

## Three Strikes – 1 Samuel 15:1-35

### Introduction:

When we hear the phrase, “three strikes and you are out” we know we are speaking about baseball. Yet that phrase has been used in many other contexts as well, from business to relationships. Today it is applied to the kingship of Saul. What happens when a king chosen by God, anointed by God and blessed by God will not listen to God? Can a king claim to be the servant of God when he chooses to do things his own way? Of course the lesson extends to the rest of us as well: can we claim to be the people of God if we will not listen to what God says? This lesson shows what happened when Saul was thrown the third pitch by God, when he was tested for the third time. Once again we are on the battle field. What Saul fails to realize is that the spiritual battle is always more important than the military or physical battle.

### The Call to Battle – 1 Samuel 15:1-9

1. In verses 1-3 we find the answer to the following questions:

- Who calls Saul to go to battle against the Amalekites? (v. 1)
- By what name does God identify Himself? (v. 2)
- Why is God sending Israel against Amalek? (v. 2)
- What is Saul to do to the Amalekites? (v. 3)

#### *Background:*

*In Leviticus 18 we read a list of the sins of the people who lived in Canaan, the people the Israelites were to replace. God says the land will “vomit out the inhabitants” for how they have lived (Lev. 18:25). Besides their immoral lifestyles, the Amalekites attacked the Israelites when they were fleeing Egypt two times (Exodus 17:8-13, Numbers 14:43-45). They further attacked Israel by joining forces with Moab (Judges 3:13) and the Midianites (Judges 6:3-5, etc.) They were now under the judgement of God, or under the “ban” of God (devoted to destruction).*

2. Verse 3 makes it clear that this is to be a total destruction of the people of Amalek. Why might God choose to deal with a nation in this manner?

The term *Charam* found here “corresponds to the radical excision of a cancer performed by a surgeon to prevent the spread of malignancy throughout the body. To impress upon all the fact that this was no ordinary war of plunder and rapine, Israel was commanded to take no booty.” BBC Vol. 2, p. 251.

3. How many men showed up to fight with Saul at this battle (v. 4)? What does this say about Saul’s popularity now?
4. In verse 6 Saul allows a certain group of people to leave before the battle started. Who were they, and why were they allowed to leave?
5. What success does Saul have in this battle according to verse 7?
6. God’s instruction was to destroy all the people and all the livestock and possessions of the Amalekites. Does Saul do this (vss. 8-9)? What does Saul devote to the Lord (v. 9)?

### **Samuel’s Response to Saul’s Victory – 1 Samuel 15:10-21**

7. In verse 11 we read an interesting comment from God. What is it? Compare that to Genesis 6:6. The word used here for “regret” also can be translated “disappointed.” Does this mean God is caught by surprise?
8. As the Lord displays disappointment in Saul, what is Samuel’s response (vs. 11)? What did Samuel do with his emotions?
9. What did Saul do according to verse 12? What might that say about Saul’s demeanor?
10. When Samuel meets Saul, what are Saul’s first words to Samuel (v. 13)?
11. Does Samuel agree with Saul’s report? What does Samuel say to Saul (v. 14)?

12. Saul explains what the “bleating of sheep” was all about. What is his explanation? According to Saul, who is responsible for these animals being there? (v. 15)
13. In verse 16 it appears Samuel does not want to hear anymore stories. What does he say to Saul?
14. Verse 17 reminds Saul of an important truth. What is it?
15. What instruction had God given to Saul according to verse 18? Did he carry it out (v. 19)?
16. Read Saul’s response in verses 20-21. Does he believe he has done the right thing? Who does he blame for the disobedience Samuel is accusing him of? What do you think of the telling phrase in verse 21: “the Lord your God”?

### **Saul’s Future Determined – 1 Samuel 15:22-35**

17. According to verse 22 what is the most important thing to God? Did Saul live up to this?
18. Verse 23 speaks of the sin of rebellion and of presumption. How is Saul guilty of these? What will be the consequence of this for Saul?
19. Saul confesses his sin in verse 24. How does he identify his sin?
20. Saul makes a request of Samuel in verse 25. What is it? How genuine do you think Saul is? According to verse 26 how genuine does Samuel think Saul is?
21. Samuel turns to go, and what happens (v. 27)? According to verse 28, what event does this prophetic action foretell?
22. What does verse 29 mean?
23. How do you interpret what Saul says in verse 30? What seems to be his intent? Again note the words “the Lord your God” in this verse.
24. There was still some unfinished business. What does Samuel do in verse 32-33? Does this seem appropriate for a priest/prophet?

25. Verse 34 tells us that Saul and Samuel parted ways. What does it mean that Samuel will not see Saul until his death (v. 35)? Looking at this verse, is Samuel sulking or is something else at work here?
26. The chapter ends with the idea that the Lord regretted that he made Saul king of Israel. Can we cause God to regret appointing us to certain tasks today?

## **Conclusion**

There is much in this chapter that goes against our sensibilities. There is the slaughter of men, women, children and even livestock in the name of the Lord. This is often referred to as holy war. From this side of the cross it is hard to understand. Also in this chapter we see a prophet hack a man to death. Not our usual understanding of a “man of God.” We also see God turn His back on Saul, the one chosen by God to be king.

This chapter shows the curious interplay between the sovereignty of God and the choice of people. There is no doubt that God is in control, even when we read twice that he regrets making Saul king. But God has given Saul the opportunity to prove himself a worthy king. And what did God desire of him? A great swordsman? A military genius? A great orator? No. God sought one thing: obedience. But Saul failed. This was his third strike. He sacrificed animals when he should not have. He made a foolish vow that nearly cost his son his life. And now he did not obey God. Strike three. He is told the throne is being taken from him and given to someone more worthy. Will this new person prove to be a man of faith and obedience? That is what lies ahead of us in the chapters that follow.