King Saul Disobeys God



Scripture Reference: 1 Samuel 13:5-14; 15:1-35

Suggested Theme: God is merciful and forgiving. Accept responsibility for your sins and do not blame others for them.

Memory Verse: “If you hide your sins, you will not succeed. If you confess and reject them, you will receive mercy.” Proverbs 28:13, ICB

Story Overview:

The Lord gave King Saul specific instructions on how to handle a battle with the enemy, the Amalekites. King Saul disobeyed the Lord in front of all of the people, and then he refused to admit his own sin. When Samuel confronted him, Saul made excuses and even blamed others. Although Saul would remain in place as king for many years, it was at this time that the Lord rejected him as King.

Background Study:

God had chosen Saul to be the first king of Israel. He had no palace, army, or royal city, so he simply went back to his farm to live. Only when the people of Jabesh-Gilead (Jay besh gil e ud) were being attacked did Saul begin to act like a king. He immediately called the men of Israel together to form an army and saved Jabesh-Gilead. After this, Saul was crowned king in an official coronation ceremony. Saul continued to lead the people against many of their enemies. He always consulted God through Samuel and offered sacrifices before battles. He began reigning as a man who loved God.

Saul and his son, Jonathan, fought together to defend Israel. Jonathan distinguished himself in battle (1 Samuel 13:23-14:23).

Samuel was disappointed in Saul many times. Saul did not carefully follow the Lord. Even before today’s story, the Lord revealed to Samuel that Saul would be replaced as king. This was because Saul tried to act as a priest and offer a sacrifice to the Lord (1 Samuel 13:5-14).

Now Samuel brought God’s message to Saul: “Go and completely destroy the Amalekites and everything they possess. The Amalekites were descendants of Esau. They were a warlike people. They lived primarily south of Canaan, in the Negev area and sometimes in the Sinai region.

God had a very good reason for wanting Saul to destroy the Amalekites. They were the first nation to attack the Israelites when they left Egypt (Exodus 17:8; Numbers 14:45). Even after Israel defeated them at this battle, they continued to harass and attack Israel. They would attack from the rear, killing any Israelite who could not keep up with the rest of the group. They were described as a nation having no fear of the Lord.

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Years earlier, Moses had pronounced a curse from God on the Amalekites. He said that when the Israelites had settled in the promised land, they would return to destroy the Amalekites. (See Deuteronomy 25:19) God kept that promise through Saul and his army.

Saul called the army together at Telaim in the Negev region. When they were ready for battle, Saul sent word to the Kenites to leave the area or be killed. The Kenites were a semi-nomadic people living in southern Canaan and Sinai.

The Amalekites were destroyed from Havilah to Shur. These were cities or regions located at opposite ends of the Amalekite territory. Havilah was in the western part of Arabia. The exact spot is unknown, but it is believed to be in the north of modern Yemen. Shur was on the eastern border of Egypt.

The Lord had told Saul to destroy everything. Saul just could not pass up a chance to make himself look good. It was a practice among heathen nations to keep a conquered king alive. They would take him back to their country. In front of his people, the victor would put out the eyes of his captive king and otherwise humiliate him. Then he would be put to death.

Saul had become very proud of himself. He kept the Amalekite king alive and the best of everything else. When he returned to Israel, he even erected a monument to himself at Carmel.

Samuel had to tell Saul of the Lord's anger. Instead of repenting, Saul tried lying and then made excuses. He blamed the soldiers and then said that they only kept the animals alive to make sacrifices to the Lord. Even though Saul finally confessed (1 Samuel 15:24), he continued to try to pass the responsibility onto others. He even asked Samuel to make him look good before the people (15:30-31).

Way to Introduce the Story:

Bring two puppets to your gathering, or make your own. A simple way to do this is to draw a simple face (eyes, nose, and mouth) on the pad of your index finger. Draw faces on each index finger, which can be your simple puppets. Introduce your puppet friends to the children. Be sure to give them names. Tell the children that these two "children" have done something wrong. They were wrestling around, and they knocked over a beautiful vase. The vase broke. Now, explain that the "children" must choose. They can do the right thing or the wrong thing. See if they can guess which is which. Proceed to let the puppets act out two scenes. One puppet goes and tells his mother he is very sorry. He says he did a bad thing and wants to pay for the vase. The other puppet tells his mother it is the other one's fault. He says that it was not his fault at all. "Which of our friends did the right thing? Once there was a king who did something wrong. Let's see if he is sorry for what he did?"

The Story:

God chose Saul to be the first king of Israel. King Saul's responsibility was to lead the people and help them follow God's instructions.

Samuel was a prophet and a priest for God. Samuel was responsible for telling the people messages from God and offering sacrifices as a way of worship.

The Amalekites had been very mean to God's people, so God told Samuel to send King Saul a message. Samuel told Saul that God's message was to fight a battle with the Amalekites and destroy them. God had some very clear instructions for King Saul to obey. God instructed, "After you win the battle, do not take anything home from the Amalekites."

King Saul and his soldiers began to do what God had told them to do. They won the battle over the Amalekites. But then, King Saul stopped obeying God. He only obeyed part of God's instructions.

King Saul took some of the best animals from the Amalekites home with him.

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Maybe King Saul thought no one would notice. But God knows everything that people do.

God sent Samuel to talk to King Saul. When Samuel arrived, Saul said, “I obeyed God and did what He asked.”

But Samuel said to Saul, “You are telling a lie, Saul. You only did part of what God told you to do. He said to destroy the Amalekites and to not take any of their animals home with you. But you disobeyed! I can even hear the animals making noises right now!”

King Saul should have said, “I’m sorry, I have done a bad thing. It is my fault.”

But that is not what King Saul said. Instead of saying he was sorry, he said things like, “It’s not my fault! The soldiers did it.” Then he said, “Besides, they only took the animals so they could offer sacrifices to God to make Him happy.”

Samuel was sad and angry at the same time. “You are the leader of the people. Don’t blame them. You have not made God happy, Saul. You have disobeyed Him.”

And then Samuel said, “Sacrifices do not make God happy if you disobey Him. Obeying God is the most important thing. It is more important than making sacrifices.”

So, King Saul made all the wrong choices when disobeying God. Then, when Samuel talked to him about it, he was not even sorry. He blamed others and tried to make it sound like he was doing something good.

Because of King Saul’s disobedience, Samuel now had a very serious message from God.
He said, “Saul, God chose you to be the king so you would obey Him and help the people. God will choose another king because your heart and actions are not good.

For a long time after this, Saul was still king. He made mistake after mistake. Soon, there would be another king over Israel.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

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- What was the first thing Saul did that made God not want him to be king? (He acted like a priest and offered a sacrifice to the Lord)
- When Saul fought the Amalekites, what things from the Amalekites did God tell him not to bring back to Israel? (prisoners, sheep and animals)
- Did Saul bring these things back to Israel or not? (Yes, he did and disobeyed God).
- What did Saul do when Samuel told him he had sinned? (Saul said he didn't do it, tried to blame others, and then made excuses)
- Why did Saul make excuses and blame others for his sin?
- Why did God not want Saul to be king after these events? (Saul was not sorry he had sinned and blamed other people for his sins. He did not have a heart that wanted to follow or please God)
- Does God forgive us when we disobey Him and ask for His forgiveness? (Yes)
- What did you learn about God or people from this story?

Reflection:

- What is something you wondered about in this story?
- What question do you have for God about this story?
- Why do you think Saul decided to take prisoners and animals from the Amalekites even though God commanded him not to?
- How do you think God felt when Saul disobeyed Him? What about when Saul blamed the soldiers for his sins?
- How do you think Saul felt when Samuel told him he had sinned?
- Have you ever disobeyed God or someone else? Have you ever sinned? How does it feel when we realise we've sinned/disobeyed?
- What should we do when we feel guilt for something we've done or said? (Admit what we did, apologise, ask for God and others to forgive us, and do your best not to sin in that way again)
- Does God forgive us when we disobey Him and ask for His forgiveness?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Oh, Be Careful Song
- Books of the Old Testament Song
- The Books of the Old Testament.
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Have an “excuses bee.” Children stand in a line. One at a time, the children must make an excuse people might say for doing something wrong (Example: I disobeyed my mum because I didn’t hear her.) If any child cannot think of an excuse, they sit down. The answers might get silly, but so do excuses. Finish the game by acting out the correct response of taking responsibility.
- Discuss what it means to take responsibility for our actions. Then, write (or have children write) “I will be responsible” in the centre of a large piece of paper and then use any art method to paint or draw a border around it.
- Role-play situations where the person must choose whether or not to own up and take responsibility for a wrong done (examples might be breaking something in a shop when no one was around or not doing homework).
- Practice looking up books of the Old Testament to help learn the books.
- Choose a confident child to help you with this idea. Ask them a question about the story and then let them answer (they can answer correctly or incorrectly – their choice). Once they have answered, tell everyone who agrees to stand up. Everyone who disagrees should sit on the floor. Then, tell them to tell you the correct answer. Ask several questions this way. Usually, children love this one.
- (Costumed Bible Characters) A little play-acting is often a fun way to tell the story or review what has been learned. Here are some ways you might use the idea: After telling the story, have the children dress up in costumes and act it out.
  - You can also dress up in a simple costume to act as one of the Bible’s characters. As you begin to speak, “get into character” as if you were the person in the story visiting today to tell them what has happened to you.
  - Or, later in the session, as a review, the teacher can also use the same method to ask the children review questions as if they were one of the characters in the story talking to the children.



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

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Crafts:

- Provide paper and markers or paint and encourage the children to paint a picture of themselves obeying God.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets -Saul becomes king (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets-Saul rejected by God (Calvary Curriculum)
- YouTube video of a teacher telling this story
- Article to read about encouraging children to accept blame(Imperfect families)
- Good article on how to teach children to stop making excuses and take responsibility (homeschool adventure)
- Situational discussion questions to discuss taking responsibility (homeschool adventure)
- A variety of ideas and links for this story can be found (Children's Church

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