

SAUL REJECTED BY THE LORD

– APRIL 4. – 1 SAMUEL 15:10-23. –

DISOBEDIENCE TO THE HEAVENLY KING COST SAUL THE THRONE – HIS FIRST SEVERE TEST – LESSON TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL – SAUL'S SECOND SEVERE TEST – WHY THE AMALEKITES WERE DESTROYED – WAS THEIR CONDEMNATION JUST? – SAUL'S WRONG ATTITUDE OF HEART – BEAUTY AND STRENGTH OF SAMUEL'S CHARACTER.

**"Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice."
– 1 Samuel 15:22.**

THE words of the Golden Text of this Study are the Lord's rebuke to King Saul by the Prophet Samuel, in connection with the announcement that Saul, by disobedience to the Heavenly King, had forfeited his privilege of representing God on the throne of Israel. The rending of the kingdom from the hands of Saul meant more than his own displacement; it meant that his son and his successive heirs should not continue as the Lord's representatives in the kingdom.

For a number of years Saul seems to have prospered fairly on the throne, and the people of Israel prospered with him. It was several years after his coronation that his first severe testing, noted in our lesson of two weeks ago, came to him. At that time a war was instituted against the Philistines, who apparently dominated Israel. Saul waited several days for the Prophet Samuel to come to offer the sacrifices of the Lord, previous to the beginning of the battle. Samuel was providentially hindered; and Saul himself, after waiting for a time, offered the sacrifices to the Lord, contrary to

the Divine arrangement, and then proceeded to battle, the result being a considerable defeat to his forces.

Apparently King Saul was not evilly intentioned, but lacked proper respect and reverence for the Lord and His arrangements. This incident may be said to have been the beginning of Saul's rejection by the Lord. The Prophet Samuel's words to him were, "Thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord;...now thy kingdom shall not continue. The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart." – 1 Samuel 13:13,14.

APPLICATION TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL

The lesson of this incident is as applicable to Spiritual Israel today as it was to King Saul and to Natural Israel in their day – "Obedience is better than sacrifice." In how many ways we may see expressions of this same condition amongst many who profess the Lord's name today? Many are workers in the Lord's Cause in the various denominations of Christendom, and many are their sacrifices of time and money; but inasmuch as they are not obedient to the Lord, they fail of the blessing they would have and, indeed, in a considerable measure cut themselves off from greater privileges and opportunities. Yea, many of them, we fear, are cutting themselves off from the Kingdom, from glory and from joint-heirship with our Lord in that Kingdom.

From this lesson, given us in King Saul's experience, we should learn that our Heavenly Father wishes us to be very attentive to His Word, and not to think for a moment that we can improve thereon, or that times and circumstances will alter the propriety of our obedience to Him. Had King Saul been obedient and the results disastrous, he would at least have had a clear conscience; he could have said that he had been obedient to God and was not responsible for results. But if he had been **[R5647 : page 77]** obedient, God would have been responsible for results; and we know that Divine Power would have brought about the

proper results. Let us apply the lesson to ourselves in respect to our daily conduct in every matter of life. Let us hearken to the Word of God and keep close to it, not fearing the results, but having faith that He who keeps us never slumbers nor sleeps and is too wise to err, as well as competent to meet every emergency that could possibly come upon us as a result of our obedience.

How many of the Lord's people in Babylon would be blessed by following the instructions of this lesson! Time and again they have said to themselves, "I see that present institutions and arrangements are contrary to the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ and the practise of the early Church; but what can I do? I am identified with this system and am engaged in sacrificing for its upbuilding. If now I withdraw my hand, it will mean more or less disaster. I wish I were free from human institutions, and that I had my hands filled with the Lord's work along the lines of His Word; but I cannot let go, for necessity seems to be upon me. I must perform a sacrifice, and this seems to be my most convenient place for so doing."

The Lord is not pleased with such arguments. His message to us is that to obey is better than sacrifice; that we leave the matter of our sacrifice in His hands; for unless He accepts it, our sacrifice will amount to nothing, and He accepts sacrifices only from those who are first obedient. "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and receive not of her plagues." – Revelation 18:4.

Although the Lord announced the rejection of King Saul, the prediction was evidently not fulfilled for several years after – perhaps for ten years. The decree stood as if it were a dead letter; for quite possibly King Saul was properly exercised by his rejection and became more attentive and more obedient to the Divine will, and David, who was probably anointed about this

time, was not yet sufficiently developed to be the Lord's representative in Saul's stead in the kingdom.

KING SAUL'S SECOND TEST

King Saul's next severe trial was in connection with the Amalekites – a fierce nomadic people who on several occasions had done injury to the people of Israel. In sending the message to the king, the Lord gave special instructions that the Amalekites should be destroyed, saying, "Utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." Without mentioning other of Amalek's transgressions, He specifies that the destruction here was on account of Amalek's opposition to Israel in the way when the Israelites came up out of the land of Egypt, several centuries previously.

This narrative is seized upon by skeptics to prove either one or the other of two things: **(1)** That it was the imagination of either Samuel or Saul or of some one writing fictitiously in their names; or **(2)** That if it be accepted as being the command of the Lord, it would prove Him to be a monster – lacking in justice, pity, sympathy and love – that He should thus command the wholesale slaughter of human creatures and dumb animals. There is but one answer to make to this matter, and it should be satisfactory to all who understand it. It is this:

(1) The slaughter of the Amalekites did not mean, as is usually inferred, that being admittedly wicked they went forthwith to eternal torture. Death had the same meaning to the Amalekites that it had to their cattle – a termination of whatever was desirable in the present life; and the desirable things of the present life were probably not more to the Amalekites than to their herds. Slaughtered by the sword, the Amalekites suffered far less than if they had been made the subjects of famine or pestilence, and had died of hunger or disease – the ending of life with little pain to

themselves or trouble to others – the ending of comparatively uneventful lives, anyway.

They all went down to the great prison-house of death – Sheol, Hades, the tomb. God foreknew and had already arranged a great redemption, not only for them, but for all mankind. And that redemption, secured by the great sacrifice of Christ centuries after their death, will by and by secure to them release from their imprisonment – an awakening from the sleep of death. They will be amongst the class mentioned by our Lord, saying, "All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall come forth." They will come forth under much more favorable conditions, to learn of the grace of God in Christ and to be amongst the families of the earth who shall be blessed by the Seed of Abraham – Spiritual Israel. The Amalekites will not be in the Chief Resurrection, but will be awakened unto the privileges of Restitution by judgments – corrections in righteousness.

(2) It is quite true of the Amalekites, as it was of the Amorites, that they would have been cut off sooner, but that their iniquity was not yet come to the full. One lesson to be learned from this is that even though those nations may not be under special covenant relationship with God, there is a certain Divine supervision – that their iniquities go not too far; and that, when these iniquities have reached their full, punishment is to be expected. We know not the particulars respecting the Amalekites; but, knowing the character of God, and His justice and mercy, we may be sure that in some particular sense of the word their iniquities had come to the full and running-over measure before this order for their execution was committed to King Saul.

KING SAUL'S WILFUL DISOBEDIENCE

Saul's error in this trial was his failure to carry out the command of the Lord explicitly. He slew all the Amalekites, old and young, except the king, whom he kept alive, possibly thinking

to exhibit him in some kind of triumphal display. But as for the flocks and herds, he consented with his people to spare all that were desirable.

It was at this juncture that the Prophet Samuel came to him and the colloquy of our lesson ensued. The general narrative – Samuel's indignation and the Lord's positive statement – clearly indicates that King Saul had not misunderstood his instructions, but had with considerable deliberation violated them. Consequently we must understand his words addressed to the Prophet Samuel to have **[R5648 : page 77]** been to a great extent hypocritical. He first salutes the Prophet with blessings and with assurances that he had performed the commandment of the Lord successfully.

Immediately the Prophet replied, "What meaneth, then, this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" The Prophet understood at once that the work of destruction had not been complete – that King Saul and the Israelites were anxious to take a spoil. This was wholly contrary to the Divine direction. They were not to destroy their enemies to their own advantage, but to act simply as the agents of the Lord in thus executing His decree, the sentence of Justice. They were not to take booty and thus to become like the nations about them – a robber nation, profiting by the troubles which they inflicted upon the enemies of the Lord. This is in full accord with the Lord's character and the foregoing explanation of it. **[R5648 : page 78]**

Seeing that the Prophet was not likely to sympathize with his violation of the command, King Saul began hypocritically to represent that all the sheep and oxen captured from the enemy were to be sacrificed to the Lord; and incidentally this would have meant a great feast for the Israelites; for the flesh of animals so sacrificed was eaten by them. The Prophet stopped the king in his explanation, and told him of the Lord's words of the night

preceding, which in Jewish reckoning would be "this night," because their day began in the evening.

The Divine message calls attention to the fact that Saul was humble when he was chosen as the Lord's representative upon the throne, and that at that time he was very willing to give strict obedience to the Heavenly voice; but the intimation is that he had grown more self-confident, and therefore less reliant upon the Lord and less attentive to the Lord's commands. Getting into the wrong attitude of heart, he had failed to execute properly a very plain, specific direction. Knowingly and in violation of the Lord's command he had the spoil separated, and had spared the best when the Lord had commanded the reverse.

If, in applying the principles of this lesson to the Lord's people today, we think of the Amalekites as representing sins and remember that the Lord's command comes to us to put away sin entirely, we may get a good lesson. Like Saul, many are disposed to destroy the vilest things connected with sin, but to save alive the king sin, merely making him a prisoner. Many are disposed, also, to seek out the things which they realize to be condemned of the Lord to destruction – such things as would be choice and desirable to their taste; and frequently, like Saul, they claim that even these sins of the less obnoxious kind are held on to for the purpose of sacrificing them in order thus to honor God. How deceitful above all things is the heart! How necessary it is that all who would be in accord with the Lord should be thoroughly true-hearted, thoroughly sincere; and that under the Lord's direction we should seek to take away the life of every sinful principle, evil teaching, evil doctrine and all unholy words, deeds and thoughts!

OBEDIENCE VERSUS SACRIFICE

King Saul sought to defend his course, to put as good a face upon the matter as possible and to lay the responsibility for the saving of the spoil upon the hosts of Israel, who with himself were

very desirous of offering sacrifices to the Lord. The Prophet's answer is the pith of this Study and contains its Golden Text. He clearly pointed out to the king what the latter should have known and what all should recognize; namely, that offering sacrifices is far less pleasing to the Lord than is obedience to His Word. No one could offer an acceptable sacrifice to God unless he was obedient in his heart and unless the sacrifice represented that obedience.

So with God's people today. It is not so much of ill-gotten wealth that we may sacrifice to the Lord; it is not so much the proceeds acquired directly or indirectly by wrong doing that we may sacrifice acceptably. Our sacrifice must be from the heart. First of all must be the will. He who gives his will, his heart, to the Lord gives all; he who gives not his will, who comes not into heart obedience unto the Lord, can offer no sacrifice that could be acceptable to the Lord. "Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice," is a lesson which should be deeply engraved upon the hearts of all the sanctified in Christ Jesus.

It is also necessary to have the spirit of obedience. Whoever has that spirit will not only obey the Divine will, but will seek to know the Divine will more and more that he may obey it. It is of this class that the Scriptures declare, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them"; and again, in the words of our Redeemer, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy Law is written in my heart."

King Saul had been very diligent in his opposition to witchcraft and idolatry throughout the land of Israel, and in so doing was accomplishing a good work in accord with the Divine plan, the Divine will; but the Prophet calls attention to the fact that his energy in such matters would not prove an offset to his deliberate, wilful neglect of the Divine injunction. The Lord's commands against sin and every evil thing are to be executed to the very letter, no matter how highly exalted the sin may be in dignity and place, and no matter how precious or valuable or

desirable or toothsome the sin may be to our fallen natures. Though it be as dear as a right hand or as a right eye, there is no course open to the Lord's followers but to be obedient – obedient even unto death.

Although fully rejected, King Saul was not removed until the due time. The Prophet Samuel associated himself with the king in a public sacrifice, commemorating the victory over the Amalekites; and on this occasion he slew Agag with his own hand, and then departed to his home. He never afterward saw King Saul; yet the Scriptures declare, "Nevertheless, Samuel mourned for Saul" – thus again showing us the beauty and the strength of the Prophet's character. He was ever ready to do the command of the Lord in any and every particular, yet was not without a feeling of compassion for those who were out of the way – not a compassion which would make them his friends and lead him to co-operate in their wrong course, but one which would have been glad to co-operate with them at any time in a righteous course.

"ARE YE ABLE?"

Are ye able to walk in the narrow, strait way,
With no friend by your side, and no arm for your stay?
Can ye bravely go on through the darkening night?
Can ye patiently wait till the Lord sends the Light?

Are ye able to crush your soul's longing for Love,
Will ye seek for no friendship save that from above?
Can ye pass through this world, lone, unnoticed, unknown,
While your faith faintly whispers, "*He knoweth His own*"?

Where the feet of the Blessed One stood, can ye stand?
Can ye follow His steps to a *wilderness* land?
Are ye able to cast aside pleasure and fame?

Can ye live but to glorify **His** precious name?

Can ye smile as His dear voice says tenderly "No,"
When "**the field is so white,**" and your heart **yearns to go?**
Can ye rest then in silence, contented and still,
Till your Lord, the Chief Reaper, revealeth His will?

Are ye able to lay on the Altar's pure flame
That most treasured possession, your priceless **good name?**
Can ye ask of your Father a blessing for those
Who see naught in your life but to scorn and oppose?

When the conflict 'twixt Error and Truth fiercer grows,
Can ye wield the strong "**Sword**" against unnumbered foes?
Can ye lift up the "**Standard**" e'en higher and higher,
While His praises ye sing in the midst of the **fire?**

When ye see the Lord's cause going down to defeat,
Will your courage endure in the **seven-fold heat?**
Will your faith keep you steadfast, though heart and flesh fail,
As the New Creature passes beneath the last **Veil?**

Ah, if **thus** ye can drink of **the Cup He shall pour,**
And if never the Banner of Truth ye would lower,
His beloved ye are, and His crown ye shall wear,
In His Throne ye shall sit, and His glory shall share!

G. W. S.

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