

Does this help to reconcile the tension of God commanding the death of Israel's enemies?

What have you learnt about 1) God and 2) obeying the word of God?

Are you ever guilty of trying to justify your sin's as Saul did (and Adam and Eve before him)?

How do you respond to the truth that God is more interested in our inner attitudes than our outer religious practices? (see 15:22-23)

## Pray

This study has been written to accompany a sermon series at St Columb's Anglican Church Hawthorn. It is written for small group and personal study. It is meant as a resource so feel free to select the parts that are most useful to you or your group. It is advised that you at least do the section "Getting Inside the Passage," some parts of "Personal Application" and "Pray." The section "Going Further" will take you further into the 1 Samuel and the Bible as a whole.

With acknowledgement and thanks to Rev. Peter MacPherson  
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# 1 Samuel 15 Small Group Study Material

## Slaughter of the Amalekites

### Context

The Amalekites were an ancient people descended from Esau (Gen 14:7, 36:12&16) usually found south of Israel in the Negev area. They attacked the Israelites at Rephidim while they were on the exodus from Egypt. As a consequence of this attack on his people Yahweh vowed that he would wipe the Amalekites out (Ex 17:8-15)

Prior to entering the promised land the people are reminded of this in Deuteronomy 25:17-19

During the period of the Judges the Amalekites continued to attack Israel periodically and Saul has already gone to war against them (1 Sam 14:48)

### Getting Inside the Passage

1-9 Saul attacks the Amalekites. Unlike Saul's attack on the Philistines (13:1-4), this attack is commanded by God.

"totally destroy" (vv 3, 8-9) is the Hebrew *herem* ("ban") which means something which is devoted totally to Yahweh for his purposes. In this case his purpose is judgement. Read Exodus 17:8-15 to see why the Amalekites were under such a harsh judgement.

Note God's grace shown to the Kenites, the tribe of Moses' father-in-law (v6.)

Does Saul do what Samuel commands him to do? (vv 4-9)

10-12 Saul's disobedience.

What do we learn of Yahweh from this?

God "grieving" (v 11) literally means "repenting". What does this suggest about God?

What is Samuel's first reaction? (v11)

What sin/s has Saul committed? Do words like self-deception and self-justification help explain Saul's responses to Samuel?

22-31 Saul judged

What does God demand of his followers? (v 22-23)

Does Saul really repent or is he just trying to save face?

32-35 Final judgement

Why does Samuel execute Agag?

Samuel and Saul go their separate ways. Why is this so sad? (v35)  
note: 16:1-2 where Yahweh jolts Samuel out of his mourning

Saul is later reminded that this incident with Agag has been crucial in his loss of the Kingship (1 Sam:16-18)  
Try and summarise what Saul has done wrong.

## **Going Further**

Are all the Amalekites ever killed as Ex 17:8-15 & Deut 25:17-19 suggest they will be? It appears from 1 Sam 27:8, 30:1-20, 2 Sam 1:1, 8:12 & 1 Chron 4:43 that they continue for a long time as enemies of Israel.

In the book of Esther (c 500 years after Saul) Haman is described as an 'Agagite' which may mean that he is a descendant of Agag, king of the

Amalekites. This helps explain the hostility between Haman and the Jews, particularly as Mordecai was descended from Kish, as was Saul (Esther 2:5 & 3:1-6). There are old tribal and family enmities at work here. Read Esther 9:5-10 which fulfils Samuel's command to Saul and note how this time the Jews take no plunder.

For more examples of the idea of *herem* see Lev 27:28-29, Josh 6:17-21, 7:1-15 & 22:20. Notice how both people and things can be 'devoted' to God for his purposes. Also read Deut 20:16-18 to see why this was an important part of Israel's possessing of the Promised Land.

The idea that God 'repents' (NIV 'grieves') can mean either that he withholds judgement (2 Sam 24:16) or that he reverses something intended for good (compare Gen 6:6). How do we reconcile this with 1 Sam 15:29?

"He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."

Samuel says God delights in obedience rather than sacrifice. God looks more at our inner attitudes than our outer religious practices. This important theme is reinforced in other places: Ps 50:7-15, Ps 51:10-19, Isa 1:11-17, Hos 6:6, Mic 6:6-8. This theme is made even clearer in the New Testament. See Heb 10:1-18 which explain how the sacrifice of Christ provides forgiveness for our sins. We are called to live lives of obedience to Christ rather than offer sacrifices as such.

## **Personal Application**

How do you respond to the idea that people and things can be 'devoted' to God for his purposes?