

The Hacking of Agag

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It would have appeared after Saul's return from his battle with the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15) that his victory over them was complete and decisive. Charged by God to utterly destroy these perennial enemies (v. 2), he launched a successful military campaign against them and defeated these foes with the edge of the sword. Although he had decimated their ranks, Saul had not completely destroyed them but had spared Agag their king and the best of the flocks. Everything else--that which as "despised and worthless"--he did away with (v. 9). In many respects, it was an overwhelming victory. But because Saul had not fully obeyed the Lord, God sent Samuel to confront him for his lack of obedience. When Samuel encountered Saul in Gilgal, he had just come from Carmel where he had erected a monument--a memorial to himself to glory in his "victory". Self-assured, he declared to Samuel with an air of confidence that he had performed the "commandment of the Lord" (v. 13). But Samuel was not swayed. Bolding exposing Saul's incomplete obedience, he declared the dire consequences of disregarding the command of the Lord. He asked the penetrating question: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" Not waiting for a response, he sounded forth the truth "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams." (v. 22) Forced to face his disobedience squarely, Saul could do nothing more than to readily admit his sin and hope for the best. But the damage had been done and the verdict was in--the Lord had rejected him from being king over Israel. Samuel then requested to have Agag, king of the Amalekites brought to him. Without delay, he declared God's judgment on him and hacked him to pieces before the Lord.

The hacking of Agag is an incident worthy of careful consideration. Saul had not heeded the word of the Lord and as a result brought about his own demise. Had he obeyed fully perhaps things might have been different. But because he had undervalued God's command to him, it culminated in his ruin. What is the lesson that comes to us from this dramatic incident contained in the Scriptures? Certainly one lesson is that partial obedience to the Lord is actually disobedience to the Lord. God had instructed Saul to utterly destroy all of the Amalekites and their possessions--not just some of them. God had His purposes but they were hindered by Saul's lack of obedience. Whenever we don't fully obey the Lord, His purposes though not thwarted, are certainly hindered. Our attitude should be the same as Mary who said to the servants at the wedding of Cana, "whatever He says to you, do it." (John 2:5) Without a doubt, partial obedience is the same as disobedience and Samuel needed to demonstrate to Saul the importance of completely obeying the Lord by "finishing the job" and killing Agag. But there is another very forceful lesson for us from this account. Agag was an Amalekite, a direct descendant of Esau (Gen. 36:12). It was Esau who maintained an aggressive and ongoing hatred against Jacob for past deeds. Esau's descendants--including the Amalekites--simply perpetuated that hatred. It was not long after Israel had departed from Egypt that Amalek attacked them as they made their way through the wilderness. Ambushing the Israelites at Rephidim (Ex. 17:8-16), they sought to hinder the progress of the people that God had redeemed. Because they were related to Israel and yet opposed to them, Amalek is a fitting type of one of the Christian's chief antagonists--the flesh, our own sinful attitudes and actions that war against our progress in the Christian life. This struggle against the flesh is no more keenly apparent to the Christian than in the early days out of Egypt. While Israel was enslaved in Egypt they did not have to deal with this foe. But now having been redeemed and en route to their inheritance, they did. And when a person turns to the Lord, the enemy which was not a factor previously now makes his presence known, and does so continually. After Israel defeated Amalek, the Lord declared that He would have war with Amalek from generation to generation. And indeed He did. Saul, David, and Hezekiah all had their struggles with the descendants of Amalek. Esther and Mordecai

many years later also had to deal with the vestiges of this nation through Haman who came from this line. No wonder the Lord wanted Saul to conquer all of Amalek including Agag. He knew the difficulties that would lay ahead for Israel if he did not. Likewise, God knows the difficulties and struggles that lay ahead for us if there is only partial obedience to His Word, especially in this battle against the flesh. Col 3:5 reminds us to be unsparing in our attitude and to "...put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry". Paul could say unabashedly--"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing..." (Roms 7:18). To the Galatians, he wrote: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish". (Gal 5:17)

To be obedient to the Lord in many areas and yet allow "Agag" to remain active (even if he walks "delicately") will only cause us grief and further difficulties. Israel learned this lesson after the days of Joshua when they failed to completely expel all the inhabitants of Canaan. These inhabitants later became a thorn in the side of Israel during the days of the judges. Similarly, the things of the flesh--impurity, anger, jealousy etc.--that we allow to go unchecked in our lives can also prove disastrous over the course of time. Like Samuel, we need to be unsparing and unceasing in our energy to obey the Lord fully and overcome this foe with His help. Saul should have done so with Agag. Fortunately, Samuel did--and has given us an example of how we should deal with this "close" enemy that continually wars against us.