The Background to David Becoming King over Israel
Part 7

Saul's Final Rejection and The Stage for a New King (1 Samuel 14-15)

- **The Setting:** God gives Saul a clear, ultimate test of obedience regarding the Amalekites—a nation that had ruthlessly attacked Israel's weak and vulnerable generations earlier.
- **The Theme:** God does not grade obedience on a curve. Partial obedience is complete disobedience. This chapter serves as the tragic pivot point of 1 Samuel, where Saul's kingdom is officially revoked, clearing the way for David.

Setting the Stage for the End of Saul's Reign and David's Future (1 Samuel 14:47-52)

- **Summary:** Saul's military victories are listed, including a major defeat of the Amalekites. Then Saul's family tree is described, along with a description Saul's recruitment strategy for his army.

<u>The connection to David</u>

While David is not mentioned by name until chapter 16, this brief passage lays critical groundwork and directly introduces characters, conflicts, and plot points that will define David's life.

- **Michal, David's future wife:** Verse 49 introduces Saul's younger daughter, Michal. She will later fall in love with David (1 Samuel 18:20), become his first wife, and play a crucial role in saving his life from her father's wrath.
- **Abner, David's military rival:** Verse 50 introduces Abner, the commander of Saul's army. Abner will later hunt David alongside Saul. After Saul's death, Abner becomes the main obstacle to David taking the throne by setting up Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, as a rival king.
- **The Philistine crisis:** Verse 52 highlights that the war against the Philistines was "severe all the days of Saul." This relentless war is the exact stage David steps onto in chapter 17 when he fights Goliath. David ultimately accomplishes what Saul could not: permanently crushing the Philistine threat.
- **Saul's recruitment policy:** Verse 52 explicitly states that Saul drafted "any mighty man or any brave man." This explains the exact mechanism of how David is brought into Saul's court. When Saul needs an armor-bearer and a warrior, David fits the description perfectly as a "man of valor" and a "warrior" (1 Samuel 16:18).

The Command and the Compromise (1 Samuel 15:1–12)

- **Summary:** Samuel gives Saul explicit instructions from God to destroy the Amalekites completely. Saul wins the battle but compromises: he spares Agag (the enemy king) and keeps the best sheep, cattle, and fat calves. God tells Samuel He is grieved that Saul has turned away.

The connection to David

Saul uses his victory to build a monument to *himself* (v. 12) and hoards the plunder. Contrast this with David's later battles against the Amalekites (1 Samuel 30). When David defeats them, he doesn't build a monument to himself or hoard the goods; he takes the plunder and shares it generously across all the towns of Judah. David views victory as a gift from God to be shared, while Saul views it as a trophy for his own ego.

Excuses vs. True Obedience (1 Samuel 15:13–23)

- **Summary:** Samuel confronts Saul, who immediately lies and says, "I have carried out the Lord's instructions." When Samuel asks about the sound of bleating sheep, Saul shifts the blame to his soldiers and claims they kept them to "sacrifice to the Lord." Samuel responds with the iconic truth: "To obey is better than sacrifice."

The connection to David

This reading highlights the ultimate contrast between Saul and David. When Saul is caught in sin, he minimizes it, blames others, and makes religious excuses. Later, when David is caught in a massive sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12), he makes zero excuses. He immediately drops to his knees and says, "I have sinned against the Lord." David is a "man after God's own heart" not because he is perfect, but because his repentance is absolute and transparent.

The Kingdom is Torn Away (1 Samuel 15:24–35)

- **Summary:** Saul finally admits his sin, but only because he fears losing face. As Samuel turns to leave, Saul desperately grabs his robe, tearing it. Samuel tells him the tear represents how God has torn the kingdom away from him today and given it to "a neighbor of yours who is better than you." Samuel then executes King Agag himself and leaves Saul forever.

Verse 35 states that "Adonai regretted (KJV "repented") that He had made Saul king over Israel." The Hebrew word is *nacham,* literally means "breathing strongly" or "sighing deeply." Depending on the context, it can mean to grieve/lament, to comfort/console oneself, or to relent/change one's mind.

In this context, when applied to God, it carries the weight of a gut-level, emotional response to pain. God is not executing a cold, administrative revision; He is expressing profound sorrow and heartbreak over Saul's rebellion.

The connection to David

The stage is now set for Bethlehem. The "better neighbor" Samuel mentions is, of course, David. This final verse leaves Samuel mourning over Saul, perfectly setting up the very next verse in 1 Samuel 16:1, where God makes it clear that the time has come to move on, which leads to the anointing of David as king.

Saul begs Samuel to honor him "before the elders of my people" (v. 30). What happens to our spiritual vitality when we care more about maintaining a good reputation before people than being right before God?

The Big Takeaway

The outcome of Israel's desire for a king reveals a bittersweet reality: Israel got exactly what they asked for—a king like the other nations—only to learn that a king who rules like the nations will ultimately fracture under his own human pride. When they first demanded a king, their motivation was rooted in a lack of faith. They rejected God as their direct ruler in exchange for a visible, military figurehead.

Ultimately, Israel's experiment with a king of their own choosing ends in spiritual failure. Saul successfully secured Israel's physical borders, but he failed to secure their spiritual heart. By chapter 15, the crown is stripped from Saul's lineage. Yet, this painful outcome exposes a deeper divine purpose: by allowing Israel to experience the exhausting limits of a king chosen by human standards, God prepares the nation to finally appreciate a king chosen by *His* standards—one who rules not by outward stature, but by a heart aligned with God.