

### I Samuel

#### Lesson 25 - Chapter 15 Continued 2

We have spent an inordinate amount of time in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel chapter 15 due to the several powerful Biblical principles and lessons that we find operating here. Keep in mind that we're not discovering new principles in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, but rather we're seeing the long established principles of the Torah being put into practice. Or, as is the common word used today to describe putting principles into action, we are witnessing the **application** of God's Word.

Let's take a few minutes to review since I've thrown so much at you the past couple of lessons. In our previous lesson we discussed the foundational theological and practical matter of the world being divided into two distinct groups of people by the Lord, and that this division occurred upon the Father's election and separation of Abraham and certain of his descendants as a people designated to serve Yehoveh, God of Israel. The people who were set apart for service to God were called Hebrews, and all other people on this planet (the vast majority) were designated as gentiles (*goyim* in Hebrew). Thus there was but one group (the Hebrews) who were ordained to trust and serve God, establish God's Kingdom on earth, bring His laws and commands into this Kingdom, and produce the Messiah. The other group, gentiles, represented the opposite attributes and purpose. Gentiles were those who did NOT trust or serve God, were opposed to the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, did not want God's laws and commands as their own, and therefore saw no need for a Messiah.

Although the people God set apart for service to Him were given a covenant to establish them and to operate under (the Abrahamic Covenant), that covenant was essentially an unconditional promise from God; that meant it was one-sided (there was no "if, then" inherent in the Abrahamic Covenant). Once Abraham accepted God's offer of the covenant, from that point forward all that was left was for God's promise of a special land (a kingdom with a government) to be created and given as an inheritance to this set apart group of people, and for Abraham's descendants to be some undefined kind of blessing to all the families of the world (people on both sides of the divine divide). And this was to come about by some vague means. There was no explanation contained in the Abrahamic Covenant as to how or when all of this would happen or even what it might look like when it did.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15:3 we found that King Saul was ordered by God (through the Prophet Samuel) to destroy Israel's arch enemy, Amalek. Amalek was the Biblical epitome of the gentile nations, and also somewhat of a metaphor for Satan (or at the least, a metaphor for being Satan's primary stooge). Amalek was accused by God of mercilessly hating and attacking His people almost immediately after they were redeemed, and thus Amalek was worthy of nothing but total annihilation. Amalek had attacked Israel from the rear of the column where the weakest and most feeble walked as they were fleeing from the Pharaoh. Israel had done nothing to Amalek, had no designs on Amalek's territory, and did not provoke them so far as we know. So why did Amalek come after Israel? Because Israel existed, and therefore Amalek hated them because Amalek is, in their nature, opposed to God, His people, and His Kingdom.

The Spirit of Amalek (the spirit of opposition to God and all of His plans) is inbred in all gentiles at birth and the only way it is removed is when that evil spirit is replaced with the Holy Spirit of God. That Israel exists is enough for those with the Spirit of Amalek to want to destroy them.

Thus in our time we see that upon the miraculous and prophesied rebirth of Israel as a nation of Hebrews, on the very day that God called them home and re-established them back in their land, gentiles inbred with the Spirit of Amalek immediately attacked God's people when they were the most weary and vulnerable. People who were but months removed from Nazi death camps, weakened by years of starvation, deprivation and slavery and by no means physically strong or emboldened, were attacked by the combined armies of the powerful Arab League. Why did those Arabs attack Israel? Did Israel harm them? Did Israel have harsh designs against them? No. It's merely that Israel existed. It was that after 19 centuries of prophetic dormancy, God's plan of redemption exploded back into action as the Hebrews were gathered in (as promised) from their long, long exile. And yet, against all earthly odds, because the Lord God of Israel fought for His people, His people won while the rest of the gentile world simply folded their hands and watched largely disinterested as it all happened.

Hebrews are born spiritually quite different from gentiles. Hebrews are NOT born with the Spirit of Amalek because, 1) they are born as God's set apart people, and 2) they had been redeemed from their evil taskmaster many centuries earlier. This is definitely not the case for gentiles, is it? However after the previous lesson I was asked if when I told you this fact that I was implying that the Hebrews' redemption from Egypt also relieved them of their original sin (their sin nature); and the answer is definitely NOT. If that sin nature had been removed from them in Egypt, then there would have been no need for the Messiah the Torah speaks of. This continuing sin nature within the Hebrews is one of the reasons that the saints of old (pre-Christ) were NOT permitted to come into God's Heaven just yet. The Old Testament saints (Hebrews) who trusted God and were obedient to His Torah died and were kept safe in a place called Abraham's Bosom. Only after Yeshua's redemptive work on the cross was accomplished and He arose from his own grave (thus atoning for the original sin, something the Law was never designed to do) could those righteous souls of God's people go to live with the Lord in His Heaven.

Today, and every day since Messiah Yeshua's resurrection, the only means for anyone (Hebrew or gentile) to be pardoned by God for our sinful behavior **and** for our sinful nature (the evil spiritual remnant that is part of all humans) is to trust in the God of Israel and that means to trust in His Son. Torah observance depends on trusting God; and at the center of Torah observance is the expectation of our ultimate deliverance by means of Messiah. Thus the reason that a Hebrew who is born redeemed (by no merit of his own) must still accept their Hebrew Messiah is that Messiah is very much central to Torah obedience. To dismiss the Messiah is to dismiss the Torah. I doubt that any but perhaps the most modern liberal Jewish Synagogue would disagree with that. The issue, then, is WHO is the Messiah and WHAT is his nature?

I say this not as a fine speech or as a rhetorical comment but rather from the point of view of the ancient Rabbis. The great Biblical scholar Alfred Edersheim, a Hebrew and a Believer in Yeshua, over 150 years ago painstakingly compiled a list of 456 Old Testament passages that

the ancient Rabbis said were in direct reference to the Messiah. And these statements were taken from over 500 separate Jewish writings. Although most religious Jews to this day deny that Yeshua of Nazareth is their Messiah, they readily acknowledge that God's Messiah is at the core of the Torah.

The only hope for gentiles then is the same as the only hope for Jews: Yeshua HaMashiach. However do not be mistaken: Hebrews begin life from a different and (Paul would say in the Book of Romans) spiritually advantageous position than gentiles.

***CJB Romans 2:25 For circumcision is indeed of value if you do what Torah says. But if you are a transgressor of Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision!<sup>26</sup> Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the Torah, won't his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the man who is physically uncircumcised but obeys the Torah will stand as a judgment on you who have had a b'rit-milah and have Torah written out but violate it!<sup>28</sup> For the real Jew is not merely Jewish outwardly: true circumcision is not only external and physical.<sup>29</sup> On the contrary, the real Jew is one inwardly; and true circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; so that his praise comes not from other people but from God.***

But here's the kicker because Paul doesn't want gentiles to get the wrong idea anymore than the Jews; so he continues and says:

***CJB Romans 3:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised?<sup>2</sup> Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God.<sup>3</sup> If some of them were unfaithful, so what? Does their faithlessness cancel God's faithfulness?<sup>4</sup> Heaven forbid! God would be true even if everyone were a liar!- as the Tanakh says, "so that you, God, may be proved right in your words and win the verdict when you are put on trial."***

What advantage has the Jew (Hebrew)? MUCH in every way! WHO does the Hebrew have advantage over? Gentiles of course (if you're not a Hebrew, then you're a gentile because there are only two possibilities of human identity since the time of Abraham).

On the other hand, are gentiles so entirely disadvantaged that we have no hope, and Hebrews have such a great advantage that they are saved merely because they're born as Hebrews? Eight verses later Paul asks and answers the question:

***CJB Romans 3:9 So are we Jews better off? Not entirely; for I have already made the charge that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are controlled by sin.***

What Paul means by "controlled by sin" is our sin natures, the ongoing consequence of the original sin. So what does a gentile have to do to obtain the same spiritual advantage as the Jew?

***CJB Romans 11:13 However, to those of you who are Gentiles I say this:***

**CJB Romans 11:16** *Now if the hallah offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches.<sup>17</sup> But if some of the branches were broken off, and you- a wild olive- were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree,<sup>18</sup> then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you.*

I know many of you understand this concept now, and you may wonder why I try to find as many ways as I can to keep exposing this amazing truth. The reason is that the vast majority of the gentile Church (and many who are listening to this message) are blind to our relationship with Israel, to our grafted-in attachment to the covenants of Israel, and that it is the divine heavenly ideal of Israel as a pure Kingdom of God (an ideal that earthly Israel has never fully attained) and as a perfected people set apart for God that both Hebrew and gentile have waiting for us IF we will but accept the Hebrew Messiah that the Torah and the Prophets insists that we must. No amount of following laws and ordinances and rituals ever did or ever will make us that perfected people. No amount of performing righteous deeds or pious works merit us salvation. However, once declared part of that group, those laws and ordinances become our manual for living the redeemed life. Living those commandments is an obligation we assume as a reasonable and expected response to the God who has saved us. We're not left to wonder or guess what pleases and displeases God.

The other major area we discussed last week was the issue of obedience. And it centered on King Saul's insistence that although he didn't entirely obey every last detail of the Law of the Ban (the Law of Herem), that he mostly did and thus that should have pleased God. And even where he didn't do precisely what God ordered, his intentions were good and so he saw no personal sin in his failure to destroy all the spoils of war that were captured from Amalek.

I confronted you with a modern day application of this same dilemma that faced King Saul, and gave you three examples of common situations whereby Christians tend to feel that following God's Laws to some degree or another ought to be "good enough". I know from both the positive and negative responses to that portion of the lesson that this must have hit home for many of you because while I posed 3 questions (regarding tithing, symbols, and observing holidays), I gave you no answers. That's right; even though you may have felt that I was telling you that your personal decisions and choices may be suspect or even wrong, in fact I gave you no answers at all to those questions. So however you reacted to them it was not from me telling you what to do or how to feel (because I didn't). Perhaps it was with your own conscience or perhaps with the Lord that you were wrestling so uncomfortably.

But the point of that exercise was to get us to think about the very nature of obedience especially in this, the era of such a casual Christianity. Is obedience even required any longer? Is partial obedience, obedience? Or is partial obedience, disobedience? Tough questions. At least it's tough from a human perspective especially when we choose to overlook God's Word on the subject because perhaps how we feel about it doesn't match with what God says about it.

So let's get a little further into dealing with some of these difficult issues by re-reading a

segment of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel chapter 15.

### RE-READ 1<sup>ST</sup> SAMUEL 15:13 – end

Saul's self defense was basically that he was afraid of the people. The people wanted the spoils for themselves and he didn't want to disappoint them. But as Israel's supreme earthly leader it was King Saul's job to do exactly that: disappoint them if need be. His first loyalty was to be to the Lord, not to the wishes of the Israelites. Unfortunately King Sha'ul was more worried about what the people thought than what Yehoveh demanded.

Another part of Saul's self defense was that he had generally done what Adonai told him to do. But Samuel's response to that argument is a short piece of poetic prose that has been used and abused terribly by Christianity. And it begins in verse 22 with: "Does Adonai take as much pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying what Adonai says?"

It's always been fascinating to me that the same folks who declare the Old Testament dead and gone and no longer valid turn around and borrows this verse from the OT to try and prove their point! But when we read it in the context of the story in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15 it takes on a rather different light. The usual sense as taught in Church is that INSTEAD of Sacrifices and Burnt Offerings, NOW it's merely a matter of being obedient (in some undefined way). The idea is that obedience has replaced sacrifice. But obedience to what? Well, often it's said "to God", but again if there are no longer any rules or regulations what is there to be obedient to?

But the bottom line here is that in no way does this passage suggest that the sacrificial system is somehow defective or ineffective or obsolete. The prophets often condemned the people for their abuses of the sacrificial system (as in Isaiah 1 and 66, Jeremiah 7, Hosea 6, and Amos 5 to name but a few) and here Samuel is doing the same by telling Saul that he can't intentionally and knowingly do what is wrong with the idea that he has a get-out-of-jail-free card up one sleeve. That all he has to do is perform a ritual sacrifice and presto, he's fine. So Samuel tells him, "not so fast". And this is because as one commentator put it so well, "no ceremonial can make up for a rebellious attitude to God and His commandments, because obstinate resistance to God exalts the self-will to the place of authority". Indeed if one thinks they can on the one hand intentionally disobey God, while on the other rely on a sacrifice as a kind of band aid to place over their rebellious attitude, all the time fully meaning to go and sin some more, then the sacrifice means exactly nothing.

What Samuel's response plainly means is that in the end, a sacrifice is only to PAY for a disobedient act. The idea is not to disobey (not commit sin) in the first place, and then some poor innocent animal won't need to have its throat slit to pay for YOUR indiscretion. The ONLY reason for the sacrificial system is to give God's followers some means to survive our disobedience. If there was no sin, there'd be no need for sacrifice.

Paul asked his listeners this rhetorical question that was meant to be absurd on its face:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Romans 6:1 So then, are we to say, "Let's keep on sinning, so that there can be more grace"?**

Later in Hebrews a similar connection between obedience and sacrifice is made:

**CJB Hebrews 10:26** *For if we deliberately continue to sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,<sup>27</sup> but only the terrifying prospect of Judgment, of raging fire that will consume the enemies.*

Where would these Apostles get such ideas about the ineffectiveness of sacrifice (whether of goats and sheep or of Yeshua's) if one's mind is only towards rebellion? From 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15.

Let's look even closer at 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15:22. It says in Hebrew, "Does Yehoveh take as much pleasure in **'Olah and Zevah** as in obeying what God says?" As most of you know, **'Olah** is a specific kind of altar sacrifice, and **Zevah** is another and there are several more kinds. **'Olah** is more or less the supreme altar sacrifice and the **Zevah** is at the other end of the scale. This is called merism. The idea is to give two extremes as a means of saying, "this and everything in between". We say in modern times, "from A to Z" meaning that something is all-inclusive. So Samuel is explaining that no kind of sacrifice, tithe, offering, gift, whether of animal or produce, big or small, inexpensive or luxurious is better than simply being obedient to God in the first place. Obedience is the proper response to God's instructions for a redeemed person. A sacrifice is usually the result of a redeemed person's disobedience to God's instructions.

The need for Christ is the result of OUR disobedience, not of our goodness. Yeshua's sacrificial death on the cross is a consequence of our rebellion, not because it's automatic that sacrifice is inevitable. In the same way Yeshua's atoning death is definitely better for us than the sacrifice of bulls and goats because not only does it **not** cost US, but because (among other things) His sacrifice did something that the Law of Moses never could: atone for the original sin that plagues all humankind, Hebrew or gentile. Just as Samuel said that in comparison it is better to obey and therefore not need to sacrifice, so it is that depending on Christ's sacrifice is better for us than being obedient to the Law. But just as Samuel in no way was intending to suggest that the sacrificial system was now obsolete or useless, neither was Yeshua suggesting that the Law was dead and gone and "nailed to the Cross".

**CJB Matthew 5:17** *"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete."<sup>18</sup> Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened.<sup>19</sup> So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

So from the standpoint of God's expectation of His followers to be obedient to His commands, Jesus just said that nothing has changed in that regard with His advent. And that the source of those commands is the Torah. And in many ways Yeshua's assertion is but a replay of Samuel's to King Saul.

The second half of verse 22 is parallelism. "Surely obeying is better than sacrifice and heeding orders than the fat of rams" is just a 2<sup>nd</sup> way of saying exactly the same thing as the first half of the verse and it was a common Hebrew way of Biblical expression (so we don't need to go

there any further).

But verse 23 is more difficult, I think. The question this verse poses for us is how is it that any kind of rebellion is in reality like the sin of sorcery and our stubbornness equivalent to idolatry? Notice that in this example the two sins mentioned for comparison (sorcery and idolatry) are capitol offenses. I think the great German Bible commentator C.F. Kiel says it so very well: "All conscious disobedience (to God) is actually idolatry because disobedience makes self-will (the human "I", "me") into a god". When God says to do this or don't do that and we say "no" or do otherwise, we have put our own opinions, intellect, and wills above the Lord's. There is no better definition of idolatry than this. I know we don't usually think of it that way, but reducing all sin to essentially either idolatry or sorcery (which is the dealing with other gods) is very much a parallel thought with the well known Biblical statement about the foundational principle that under grids all of God's commandments:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Mark 12:28 *One of the Torah-teachers came up and heard them engaged in this discussion. Seeing that Yeshua answered them well, he asked him, "Which is the most important mitzvah of them all?"<sup>29</sup> Yeshua answered, "The most important is, 'Sh'ma Yisra'el, ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad [Hear, O Isra'el, the LORD our God, the LORD is one],<sup>30</sup> and you are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your understanding and with all your strength.'<sup>31</sup> The second is this: 'You are to love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other mitzvah greater than these.***

The foundation of all good is to love God and to love your fellow man. The foundation of all sin and evil is idolatry and sorcery. To love God is to obey God. To commit idolatry is to put our will above His. And that is exactly what King Saul has done by making the decision to allow the Amalekite leader, Agag, to live and by not destroying all the spoils but instead taking some for himself and the people of Israel.

In verse 24 King Saul now sees that his partial obedience is disobedience and that his disobedience is fundamentally idolatry, so he admits it. But still he says that it was for the sake of the people (who he was afraid of) and that he listened to them instead of to God. It seems, though, that Saul still doesn't fully understand the seriousness of the situation and the next few verses reveal that Saul was thinking of the violation and the possible repercussions in political terms and not spiritual terms. I'm sad to say that this is the condition of politicians since time immemorial and it is expressed well in Proverbs 29:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Proverbs 29:25 *Fearing human beings is a snare; but he who trusts in ADONAI will be raised high [above danger].***

It is so very difficult for teachers, pastors, Rabbis, mothers and fathers, and political leaders to resist the temptation to gain the favor of their congregations, friends, family, or constituents by surrendering to their requests instead of listening to (and obeying) God's Word. As David Tsumura says, "In the Biblical principle, democracy contradicts theocracy". That is the reason that there will always be an insolvable tension between human government and divine government. That is the reason that we see this ebb and flow in American politics towards and then away from a secular government. As much as democracy is probably the best there is as

an institution of human-led government, it is still at odds with God's ways. A vote of the people is fine provided the choices given to them are preferences and not divine moral imperatives. King Saul gave the people the moral choice to directly disobey God, and they (and he) chose unwisely and rebelliously.

We will finish up chapter 15 and begin chapter 16 at our next meeting.