from the heart. God desires heartfelt obedience, not ritual sacrifice. Even Saul's excuse was insincere. He had already shown that he cared more about his own glory than God's (1 Sam 15:12). He even referred to God as Samuel's God, not his own (15:21).

Because Saul rejected God's word, God rejected Saul as king. Despite his rejection as king, Saul could still have repented. But he did not. He acted as if a quick confession could return everything back to normal immediately

(15:25), showing that he still did not understand just how terrible disobedience is. His fake repentance was focused on his own honor, not on God's glory (15:30). So the story ends with both God and Samuel grieving over Saul's failure (15:35).

Because of Saul's sin, God regretted making him king (15:11, 35). God loves His creation, and He grieves deeply when He sees mankind dishonoring Him and turning from their greatest good (Gen 6:6). However, this does not mean that God made a mistake or was caught by surprise (1 Sam 15:29). God does not change either His nature or His predetermined plan (Num 23:19). God was sad to see Saul's hard heart, but all along, God had planned to give Israel the king they deserved, for He had in mind a king after His own heart (1 Sam 13:14; 15:28; 16:1).

Saul's failure warns us of the deadly reality of disobedience. But it also shows a deeper problem: disobedience flows from the **heart**, *the center of our thoughts, desires, and emotions* (Prov 4:23; Matt 15:19). Disobedience flows from a heart that does not love God (John 14:24); a heart that fears man and trusts man instead of God; a heart that values one's own opinion more than God's word; a heart that is greedy for selfish gain; a heart that worships self as an idol in God's place and arrogantly defies God (1 Sam 15:23).

Disobedience grieves God, leads to greater trouble, forfeits God's blessing, and ultimately leads to rejection by God. Unless there is repentance, no amount of good works or sacrifices can make up for disobedience. So repent quickly. Admit your sin and be humbled by how serious disobedience is. Turn from sin for the sake of God's glory. Look to Jesus to give you a new heart, one that is capable of obedience (Ps 51:10; John 3:3–5; 2 Cor 5:17).

THINK ABOUT IT
Repentance
longs to honor
God above all.



THINK ABOUT IT
Partial
obedience is
disobedience.

Lesson Outline

God rejects those who reject His word.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Saul disobeyed God by not waiting for Samuel (13:1–23).
2. Saul disobeyed God by not waiting for God's instructions (14:1–52).
3. Saul disobeyed God by not killing all the Amalekites (15:1–22).
4. Because Saul disobeyed, God rejected Saul (15:23–35).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Saul rejected God's word about the sacrifice (13:1–23).
 - Saul's army was fleeing because they feared the huge Philistine army (3:1–7).
 - Saul disobeyed God's word and offered the sacrifice without Samuel (13:8–9).
 - God rejected Saul's descendants as kings after Saul (13:13–15).
 - Saul and Israel were helpless against the Philistines (13:16–22).
2. Saul rejected God's word in battle (14:1–52).
 - God used Jonathan to defeat the Philistines (14:1–15).
 - Saul stopped the priest from seeking God's word (14:16–19).
 - God saved Israel from the Philistines (14:20–23).
 - Saul brought trouble to Israel by His foolish words (14:24–46).
3. Saul rejected God's word about the Amalekites (15:1–35).
 - Saul disobeyed God's command to kill all the Amalekites (15:1–9).
 - Saul refused to confess when Samuel confronted him (15:10–21).
 - Samuel explained that disobedience is a terrible sin (15:22).
 - The LORD rejected Saul as king (15:23–35).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. Did Saul obey and wait for Samuel to come offer the sacrifice?**
No. He was impatient. He disobeyed God's word.
- 2. Did Saul want to hear God's word during the battle with the Philistines?**
No. He did not think God's word was important.
- 3. Did Saul obey God's word when God told him to kill all the Amalekites?**
No, he did not obey completely. He spared the king and some animals.
- 4. Because Saul disobeyed, what did God do?**
God rejected Saul and his descendants as kings.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. Why did Saul offer the sacrifice instead of waiting for Samuel?**
He feared man (the Philistines) more than he feared God.
- 2. Why was Saul's reason for offering the sacrifice foolish?**
He said he offered the sacrifice to seek God's favor, but disobedience never pleases God.
- 3. How did Saul dishonor God's word during the battle with the Philistines?**
Saul interrupted the priest because he was in a hurry. Later, Saul did not even ask the priest to seek God's guidance.
- 4. How did Saul hurt his own troops during the battle?**
He made an oath that they should not eat any food that day. He wanted people to obey his foolish words, but he wasn't willing to obey God's perfect word.
- 5. Why did God tell Saul to kill all the Amalekites?**
God wanted to punish them for their cruelty to His people, Israel.
- 6. Did Saul repent when Samuel confronted him about his disobedience?**
No. Saul made excuses.
- 7. How did Samuel respond when Saul kept making excuses?**
Samuel said, "To obey is better than sacrifice." Samuel explained that disobedience is like worshipping idols and trying to talk with demons.
- 8. How did Samuel and God respond when Saul pretended to repent?**
They rejected Saul as king, but they grieved over him.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



SIMON SAYS

Those who do not obey exactly get “rejected.” Tell the children that today’s lesson is about a man who didn’t obey God completely.

WAIT SEVEN SLEEPS

Bring in a pillow, sleeping bag, stuffed animal, or any other item that represents sleep. Tell the children that in today’s lesson, King Saul was instructed to wait seven sleeps for Samuel to come give a sacrifice.



FROM THE HEART

Bring two containers (preferably heart-shaped). Have one filled with mud, the other with small candies or toys. Reach into the muddy one and get out some mud. Show the children. Ask, “Why is there mud in my hand?” Because there was mud in the “heart.” After washing your hands, reach into the other “heart” and pick out something nice. Why is there something nice in my hand? Because there were nice things in the second “heart.” So Saul’s disobedience came out of a disobedient heart (Prov 4:23).

THE CLOCK

As you begin to teach about Saul’s first rebellion in 1 Samuel 13:1–12, show the children an alarm clock or timer. Set the timer, and tell them to wait for it to go off before doing something (such as eating the snack you have already handed them, or talking). Talk about Samuel’s instructions to Saul, referred to in verse 8. Also talk about how long Saul waited, but in the end took matters into his own hands.



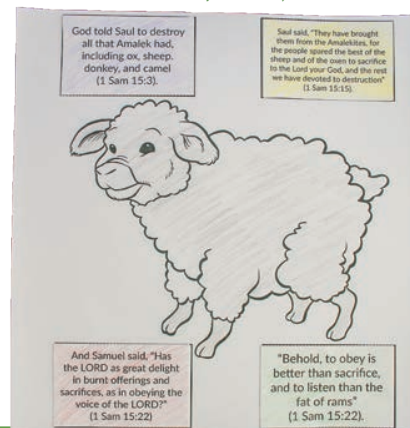
SAUL’S INCOMPLETE OBEDIENCE

See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 1*.

Materials: Craft sheets, scissors, glue, cotton balls (optional), and crayons.

Directions: Pre-cut rectangles with verses from craft sheet. Have the children color the rectangles and glue them to the craft sheet with the sheep. Children can color or decorate the sheep with cotton balls.

Saul’s Incomplete Obedience
See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 1*



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

JUSTIFYING SIN

This week's lesson is a good example of a man's attempt to justify his sin. We justify sin when we try to make excuses for it or blame someone else. Ask the children for some excuses they sometimes make for their sin. You may have to help them recognize this practice ("I was not listening because Mary was talking to me" or "My sister started the fight" or "I did not clean up because I forgot," etc.). Explain that we make our sin even worse when we try to justify it (1 John 1:8–9).

CAN YOU WAIT?

Give each child a piece of candy as they enter the classroom. Give them specific instructions (only once) not to eat it until they are given permission. You may want to teach a part of the lesson and then highlight for the children how difficult it was for them not to eat their candy. Some may have failed to obey completely. This is exactly what happened to Saul. He disobeyed God when he became impatient waiting for Samuel. It is important to realize that every time we choose to sin, it is very serious to God.



ILLUSTRATE

A CLEAN CUP

Use two cups to illustrate the importance of truly doing what is right, not just appearing to do what is right. One cup should be dirty on the outside but clean on the inside. The other should be clean on the outside but dirty on the inside. Ask the children which is more important, for a cup to be clean on the outside or the inside. When you come to the point of the lesson where Saul did one thing God required but did not obey in other ways, explain that Saul was like the cup that was clean on the outside, but not the inside. (Also see Matthew 23:25.)

WHICH ONE IS REPENTANCE?

Act out two scenarios of a child apologizing for taking another child's toy. Scenario 1: "I'm sorry. But he took my toy yesterday, and you are always harder on me. Besides, I was going to give him my old broken toy to play with." Scenario 2: "I'm sorry. I was wrong because I took something that wasn't mine. I was selfish. I was not loving, and I did not honor God. Here's your toy back. Will you please forgive me?"



APPLY

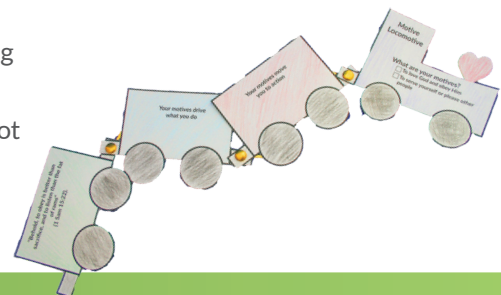
MOTIVE LOCOMOTIVE

See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft sheets, scissors, brads, and crayons.

Directions: Have students color each of the train pieces. Next, have them cut out the pieces and assemble the train using brads.

*Motive Locomotive
See Year 2 Craft Book, Book 1*



AGES 9–11

**INTRODUCE****SKIT: SOMEWHAT OBEYING**

Tell your child (volunteer from class) to wear a certain outfit to school, wash his face, and comb his hair. When the child comes out, he is wearing the pants he was told but not the shirt; it is similar, but not the one he was told to wear. He also washed his face but only ran his hands through his hair; he did not comb it, so it still looks a little messy. Explain to the children that today's story is similar. Saul obeyed, somewhat. Explain that obedience is doing completely what is asked of you.

INSIDE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUTSIDE

Actors are paid to convince people that they are someone other than who they actually are. If you were to meet them in person, they probably would be very different from who they portray in the movies. This should lead to a discussion about how people sometimes are very different on the outside from how they are on the inside. In today's lesson, we see that Saul did what he thought looked right on the outside, but it actually was not what God wanted. God wants obedience, not just an outward appearance of obedience.

**ILLUSTRATE****PERFECT OBEDIENCE**

To illustrate perfect obedience, tell the following story: A young son of a missionary couple in Zaire was playing in the yard. Suddenly the voice of the boy's father rang out from the porch, "Philip, obey me instantly! Drop to your stomach!" Immediately he did as his father commanded. "Now crawl toward me as fast as you can!" The boy obeyed. "Stand up and run to me!" Philip responded unquestioningly and ran to his father's arms. As he turned to look at the tree by which he had been playing, he saw a large deadly snake hanging from one of the branches! At the first command of his father, Philip could have hesitated and asked, "Why do you want me to do that?" Or he could have casually replied, "In a minute." But his instant obedience without questioning saved his life! (Donald Grey Barnhouse [1895–1960].)

DOING IT JUST RIGHT

Bake three kinds of cookies: one that contains wrong ingredients, one that was not left in the oven long enough, and one that is just right. Explain what is wrong with each of the cookies. God requires us to follow His "recipe" book very carefully.

**APPLY****PATIENCE ON THE LORD**

Being patient can be difficult. Discuss with the children times when they have had to be patient. Explain that God's timing is always best, even when we think that we know best. Saul was not patient for the Lord's timing. He felt it was better to be disobedient in one area in order to do what he thought was right. Make this lesson practical to the children by discussing ways that they can be patient when they know they must wait on the Lord rather than trusting in their own intellect.