

# No Substitute for Obedience

BY STEVEN JAMES

**Read 1 Samuel 15.**

**What was Saul's mission?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did he obey it?**  Yes  No

**How many times did Saul claim he had obeyed God before he finally admitted his sin?** \_\_\_\_\_

**I**n the Old Testament, God sometimes used His people to carry out judgment on those who had rejected Him. In this story, God decreed that the Amalekites were to be wiped out (check out the background in Exodus 17:14). And Saul was the one to do it.

So, Saul was given a clear mission by God. It was simple. It was direct. God told him to completely destroy the Amalekites and all their stuff. Period. Take no prisoners. Take no plunder. Nothing. Nada. Zip.

The total destruction thing may not make a lot of sense to us, and it didn't make a whole lot of sense to King Saul. Yet, Saul knew *what* God wanted, even if he didn't understand *why* God wanted him to do it. But still, he thought, "Why don't I just go ahead and keep the best animals and maybe let the enemy king live so I can show him off. I mean, surely God wouldn't want me to waste all this good stuff! We can even use some of it to make sacrifices to Him. That'll make Him happy." Saul had lots of reasons for not obeying God—good-sounding reasons. But to God, they were all excuses.

**What verse gives the first hint that Saul was not willing to obey God?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Verse 9 says a lot about Saul and his men. What two insights about them can you draw from this verse?**

**What did God understand Saul's disobedience to mean? (v. 11)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did Saul give God the credit for his victory, or did he take credit himself? (v. 12)** \_\_\_\_\_

**N**otice the contrast in this story between Saul and Samuel. Samuel stood up for God; Saul stood up for himself. Samuel was troubled by disobedience; Saul wasn't. Samuel cried out to God all night when he heard Saul turned away from God; Saul was busy setting up a monument in his own honor. And most of all, Samuel was committed to total obedience, while Saul was content to obey as long as it seemed to make sense.

This story is really about how two different people responded to God's command. Saul had a mission, and so did Samuel.

**How would you describe Samuel's mission?**

"To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 SAMUEL 15:22, NIV).

## What are three things he did to fulfill it?

Samuel was still the judge, priest and prophet of Israel. Since the king had failed, Samuel was sent by God to not only complete the mission of judgment on the Amalekites, but also to hold Saul accountable for his failure to obey.

If we won't be *on mission* as assigned, God will assign our mission to someone else.

Saul appeared to repent, but he still wasn't willing to obey. Was Saul genuinely repenting? It may look like it, but Samuel refused to extend the assurance of God's forgiveness to him. And Samuel had to kill the Amalekite king! Saul's repentance was all a show. Somehow, he had become more concerned about what others thought of him than what God thought. He wanted to "save face" and look good to others even when he knew he was wrong.

Sometimes we don't understand God's prompting in our lives. "Why would You want me to do that, God? It seems wasteful. I'll do this thing over here instead. It makes more sense to me. I'll even sacrifice something to You afterward."

But all God wants is obedience. If we won't be *on mission* as assigned, God will assign our mission to someone else. There is no substitute for obedience.

Are you willing to obey God no matter what He asks you to do?

Saul knew what God wanted, even if he didn't understand why God wanted him to do it.