

THANKSGIVING AND OBEDIENCE

November 26, 2017

I Samuel 15:1-35

“And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

I Samuel 15:22, 23

Amalek was the grandson of Esau, Jacob’s brother. His descendants, the Amalekites, were the first to attack the people of Israel, Jacob’s descendants. The attack was an unprovoked ambush from behind, where Israel’s weak and infirmed were sheltered. Israel was without defense and weary, having just escaped Egyptian bondage (Ex. 17:8-17; Deut. 25:17, 18; I Sam. 15:2).

God delivered Israel, and promised “I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven” (Ex. 17:14). Decades later, as they prepared to enter Canaan, Moses instructed Israel, “when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, . . . thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven” (Deut. 25:19).

Israel’s first king, Saul, was appointed by God to complete this task. But he failed, keeping the Amalekite king and its best livestock for his own pleasure. He offered a false, pious excuse for this disobedience, prompting Samuel to rebuke him in the text quoted above. From this text we learn that actions of worship are futile if there is no effort to obey God’s commands.

Lessons illustrated by this narrative must be taught to every generation. And as we observe another Thanksgiving holiday, we should remember that thanksgiving, or any act of worship, is vain without obedience to God’s commands. The first and greatest commandment is this: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37).

Among things we should ponder, consider these:

1. The sins of one generation damage succeeding generations. The Amalekites were doomed to destruction due to violence committed by their forefathers roughly 350 years earlier.
2. God will deal with sin, though He may tarry long in doing so. He is not forgetful. He never needs to rush. A thousand years is as a day with the Lord (II Peter 3:8). His timing is perfect.
3. Obedience for God’s sake, not for personal gain, is true worship. Saul disobeyed, and sought to legitimize his sin with a pious excuse—that he kept the best of Amalek’s livestock for sacrifices unto God. This was untrue. Obedience is true worship.
4. Without obedience, “worship” is but a façade. Disobedience is dismissive of God, and any semblance of “worship” offered out of a heart of disobedience is not worship, but mockery. It adds to the offense, acting as if God does not see and does not know our actions or motives.
5. God equates disobedience with witchcraft and idolatry. It is no small misdemeanor. It is

violence against Almighty God, a usurpation of His priority and disregarding of His authority. It will not go unnoticed, nor unjudged.