

1st Samuel

Lesson 32

(ix) What Samuel Declared

To Saul's answer, we come to what Samuel declared. Verse 22.

"Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.'²³ 'For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.' (15:22-23)

We do not want to run through Samuel's declaration too quickly. Let us look at the importance of the points.

"Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams." Samuel makes his first case by asking if offerings and sacrifices are better than obedience? Then he answers the case by stating that obedience is better than sacrifices. "... to heed" means to obey the commands. "... the fat of rams" is part of the sacrifice process. It, too, was part of obedience to the required process in presenting the sacrifices. The fat was always cut out and offered on the altar to the LORD. What we are saying here is that the LORD has given a command for the extermination of the Amalekite people. Still, He has also provided a command concerning sacrifices with a command as to how the fat was handled in the offering. How can one command be better than a different command when both are given by the same Person – the LORD? *"Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams."*

The answer is found in the difference between the commands. Let us start with the second command first because the explanation is much shorter. As a reminder, the direct command from the LORD to Saul was *"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) The command was simple – kill all the human Amalekites and their livestock. Nothing was to be saved. Nothing was to be captured. Nothing was to be taken. Nothing was to be spared. The command was the same as the one the LORD gave to the nation of Israel concerning the Canaanites in the Promised Land when Joshua led the taking of the land. Under Joshua, the nation failed to fulfill the LORD's command. Be that as it may, the command was a direct order from the LORD.

The first command is harder to explain, so stay with me. May we start with a timeline of sacrifices associated with offerings and their purpose. For the first 2711 years, from the first day of creation until the law was given in the Exodus journey, a sacrifice was offered as an offering to the LORD as a form of worship to thank the LORD for His goodness and kindness. It was not required by the LORD. It was not expected by the LORD. It was a free-will offering based totally on the desire of the human to give thanks to the LORD. Beginning in the year 2711 after the creation of Adam, the LORD had the twelve tribes of Israel at Mount Sinai. There, at the mount, the LORD selected the tribe of Levi to be his priest perpetually for the rest of time. As his priests, the LORD placed restrictions on them.

First, the priests could never own land. Second, they could never own a home. Third, they could never own livestock. Fourth, they could never own fields of grain, grapes, trees, etc. All of the other tribes could own everything we have mentioned, but the priests could not. But the priest did have all of these things at their disposal to use. Where did they get them? They got them from the donations of the other tribes of Israel. Every person in every tribe was required to bring a tithe, or 10 %, of

their livestock and produce of the land to the Tabernacle complex, or one of the Levitical cities, as a gift. It was not a freewill offering – it was required. Once the required gifts were at the Tabernacle complex or one of the Levitical cities, the best 10 % of the gifts were kept to be used in the required offerings each day and special days as acts of worship to the LORD by the priests. Note what we are saying here. The normal people of the regular tribes did not provide the morning, evening, Sabbath, new moon, and other special offerings in worship to the LORD. They gave their gifts to the Tabernacle or the priests at the Levitical cities. Those gifts then belonged to the LORD – He required them to be given to Him. Once those gifts were in possession of the LORD at His Tabernacle or Levitical city, the best 10 % of all the livestock, grains, etc., would be selected to be offered to Him in His required daily and special offerings. The other 90 % that remained, and was not selected as the best of the best, was then equally divided among all the Levitical priests to provide means for their families. Because they could not own anything, they could not buy anything, how could they feed their families? The LORD paid them to be His priests from the offerings brought to Him from the tithes of the other tribes of Israel. Even the forty-eight Levitical cities, four in each tribal area, were owned by those tribes, but the land was carved out to allow the priests and their families to live on, and houses were built for the priests and their families to live in, barns were built to hold the donated livestock and other produce that the Levitical priests would consume as sustenance, but the priests did not own any of it, raise any of it, or had given any of it in the first place. My purpose in explaining all of this is to make sure that everyone understands that the tithe of the livestock and produce given to the LORD at the Tabernacle complex or Levitical cities were not considered offerings of sacrifice by any individual. Those offering gifts became the property of the LORD and were used by the LORD's priests in daily, monthly, and yearly sacrifices. The priest did all the work in presenting the livestock and produce in the regular course of worship. This whole process is completely separate from the free-will offerings. It is a required offering of the LORD.

Free-will offerings involve individuals. All free-will offerings are presented when the heart of a person leads a person to give to the LORD without any requirement. These offerings are generally given to redeem some sin, a gift of thanksgiving for some blessing, etc. In these offerings, the person brings the livestock, grains, etc., and personally presents them at the door to the Tabernacle or the altars set in the Levitical cities. There, the person will put his hand on the head of the animal and slay it. The priest on duty will catch the blood and sprinkle it in the appropriate places, as instructed by the LORD in Leviticus chapters 1 – 7, while the person skins the animal. The hide is taken outside the camp to be burned. If the offering is a burnt offering, certain parts of the animal are washed before being placed on the altar; however, all of the slain animal was placed on the altar to be burned completely to ashes. If the offering is a sacrifice of peace, in other words, a thanksgiving offering, certain parts of the animal are washed and placed on the altar to be totally consumed, the hide is given to the priest as a gift, and the rest of the animal is cooked to be eaten by the priests and the family who has presented the offering. In this case, each individual from any of the tribes participated in the worship; however, the priest presided over the whole process. It is not a required offering of the LORD.

Now, with all of that understood, let us discover why the LORD, through Samuel, says, *“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.”* First, the livestock taken from the Amalekites was not an increase to the individuals in which a tithe would be given to the Tabernacle. The livestock taken from the Amalekites belonged to King Saul and the nation. The king and the nation did not tithe; the individuals were the ones who tithed. Second, any sacrifice of the Amalekite livestock did not fall into the category of the required daily, monthly, or yearly offerings of the Tabernacle. The sacrifice of the Amalekite livestock would be free-will offerings. Remember, a free-will offering is not a

required commandment of the LORD. The process of presenting a free-will offering did have commandments from the LORD, but the offering was never required in the first place. So, here is the big reason why *“to obey is better than sacrifice.”* The commandment to kill the Amalekites was a direct command that required full obedience; the sacrifice offering, as stated as the intent of the Amalekite livestock, was not a direct command but a desire of Saul and the people; it was not the desire of the LORD. Therefore, Saul should have obeyed the LORD because He would not accept a free-will offering in place of His direct command.

We have not mentioned this yet, but it would have the same effect if Saul presided over the sacrifice offering instead of a priest. We do not know that this was Saul’s intent; however, if it was, Saul did not have the authority to preside over any offering – he was not a priest. This scenario is not too far of a stretch because Saul has already been guilty of wanting to preside over sacrifice offerings. If you will remember, he had a large stone rolled in front of him to begin offering sacrifices, but he was stopped by a priest who suggested he pray about it first. As you will remember, he did pray, but the LORD did not answer. In this case, if the livestock of Amalekite were sacrificed, the LORD would not accept them.

The passage also said, *“For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.”* (15:23) We must delve into this last part of the passage in detail also.

First, we must look at Samuel’s statement that *“For rebellion is as the sin of divination.”* Saul had rebelled against the LORD’s command, and Samuel called him on it. But notice that Samuel calls such *rebellion* as being equal with *the sin of divination*. In other words, *rebellion* is as bad as *divination*.

In the Scripture, there are numerous kinds of *divination* listed, but they all are used for the same purpose. The purpose of *divination* is to foretell future events or discover things secret by the aid of superior beings, all in other ways than by human means. It is all sin. It is all *witchcraft*. Types of divination in the Scripture include the consulting of teraphim, looking at the internal organs of a dead animal, the use of cards to read the future, or the enticing of an oracle, all used by *witches*. Through Moses, the LORD forbade all forms of divination and connected it to idolatry. Here is that passage.

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. “You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you. (Deuteronomy 13:1–5)

But *rebellion*, as mentioned by Samuel, is *insubordination*. *Insubordination* is the same as *disobedience*. The Hebrew word is often translated as *disobedience*. Why the translators chose to use the word *insubordination* here, we do not know. However, it does mean the same as *rebellion against a direct order or command from a superior*. In this case, Saul was insubordinate to the LORD. He was disobedient to the LORD.

Second, Samuel instructed Saul that his *insubordination* was equal to *iniquity* and *idolatry*. The word *iniquity* defines a specific kind of sin in the Hebrew language. The word *iniquity* means *wickedness* – absolute wickedness. Wickedness equals *men of trouble or evildoers*. Samuel has just called Saul an *evildoer*, a *wicked evildoer*.

Third, Samuel stated that along with being a *wicked evildoer*, his subornation equals *idolatry*. In its basic form, *idolatry* is the worship of any lifeless man-made object or concept as a god. But, in its details, *idolatry* is the desire for anything that is in disobedience and insubordination to the commands of the LORD. Anything that a person wants more than a relationship with the LORD is idolatry – money, looks, possessions, prestige, you name it. If it is more important to you than the LORD, it is disobedient, insubordinate, wicked, idolatry. Samuel summed it all up about Saul in his reply. He was right. Some of us need to take note of our disobedient, insubordinate, wicked idolatry and make a course correction toward the LORD.

But it was too late for Saul. Remember the last words of his passage. *“Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.”* (15:23). Saul had failed his final test. Saul had filled in the last check box needed to experience the rejection of the LORD and the last nail driven in the coffin of his kingship.

(x) What Saul Confessed

Saul was shaken. We hear what Saul confessed. Verse 24.

“Then Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice.’” (15:24)

Excuses, excuses, excuses. I wonder if Saul had just said, *“I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the LORD and your words,”* would the outcome have been different? Why not? If he had just admitted that he had sinned and left it there, would the LORD intervene with Samuel? He might have; He might not. But as we are fortunate to have the rest of the Scripture to see Isaiah proclaim a death sentence on King Hezekiah. We heard how Isaiah left the king’s room and walked across the porch of the palace. We heard how Hezekiah turned his head to the wall and prayed. We heard how the LORD heard the king’s prayer. We heard how the LORD turned Isaiah around and sent him back to the king’s room to announce the king’s reprieve for fifteen years. What was the difference? Hezekiah was not a blame shifter; Saul was.

We see Saul shift the blame when he uses the word *because*. *“...because I feared the people and listened to their voice.”* (15:24) It was not his fault that he disobeyed the LORD; it was because of the people. Saul seemed always to have an excuse for why he did something wrong.