

Discover Hour  
E100 Week 7  
February 21, 2010  
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The readings for this week focus on the transition in leadership from Samuel to Saul to David. We will focus on Saul, as David will be the focus of the message this week during the service. Saul takes up the throne reluctantly, hiding among the baggage so Samuel cannot anoint him (10:22), and then, to put it mildly, makes a mess of it. In his last speech, which takes place as he is retiring from leadership and after he has anointed Saul as King, Samuel repeats the language of the covenant that is to be between the people and Yahweh. It is the covenant first made with Abraham, then Isaac, Jacob, Moses and the Judges:

Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the Lord has set a king over you. If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God – good! But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers” (I Samuel 12:14-15).

Saul’s first great moment of failure comes early in his reign and is described in chapter 13. He has gathered an army together and is intent on defeating the Philistine’s. This is to be the fulfillment of the prophecy the Lord gave Samuel about Saul, “Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistine’s” (I Samuel 9:16). Samuel explains to Saul (10:8) that he should wait for him to come, but Saul gets anxious to begin the battle against the Philistine’s and offers the sacrifice without Samuel. The punishment is that the kingdom will be taken from him and given to David, “a man after God’s own heart” (12:14).

Saul’s second great failure is not fully carrying out the Lord’s command to completely annihilate the Amalekites (15:2-3). This passage raises the persistent question about violence in the Old Testament and we will discuss it this morning. The question may hinge as much on our understanding of God’s character as anything else:

But on the basis of the Santa Claus theology, sin creates no problem, and atonement becomes needless; God’s active favor extends no less to those who disregard his commands than to those who keep them. The idea that God’s attitude to me is affected by whether or not I do what he says has no place in the thought of the man on the street, and any attempt to show the need for fear in God’s presence, for trembling at his word, gets written off as impossibly old-fashioned – ‘Victorian,’ ‘Puritan’ and ‘sub-Christian.’ Yet the Santa Claus theology carries within itself the seeds of its own collapse, for it cannot cope with the fact of evil (J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 160).

In any event, Saul fails and tries to explain (7-20). Samuel explains the need to fully obey and explains that to obey is better than sacrifice (21-23). God’s Spirit leaves him and he is tormented by an evil spirit. Samuel kills Agag the king of the Amalekites himself (15:33)

### **Discussion Questions**

- How applicable is the covenant repeated in I Samuel 12: 14-15 to our country today? For example, is it important for the United States to have a committed Christian as President?
  - What about the command to kill everyone, men, women, and children among the Amalekites? Why was this necessary and how can a good God command this?
  - Saul gives Samuel several reasons for disobeying the Lord's command, he plays the blame game. Why do we do this even when our personal mistakes are obvious?
  - Saul obeys the Lord's command in regards to the Amalekites, but only part way. Is this too a common pattern for us, obeying Biblical principles only to a certain point, but not fully?
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