

Introduction

- We come to one of the most difficult chapters in the whole of the Old Testament for us to accept:
 - King Saul is told **by God, through Samuel**, to exterminate the Amalekites - including their children, babies and livestock
 - it would be considered a **war crime now**
 - it appears almost impossible that God who is love and full of loving kindness should make such a grim demand
 - it leads us to question if this wasn't just something **Samuel** wanted rather than coming from **God himself**
- As we come to this passage, and all its horrors, we cling onto truths we know from elsewhere, that hold us as we look this passage in the face:
 - for instance, God does not delight in the death of even the wicked (**Ezekiel 33:11**)
- So let us explore - perhaps with trepidation - this passage

A Judgement Long Coming

- The term 'totally destroy' in Hebrew signifies a total devotion of something for God's exclusive disposition
 - and therefore the stuff and people were totally off limits for Israel - they were for God's use, not theirs
 - this was the situation, for instance, at **Jericho** and at **Ai** at the start of the conquest of Canaan
 - **this was not the way Israel was to act usually**
 - this is particular to times when it was **God's war**, rather than **God's people's war** - as here against Amalek
 - it does not give Israel the right to exterminate any others
 - **the Amalekites were indescribably wicked and were a people at war with God**
 - when Israel left Egypt the Amalekites made an unprovoked attack at Rephidim when Israel was weary from travel (**Exodus 17:8-16 and Deuteronomy 25:17-19**)
 - they picked off the stragglers at the back of the column - the old and infirm, children and nursing mothers
- For three hundred years God **gave space for the Amalekites to repent**
 - but they were just as bad at the end and they were at the beginning
 - they took what they did not work for as raiders, murderers and thieves
 - years later, **Haman**, who tried to destroy God's people in exile, in the book of Esther, is named as an **Agagite (Esther 3:1)**, which is derived from the king title of the Amalekites, Agag - he was from this same people, with the same almost pathological hatred of God's people...
- **These are people who have set themselves up to oppose God and his people - and so face his judgement**
- *(And there can be a degree of hypocrisy here - we get upset about Israel slaughtering children and babies, and yet as a society turn a blind eye to the misuse of the abortion legislation...)*
- God is perfectly just
 - the wages of sin is physical and eternal death (**Rom 6:23**)
 - *(we are repelled by this judgement because we are **insufficiently repelled by sin**)*
 - the justice meted out on the wicked Amalekites is what will be meted out on all sinners who do not repent and believe in Christ
 - can we be incensed, shocked, disturbed about the judgement of the Amalekites and **not** take the gospel to the perishing men, women and children of our world that they might be saved?
 - don't we feel the urgency?
 - the day of judgement is nearer to our day than it has ever been!

- Lord, give us compassion!!

Sin Within

- Actually, like Saul, the death of the Amalekites is what we **should** be about!!
 - what do I mean by that?
 - **it doesn't mean we are to go round exterminating people!**
 - but it does mean that we have to deal with ourselves - **not as suicide bombers** - but **concerned to exterminate evil within us**
 - we should not tolerate one piece, however small
 - **it all has to go** - in the power of the Holy Spirit
- **And that is a real battle!**
- Saul didn't obey God
 - he spared the best flock and herd, and the king - the Agag
 - God regretted that Saul was ever king....
- God is not a man that he should change his mind:
 - but Saul's rejection by God troubled Samuel
 - he had cooperated in making Saul king, whom he had announced as the Lord's anointed
 - now God seems to have changed his mind
- This is troubling - but **that is the reality of sin at work!**
- Saul himself, sadly, isn't troubled by the situation:
 - he thought he had done well
 - he is quite 'upbeat' when Samuel arrives...
 - **'I have carried out the Lord's orders.'**
 - Samuel's reply cuts through the flannel: **'What is this racket from flock and herds, then?'**
 - Saul makes excuses - **in the same way we all do** - he blamed his army - **"they did it!"**
 - **'To obey is better than sacrifice,'** Samuel replied, highlighting the sin
- **Saul had rejected God, now God rejects him as king**
 - another will be found - this time not the people's choice, but God's choice
 - they cannot worship God harbouring sin in their hearts **and nor can we!**
 - our disobedience cannot be covered over by religious ceremony
 - don't think God is fooled by it - **Saul was fooling himself, and perhaps the people, but not God**
- Oh, this is so telling!
 - **I know I do this** - religious ceremony... but true integrity? In my relationships? in my habits? in my priorities?
- Knowing he was in the wrong, **Saul feigns repentance, but he really wants to save face**
 - he still tries to shift the blame onto his army and democracy
 - Saul was the kind of sorry person who is afraid of losing his standing with people
 - his principles varied with the popular vote
- As Samuel began to leave for the last time, **Saul grabbed his clothes, but they tore**
 - Samuel used the occasion for a parable to affirm Saul had been torn from his kingdom
 - however, Samuel did go with Saul and carried out that which Saul should have done
 - Agag thought all was well, but Samuel put him to death
 - judgement does come, even if in God's grace it often tarries long
 - and Samuel left, **mourning for Saul**
 - **faithful ministers don't enjoy bringing hard words**

Conclusion

- God calls us to follow him, to do his will, to obey
 - if we don't obey him then there are serious consequences
 - sin will be judged - justice demands it
 - **only by coming to the cross - admitting and confessing our sin - is there escape and life eternal**