

# 1st Samuel

## Lesson 29

### 1. The Story of Constant Wars of Saul with the Nations

#### a) Saul's Conflicts

At this point in the story, we will lose all sense of timing, for the writer will tell us the story of the constant wars of Saul with the nation. We start with Saul's conflicts. Verse 47.

*"Now when Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment.<sup>48</sup> He acted valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them." (14:47-48)*

If you were to look at a map of the Promised Land and identified all the foreign nations that surrounded Israel, the writer just provided the list of names of those foreign nations. Saul was in conflict with every one of these nations at some time during his reign. It seems to be endless. In reality, as we continue through 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, we will find that Saul was in constant conflict with these nations, and many times his own choices were the cause of the conflicts. But we will also discover something else about his conflicts; he seemed to be in constant conflict in his own family life, court life, and kingdom life.

This list is also important because it introduces us to the nations we will hear about in the rest of this book. The Amalekites are mentioned last, but that does not mean we will hear about them last because that story will come at the beginning of the next chapter. In other words, the defeat of the Amalekites has not occurred yet. This entry in the text is a summary of the war that is to come. As we have previously stated, 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel is not exactly in chronological order. In addition, the stories are completed in this book in their own context, yet, the context of their stories may overlap other stories that occurred at the same time on the calendar but are not mentioned outright in the storylines.

#### (1) The Summary of the Characters

For the reasons just mentioned, the writer gives us a summary of the characters involved in Saul's family, court, and stories. Verse 49.

*"Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan and Ishvi and Malchi-shua; and the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn Merab and the name of the younger Michal.<sup>50</sup> The name of Saul's wife was Abinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the captain of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle.<sup>51</sup> Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel." (14:49-51)*

Thus, the writer establishes for us the immediate family of Saul and his captain of the army, who is also a family member.

#### (2) A Summary of the Commitment

The writer then gives us a summary of the commitment of Saul's conflicts. Verse 52.

*"Now the war against the Philistines was severe all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man, he attached him to his staff." (14:52)*

Three things are important in this verse and its surrounding context. First, the Philistines will be a thorn in the side of Saul all his days as king. Even though Samuel will lead the ousting of the Philistines from the taxation and other tributes, the Philistines will constantly attempt to reclaim their dominance over Israel, but in vain. That does not mean they will not win battles against Israel, for they will. In fact, Saul will die in a battle with the Philistines at the end of the book.

Nevertheless, Saul will have trouble with the Philistines that David will never have. In fact, when we

get to David's reign as king in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, we will find that his bodyguards will be Philistines under the direction of a Levite man who forfeited his right to enter the priesthood during his younger years by killing two Moabites, an Egyptian, and a lion. We will cover that story in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel when we get there.

The second important thing in this story is that Saul was desperate for good warriors. When he found one, he brought him to his court, where he was in the sight of Saul at all times.

The third important thing is not actually in the text but is because of the text and its placement in the book. After concluding the story of Saul's defiant demand to have his son killed for eating a bite of honey, even though his son did not hear the command from early that day, the writer moves in verses 47-52 to conclude the stories involved in Saul's first two years as king and then summarizes the struggles of Saul in the years of reign that followed after his first two years as king. Because of the context of the story of Saul's disobedience that will begin in chapter 15, the story of many years of Saul's reign has not been included in this book by the writer. How many years? The context of chapter fifteen and following will indicate that events of at least twenty years of Saul's reign were ignored and never recorded.

## Chapter 15

In the last part of chapter 14, the author summarized Saul's second year as king. He also gave an overview of Saul's troubles from war-like relationships with all the surrounding nations. He then included the names of Saul's immediate family and then the name of his uncle, who became his commander. But if you remember, he also named the troublesome nations that came against Israel, and he ended with the Amalekite nation besides the constant threat from the Philistines. The important identity in focus in this chapter is the name "Amalekite," for it will be the undoing of Saul and his lineage on the throne of the Nation of Israel forever.

Let us set the stage for the timing of the start of chapter 15. At the end of chapter 14, Saul was at the end of his second year as king in Israel. David, will not be born for another eight years. Then, David will grow to the point where he can tend the flocks of his father on his own. He will be the youngest son of Jesse. All of his brothers are older, and some of them are old enough to be serving in Saul's army. To serve in the army, the men had to be at least twenty years of age. Looking ahead in the story of this book, David will kill Goliath in Saul's twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth year as king. Thirteen years later, Saul will die in the battle of Gilboa, and David will become king when he is thirty years of age. Doing the math from David becoming the king at the age of thirty and working back thirteen years, David was about seventeen years of age when he killed Goliath. Shortly before David killed Goliath, Samuel anointed him as the future king. Our next story in this book deals with Saul's disobedience that caused Samuel to find David and anoint him as king. David would have most likely been no younger than fifteen years of age and no older than seventeen years at the anointing. Our estimation that the following story will take place about twenty years after the last story is calculated because the previous story ended in Saul's second year as king. David will be born about eight years after the previous story. It will be another seventeen years until the Ark is captured and returned. Then Goliath will come on the scene, which will bring David to Saul's camp. From Saul's second year as king, it will be about twenty-five years until David faces Goliath. The truth is that we do not know how old David was when he was anointed. However, we can be pretty safe in saying it was no more than twenty years. About twenty years is a good number for the timing of the anointing and Saul's disobedience with the Amalekite event, but that could have swung plus or minus three to five years in either direction. That is all pure speculation.

## a) Saul's Disobedience

## (1) The Order from the LORD

Thus, we come to Saul's disobedience in keeping the order from the LORD. Samuel and Saul are together, and Samuel drew Saul's attention to his next task as the king with an instruction from the LORD. Chapter 15, verse 1.

*"Then Samuel said to Saul, 'The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD.'"* (15:1)

Interestingly, Samuel reminded Saul of his anointing that occurred more than two and a half decades before. Even with the anointing, it did not grant Saul an easy rule as king. In fact, it had been difficult almost every day of his rule. In many ways, Saul strayed from the LORD in the past. Here, Samuel purposefully warned Saul to *"listen to the words of the LORD."*

## (a) Punish Amalek

And so, Samuel gave Saul the *"words of the LORD"* to punish Amalek. We see that in verse 2.

*"Thus says the LORD of hosts, I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt."* (15:2)

Once again, we must realize that the LORD works on heaven's timeclock, not earth's timeclock. How so? Notice that Amalek will not be punished for something he and his people did recently during the life and reign of King Saul; Amalek will be punished because of what the Amalekite people and their king did to the Israelites when they were coming out of Egypt more than four hundred years before this time in the storyline. The king of the Amalekites during Saul's day was not the king of the Amalekites during the Exodus journey. Take note of this fact, people who build animosity against the LORD and His people will be punished; however, the LORD will give them plenty of time to repent because it is not His will to punish a whole nation for the sins of its ancestors. For more than four centuries, the Amalek people continued to be a thorn in the side of Israel. They are mentioned in this setting with this first king of Israel signifies that the LORD has decided that their time of rebellion against Israel was up.

Before we see what will happen to the Amalekite people in this story, let us look back to see the reason the LORD decided to punish Amalek in the first place, when *"he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt."*

Who were the Amalekites? According to Genesis 36:9-12 we find,

*These then are the records of the generations of Esau, the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir.*

<sup>10</sup> *These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, the son of Esau's wife Adah, ....* <sup>11</sup> *The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam and Kenaz.* <sup>12</sup> *Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz.* (Genesis 36:9-12)

Esau was the twin brother of Jacob. Jacob was the father of the twelve sons whose descendants became the twelve tribes of Israel. The descendants of Esau are cousins of the descendants of Jacob. They are relatives. One of Esau's twelve sons was named Eliphaz. Eliphaz had five sons by his true wife, but he had one son by a concubine named Timna. That son's name was Amalek. He was the father of the Amalek tribe.

Let us talk a little about the timing of the birth of the sons of Esau and Jacob. By the time Esau was forty years old, he had taken wives and began having children (Genesis 26:34-35). Jacob will not marry and start having children until he is seventy-one years of age. His last son, Benjamin, will be born when Jacob is ninety-one years of age. All of his twelve sons will be within fourteen years between the oldest and the youngest. When Jacob returned to live with his father in Hebron and Beersheba, Esau left his father's homes to establish himself and his family in the Edomite

mountains, where Amalek would have been born to Eliphaz. He was probably already alive as a small child when Jacob moved to Egypt, but that is just speculation. Nevertheless, with Jacob and his descendants in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years, the clan of Amalek had plenty of time to grow into a large family and tribe called the Amalekites.

When Israel left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, the Amalek tribe controlled the land on the west of Edom's land, but because they were nomads, they also moved with the seasons to follow the food sources as all nomads did. We met them first in Exodus 17. Here is that story and the promise from the LORD concerning the Amalekite people.

*<sup>8</sup> Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. <sup>9</sup> So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." <sup>10</sup> Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup> So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. <sup>12</sup> But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. <sup>13</sup> So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. <sup>14</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."* (Exodus 1:8-14)

Because of what the descendants of Amalek did to Israel, when they were about ninety days out of Egypt, near Mount Sinai, the LORD will "blot the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Here, in this story with King Saul, he will have the opportunity to be the hand of God against the Amalekites. Not to get too far ahead in the story, but just as a little spoiler in this story, Saul will fail. In fact, in the last chapter of this book, we will learn that Saul will die at the battle of Gilboa, having been warned by Samuel who appeared from the grave when Saul was with the witch of Endor, to tell him his death was because he failed to follow the LORD's command concerning the Amalekites. Further, in the spoiler mode, King David will not destroy the Amalekites during his time even though he could. Spinning it out, even more, the Amalekites will not be wiped from the land until the days of Hezekiah, during the ministry of Isaiah. Then it will be accomplished, in the LORD's timeclock.

### (b) Plunder Amalek

Let us move on to the command of the LORD to King Saul to plunder Amalek. Chapter 15, verse 3.

*"Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."* (15:3)

When the LORD tells Saul to "strike Amalek," He is not speaking of a man named Amalek; he is speaking of the people of the nation alive at the time who descended from Amalek, the son of Eliphaz, the son of Esau. Of that nation descended from the original Amalek, the LORD wanted every man, woman, boy, and girl destroyed, along with all their livestock. He wanted them wiped from the land. Saul must have understood the complete instruction. It would be hard to interpret Samuel's words in any other way.

### (2) The Order from the King

#### (a) Summons of the Soldiers

With the order from the LORD, we come to the order from the king and his summons of the soldiers. Verse 4.

*"Then Saul summoned the people and numbered them in Telaim, 200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 men of Judah. <sup>5</sup> Saul came to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the valley."* (15:4-5)

Where was Telaim in the Promised Land? First, *Telaim* is also translated elsewhere in the Scripture as *Telem*. According to Joshua 15:21-32, it was one of twenty-nine cities in the tribal area of Judah at the extreme southeastern border with the Edomite land. We do not know the location of this village.

As for the number of soldiers summoned by Saul, two-hundred and ten thousand in all, it is clear that Saul had garnered the trust of the Nation of Israel as King. It was not the largest army Saul had amassed. When he sent pieces of his own slaughtered oxen as a threat of the fate of all men who did not come to help him fight against the Ammonites when they were threatening the city of Jabesh-gilead, three hundred and thirty thousand men arrived. It differed considerably from the six hundred men he had in the last story. Even Jonathan, his son, had a thousand at the time. Nevertheless, this army was substantial enough to accomplish the desire of the LORD.

From Telaim, Saul moved the army to the valley outside the city of the Amalekites. We wish we knew the location of this city, but we are not entirely sure. Later, we will find out that it is Havilah near the land of Shur. We will cover that later. Be that as it may, the following verse will reveal the people who lived among the Amalekites.