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## Ode to Repentance

### I Samuel 15

**Intro:** Ch14 ends w/ an official summary of Saul's reign but God's not quite finished w/ him yet. God had previously rejected Saul's descendents from assuming the throne after him b/c of his failure 2 obey God's commands but Saul is still king over Israel & YHWH still has work 4 him 2. Ch15 constitutes the **end** of Saul's effectiveness 4 YHWH.

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**1-3- heed-** Samuel reminds Saul where he stands: b/c YHWH sent Samuel 2 anoint Saul king over His people= Saul's a covenant king & as such, his 1<sup>st</sup> priority is 2 **listen** (respond 2) what YHWH says. Only matter that matters!

**destroy-** This is the word of the Lord Saul was 2 listen 2 & obey. If you think it sounds a little horrid - that's b/c it is! God is clearly commanding Saul 2 bring **total judgment** against the Amalekites: **every man, woman, child & animal**. Why? What had they done? Samuel mentions it: when Israel escaped Egypt, Amalek was 1<sup>st</sup> 2 attack them. B/c of this, YHWH pronounced unending war w/ them (Ex 17:14-16). Moses reminded Israel of this again in **Deut 25:17-19**.

Amalek committed a terrible sin. When Israel was weak & vulnerable, Amalek attacked the weakest & most vulnerable of them **w/o provocation** or **reason** other than **greed & violence**. God hates it when the strong take cruel advantage over the weak, especially when the weak are His people. So YHWH promised 2 bring judgment on them.

"But this occurred more than 400 yrs b/4. Why did YHWH still hold it against them? These weren't the same people!"

**1) Time doesn't erase sin b/4 God.** W/ men: "time heals all wounds" - the years help make us more forgiving (or less) But b/4 God, time cannot atone 4 sin. In the heavenly economy, only the blood of **Jesus** can atone 4 sin, not time.

**2) Time worked against them.** We think 400+ yrs is plenty of time 2 forget but it's actually a provision of divine grace. Amalek was mercifully given 400+ yrs 2 repent but they **refused** 2 do it! Centuries of hardened, unrepentant hearts made them more guilty, not less! The time shows how **longsuffering** God was & how unspeakably **wicked** they were.

**3) Time doesn't nullify God's word.** Hadn't YHWH promised Abraham: **I will curse him who curses you** (Gen 12:3). Folks tend 2 revel in the promise of blessing but seem offended when God brings the retribution He also promised.

What does it mean 4 us today? When we see God's just vengeance executed in His Word, it should bring **comfort**! God doesn't forget how His enemies have hated & crushed His people. 2 hear **Isaiah** say, "**Behold, your God will come w/ vengeance**" is 2 hear **good tidings of great joy** b/c it means God will eventually put down all who oppress His people. If He didn't, what hope would we really have? No vengeance on God's enemies = no deliverance 4 God's people. The full gospel in all its completeness always proclaims both the year of the Lord's favor & the day of the vengeance of our God. Both will happen at the same time, they're 2 sides of the same coin. God's people enjoy His favor; His enemies receive His vengeance. We might not understand this but God's suffering people always have! Some folks put a "Beware of Dog" sign on their fence; the sign on God's fence says "Beware of Sheep." Nations & rulers should read it & tremble, especially if they are inclined 2 abuse or butcher **the sheep of His hand** (Ps 95:7).

In the end, Amalek's greatest sin was an unwillingness 2 repent. A **lack of repentance** led 2 **total judgment** by God.

**4-6- Kenites-** Saul was careful 2 protect the Kenites but that seems 2/b all he was **careful** 2 do on that day...

**7-9- attacked-** Saul was acting in obedience 2 YHWH, but unfortunately, his is a **selective, incomplete** obedience.

**spared-** If the Lord says something is **condemned**, how can we then turn around & call it **the best**?

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**10-11- turned back-** It may seem weird 2 hear YHWH say, "**I greatly regret**" & we'll look at that later but the focus here is on YHWH's assessment of Saul. His failure 2 fully carry out YHWH's orders indicates a problem deeper than mere failure: "**turned back from following Me.**" Saul would no longer be the follower (servant) of the Lord by his own choice. This is God's assessment of Saul & this is what He told Samuel & he accepted it – but he didn't take it "lying down."

Samuel's upset, but w/ whom or what? YHWH, Saul, the situation? For whom did he cry out all night? **Forgiveness** 4 Saul; **protection** 4 Israel, **strength** 4 himself, **all the above**? Samuel has several great reasons 2/b upset at this point:

**1) His theology is being shaken.** He acquiesced 2 king-making against his better judgment. Now it appears the Lord has changed His mind & Samuel must now come to terms w/ this challenge 2 YHWH's sovereignty. There was no giving up & going home – Samuel was God's man; if a problem arises in his theology (**beliefs**); he must work it out!

**2) What about Israel's leadership?** 2 lose the king will leave the country in a worse position than it was b/4 (**Judges**).

**3) Samuel's personally invested.** He's torn by YHWH's word & must come 2 grips w/ it – personal cost of ministry!

1 thing's clear: Samuel takes no pleasure in Saul's failure nor in the job he now has of conveying YHWH's message.

**12-13- blessed-** Samuel's heart is broken but Saul is strangely upbeat! He's so proud of his recent success, he erects a monument for himself. His greeting 2 Samuel is almost cheery! There's no hint of shame /guilt in Saul at all. He joyfully declares that he has fulfilled the Lord's command but his claim contradicts what YHWH has told Samuel.

**14-21- bleating-** Samuel's not buying it & his 1<sup>st</sup> query was about all the noise around camp. While Saul's affirming his obedience 2 YHWH, the evidence of his disobedience could be heard, seen & even smelt, as he was speaking! Why couldn't Saul see this? His own pride & arrogance has made him deaf & blind 2 his own sin. Of course, Saul

blames the people 4 saving the best of the livestock but he assures Samuel it was 4 a good reason: *sacrifice 2 God!* Hey, God winks at our sin if we do it 4 the right reason, like 2 help out His church, ministry or such, right? Wrong & Samuel's not about 2 let Saul continue 2 live under the influence of such faulty theology so he makes a 2<sup>nd</sup> query.

**Why did you not obey?**- It's a simple assertion but Saul's response is even more telling: *I have*: I brought back Agag & utterly destroyed Amalek. Those 2 phrases are incompatible; you can do 1 or the other but you can't do both. We see later that there were other Amalekites left alive. David will have 2 deal w/ them on several occasions during his reign. Haman, the wicked antagonist of the Jews in the Book of Esther was a direct descendent of Agag. Most ironic of all, when Saul dies, the final thrust of the sword will come from the hand of an Amalekite (*II Sam 1:8-10*). When we refuse 2 obey God completely, the "left over" portion will always come back 2 bite us & it may very well kill us too.

Saul then asserts again that *the people* saved the best of the livestock (*which should've been utterly destroyed*) He talks as if he had absolutely no control over them but he is their king! In fact, they were simply following *his* example. All of Saul's theological confusion & self-preserving excuses leads Samuel 2 ask his 3<sup>rd</sup> & most important question...

**22-23- delight**- Do you think **YHWH** enjoys sacrifices more than obedience? Samuel's not rejecting the entire OT sacrificial system, he's just saying that *formal worship* can't be a substitute 4 an *obedient life*; *external devotion* can never replace *internal submission*; all the religious ceremonies in the world mean nothing if your not keeping Christ's commandments. This is not just a fleeting declaration here, this is established OT doctrine: *Ps 40:6-8; 50:8-15; 51:16-17; Isa 1:11-15; Jer 6:19-20; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8*) Samuel's point: in *sacrifice*, man only offers the flesh of irrational animals but in *obedience*, man offers his own will, which is *rational* worship (*in spirit & truth*). Religious observance wasn't Saul's problem, the problem was his heart had become rebellious & stubborn b/4 God. If religious activity was not helping out *that* problem, then it was really not doing Saul any good anyways.

**Is as-** its important 2 Samuel that sin be rightly identified & properly compared. Not listening 2 YHWH's voice is not *failure or misunderstanding* – its *rebellion & arrogance* & it's in the same foul category as *pagan idolatry*. If we're 2 see sin 4 what it is, we have 2 look past the shiny exterior & sees what's beneath the surface / behind the scenes. Saul didn't listen 2 **YHWH's** voice; he didn't obey **YHWH's** clear command. That's not an *alternate religious understanding*, or *theological pluralism*, or an *attempt 2 find one's own identity*: its *rebellion, arrogance = idolatry!* 2 reject **YHWH's** word = reject **YHWH** Himself (*His authority*): 2 reject His kingship. Since Saul had rejected **YHWH** as king over him, **YHWH** has rejected Saul as king over His people. All the BBQ on Gilgal's altars could never replace the pleasure God could have had from the living sacrifice of Saul's will. Real worship of God begins w/ surrender.

**24-35-** it seems that both **YHWH** & Saul are toying w/ repentance but 1 is *paradoxical* & the other is *superficial*. How is it possible 4 a sovereign, omniscient God 2 be in a position 2 repent especially in light of *vs29*? The Hebrew word *nacham* = *2/b sorry, 2 rue, 2 suffer grief* as well as *2 repent*. It 1<sup>st</sup> appears in *Gen 6:6* or "*His heart was filled w/ pain.*" Vs11 & 35 don't mean 2 suggest a fickleness in **YHWH's** purposes; they reveal His great sorrow over man's sin. Saul's disobedience hurt God 2 the point of grief even tho He knew it was going 2 happen. Divine knowledge did not avert divine sorrow over sin. Samuel was not the only 1 who mourned over Saul's sin, **YHWH** did as well & more so!

**sinned-** real repentance involves facing your sin: acknowledge it reject it & turn from it. Saul certainly seems 2 acknowledge his wrong, but that's as far as he goes w/ it b/c it all seems too easy 4 him. He thinks that w/ a word from Samuel, everything can be fixed & returned 2 normal but Samuel knows that a word or 2 from him will not change the settled nature of Saul's heart. Since Saul didn't seem 2 have a grasp on the seriousness of the situation, Samuel repeats the severe judgment of *vs23*, "*Can you hear me now? You're done, finished, kaput!*" As Samuel turns 2 leave, Saul grabs his robe, tearing it. This serves as an object lesson of Saul's own situation: **YHWH** has torn the kingdom from Saul & this was final. Yet, Saul doesn't give up: he makes his 3<sup>rd</sup> appeal 4 Samuel 2 come w/ him.

Why? Despite his sin & rejection by **YHWH**, Saul still wants 2 keep up appearances & it would look bad if Samuel just left. Saul's concern is not unfounded, the problem is it seems 2/b all he's concerned about: looking good in the eyes of the people. How much better off would he have been if he'd have put half as much effort into looking good in the eyes of God? But his reputation w/ Israel was of more importance 2 him than his reputation w/ **YHWH** & that is the heart of Saul's problem. It wasn't that he was incapable of obeying, he just had a poor relationship w/ God.

In the end, Samuel worshiped **YHWH** w/ Saul but b/4 they could do that, they needed 2 tie up a loose end - Agag! B/4 there can be true worship, there must 1<sup>st</sup> be full obedience. B/4 you waste too much sympathy on old Agag, just remember he was the wicked, violent leader of a wicked violent people. God's judgment against him was justified.

**No more-** Saul had rejected **YHWH's** Word so **YHWH** had nothing more 2 say 2 him. Samuel left & never came 2 see Saul again after that. Samuel knew it was not his place 2 go 2 Saul. It was Saul's place 2 come 2 him in humble repentance 2 the Lord. See, Saul had been rejected as king but he still ruled for another 25 yrs. During all that time, tho he couldn't remain as king over Israel, he still had the opportunity 2 make **YHWH** his king, he still had the opportunity 2 repent & enter into a right relationship w/ the covenant god of Israel. But, as we'll see – he doesn't.

The Amalekites refused 2 repent & all it got them was the total judgment of God against them. Saul had many opportunities 2 repent but he squandered every 1 of them until the opportunities ran out. He suffered in silence 4 the rest of his life, no more direction from YHWH's word, no more counsel, commands or encouragement. Nothing but

divine silence! The Lord wasn't indifferent 2 Saul's sin – He was grieved by it & sorrowful over it. He's grieved over the sin today – but He's also provided a way of escape from it, a salvation that cost Him dearly but is freely given. Will you accept it? Refusal 2 repent always ends in tragedy, wouldn't you like 2 skip that part? 😊