

**Title: Sin in denial - 1 Samuel 15**

**Purpose:** To show how SIN deeply reveals itself by way of our great capacity for SELF-DECEPTION & living IN DENIAL.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Independent going digital-only

I don't know what newspaper you prefer to read - whether you would be one who would prefer say a Daily Mirror over perhaps the Daily Telegraph (a tabloid in preference to a "more serious" broadsheet).

Q. Anyone want to own up to reading The Independent?

Well, if you do quite like that newspaper - you might like to know that have about a week and a half left before the presses go silent.

Rapid digital growth in the past three years has made the INDEPENDENT.CO.UK the UK's fastest-growing quality newspaper online site.

Apparently its monthly audience has grown 33% in the last 12 months to nearly 70 million global unique users. The site is profitable and is expected to see revenue growth by about 50% this year.

In an interview with the **Guardian - EVGENY LE- BEDEV** denied that the move was about **cost-cutting** or **even pulling out of London** - he said: "The question should not be why we are doing it, but why others in the industry are not."

He went on to make this revealing statement that:

"The newspaper industry is **'IN DENIAL'** and that other proprietors should follow his lead by closing... and launch digital-only newspapers."

To be 'IN DENIAL' not the worst thing we do BUT it is why we do the worst things

Now assuming **LE-BEDEV** is right and that the strong sales figures speak for themselves - to be **'IN DENIAL'** is, in the longer term, equivalent to presiding over a certain demise - it is going to be the same thing as "shuffling deck chairs on the Titanic"!!

You see, as someone has helpfully observed:

**"To be 'IN DENIAL' is \*not\* the worst thing we do - BUT IT IS - the reason why we do the worst things"**

Another pivotal chapter

Once again this morning we are coming to look at what is a Bible-wide topic - this subject of SIN.

We started 2 weeks ago where the Bible started on this subject with the very first mention of SIN there in Genesis chapter 4 and the story of Cain and Abel.

And from this sad episode (which you may know ends in the first homicide in human history) we focus our considerations largely around Genesis 4 verse 7 and saw some of the graphic descriptions that have to do with SIN.

Then last week we went on to the book of [Jeremiah and chapter 17](#) and we looked at what you might call: "A tale of two trees". Rather than just consider more of the descriptive aspects of SIN, we came up instead with a definition (and this is only one amongst a number that would also be valid) but this one came naturally out of the story and it was:

"SIN is having our roots in anything other than God."

Today - moving on once more

Today we are moving on once more and we are especially selecting passages that are some of the most major ones in all of Holy Scripture, some of the most defining and categorical passages - let me illustrate a little what I mean:

- [Genesis 4](#) - the story of Cain and Abel - it's very major in the scheme of things, because it ends in murder and concludes with Cain being **EXPELLED from the land** - he will end up for good as a wanderer on the earth.
- [Jeremiah 17](#) - the stakes of sin are again very high because now we are looking, not at one man, but at a whole nation that is being **EXPELLED from the land of Canaan** and taken into **EXILE 500 miles away for 3 whole generations!!**
- This morning we are in [1 Samuel 15](#) where we have the episode in which SAUL, the FIRST KING OF ISRAEL, reaches the point of no return and is IRREVERSIBLY REJECTED by God as King.

The background

Although we had the story of [1 Samuel 15](#) read to us earlier on, it will still help us if we paint in some of the background here.

There are two characters:

- **ONE** is this man called **SAMUEL** - if you read [the book of Acts](#) in the NT you will discover that Samuel is considered simultaneously as BOTH:
  - **the LAST of the Judges** and also as
  - **the FIRST of the Prophets**

At this point in the story - Samuel is now an old man and he is in a sense coming full circle.

Q. What do I mean?

Well if you were to scroll back to the opening chapters of 1 Samuel you will see a lady called Hannah crying out to God for a child and then dedicating her baby (Samuel) to the LORD for the rest of his life - and she takes him up to the Temple at Shiloh and presents him (when he is weaned) to Eli the high priest and he lives in the temple from that point forward under the immediate mentorship of Eli.

Well there comes a day when the LORD reveals Himself to Samuel - he is still a boy at this point - and God reveals to Samuel a devastating message of Judgment that is directed at his mentor Eli - and he has the role of having to deliver this message.

This episode happened in the middle of the night and I can imagine that the young Samuel did not have a very good night on that occasion - thinking to himself - Q. How am I going to tell Eli what God has told me?!!

Well once again we discover in this passage, here in 1 Samuel 15, that Samuel has one more very bad night's sleep:

See [Verse 11](#) " 'I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.' **Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the Lord all that night. Early in the morning** Samuel got up and went to meet Saul..."

So once again he is hearing, he is receiving, a terrible message of God's righteous judgment against Israel's great leader (not the God anointed High Priest, Eli, BUT this time the God anointed King, one Saul).

So Samuel is the first character in this chapter - and he is unable to sleep due to a sickening sense of age-old déjà vu.

- **THE SECOND** character is, of course, **SAUL** himself, the King.

Saul is an impressive character - very tall and commanding in appearance, he is likeable and he is one for whom Samuel has much affection - after all he has poured out a good man years into the development of this one who God has chosen to be Israel's very first king.

He's had his successes, but over time, worrying traits have started to emerge.

Just two chapters back in [1 Samuel 13](#) - we see a situation where Samuel is delayed and they are to make a burnt offering before the LORD and the army of Israel is coming under some strong military pressure and King Saul decides that he will function outside his pay grade - he will not only act as King, he will act as Priest as well and offer the sacrifice himself!

Samuel tells him that he has acted "foolishly" and that now the LORD will not establish his Kingdom under him, in effect that he will not have a Kingly dynasty to his name, but that instead God has sought out another that will be one after his own heart.

A pretty strong shot across the bows.

And here in this chapter God has given him a divine mission to visit righteous judgment upon this people, the Amalekites, because their time is up, because their sin has reached that "**point of no return**".

This is *\*not\** the only "**POINT OF NO RETURN**" that this chapter details, because, as we will see, this is also where King Saul reaches his own "**POINT OF NO RETURN**" as King of Israel.

The mission Saul is given

Now [Verse 3](#) gives us the mission that Saul is to undertake - it is not in any sense unclear;

[\(Verse 3\)](#) "Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."

Now without going into detail regarding this instruction to exterminate this particular Canaanite nation, to show them

no mercy - what I should make clear is that this is \*not\* a typical example of the sort of power politics that we see in our own day and age - this is not a political move aimed at grabbing more power and territory for Israel.

This is a righteous command that comes direct from God and has to do with flagrant sin and godlessness. The severity of this passage, which does seem rather extreme to our modern sensitivities, does serve to UNDERLINE THE VERY GRAVITY OF SIN.

It is our typical habit to soft-peddle sin and yet episode like this show that we cannot do this - and if you need another example of where we see the ULTIMATE example of the GRAVITY OF SIN - we only need to think of Easter and to think of the Cross of the LORD Jesus Christ.

If SIN was not as serious as it is, then:

Q. Why would Jesus, the very One and Only beloved Son of God, need to die naked upon a cruel cross of wood bearing the full curse of SIN?

#### Starts out well

Now it does seem that this mission wasn't just a case that Saul didn't listen very carefully to what he was being asked to do.

Equally it wasn't a case that he had a bit of a soft spot for these aggressive and despised arch-enemies of Israel.

See what we read in Verses 5&6:

"Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. Then he said to the Kenites, 'Go away, leave the Amalekites **so that I do not destroy you along with them**; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt.' So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites."

Yet Saul somehow is able to fail big time in this particular divine commission.

**\*\*\* So this really brings us to the core question that we need to be asking of this passage: \*\*\***

Q. How is it possible, that one such as Saul:

- with so much to lose
- with so much personal potential under God
- having such a godly mentor in Samuel

how is it possible that he, despite having had such a major shot across the bows, can cruise full steam ahead into the ICEBERG of self-destruction?

#### Self-deception - living "in denial"

Well I want to suggest that we all have a remarkable capacity for **SELF-DESTRUCTION** BECAUSE:

- we have a strong tendency to "**SELF-DECEPTION**"
- that surprising capacity to merrily keep on going, living in a state of continual and progressive "**DENIAL**".

Let me try and illustrate this a bit looking at Samuel's question to Saul in Verse 19 and Saul's response:

Verse 19 Samuel says: "Why did you not **obey** the LORD?..."

And then in the next verse Saul replies: "But I did **obey** the LORD..." - so evidently there is **a bit of a disconnect here**.

## The disconnect explained

And it comes down to this word OBEY - let me read a paragraph from a **Jewish website** that explains something about this word in the original Hebrew language:

(<http://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/halacha-hashkafa/the-meanings-of-shema/2012/09/05/>)

They state: "It would be reasonable to assume that a language that contains the verb '**to command**' must also contain the verb '**to obey**.' The one implies the other, just as the concept of a question implies the possibility of an answer. We would, however, be wrong. *There are 613 commandments in the Torah, but there is **no word in biblical Hebrew that means 'to obey.'***

When Hebrew was revived as a language of everyday speech in the nineteenth century, a word, '**letsayet**', had to be borrowed from **Aramaic**. Until then there was no Hebrew word for 'to obey.' "

So the word here in Verse 19&20 is the word "Shema" - which more fundamentally means "**to listen**".

So Samuel is saying: "Why didn't you listen to the LORD" and Saul is saying: "Well I did listen..." and then a few verses on in Verse 22 Samuel nails things down a bit more and says in effect that proper listening entails heeding as well.

One person puts it like this (Tim Keller):

"In other words, what the text is saying is simply that **you can hear and yet not really hear. You can know** something is wrong and yet **at another level not know it**. This is what **SELF-DECEPTION** is....

**The human heart has an almost unlimited capacity to hide the truth from itself if it's too painful.**

**It's possible to hear but not really hear.**

**It's possible to know something and yet not know it because you don't want to know it.**

That is our capacity for **SELF-DECEPTION**."

## Tell-tale signs of Self-Deception

What I want to do now is to see how **SELF-DECEPTION** operates - to look at **the tricks, the techniques it uses** because there are **always tell-tale signs** - let me give you **FIVE**:

- **FIRSTLY - technique #1** - what I'll call: "**Drown it out**" - this is the way that the SIN of SELF-DECEPTION seeks to **smother the truth that we do not want to hear.**

Verse 13 - where Samuel first catches up with Saul and immediately Saul blurts out, a bit too excitedly, a bit too guiltily: "**The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions.**"

It's a little akin to the probably untrue story of the preachers notes which one of the congregation picked up after the service to find one particular part marked up in the margin with the words "Shout louder - argument weak!!"

We can do this sort of thing - we drown out our guilt by getting a little bit excitable to cover it over, perhaps talking a little bit more quickly and animated than might be expected.

- **SECOND** - see the 2<sup>nd</sup> **technique** - which we could call "**Blame someone else**".

It's simply another distraction style tactic. If I can make you pursue the guilt somewhere else then you will no longer look to closely at me.

**Verse 14** "But **Samuel said**, 'What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?' **Saul answered**, '**The soldiers** brought them from the Amalekites; **they** spared the best of the sheep and cattle...'"

And naturally this is **the oldest trick in the book**, Adam and Eve did it - Adam said it was the woman you gave me that did it...then Eve follows suit and says it was the serpent.

- **Technique #3** - what I'll call "**Word redefinition**".

**Verse 20** "But I did obey the Lord," Saul said. 'I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I **completely** destroyed the Amalekites **and brought back Agag their king.**'"

What Saul is obviously maintaining here is that COMPLETELY means MAINLY.

Now you might have a tiny bit of sympathy here at this point given that there must have been many thousands of Amalekites and he is only defaulting on a single one.

But also bear in mind that after this event (once Samuel has indeed put King Agag to the sword) - that later on in the reign of King David, the Amalekites are still a problem. Meaning? Well that clearly Saul was not really as thorough as he indicates that he was.

- Let me give you a **4th technique** we use to **smother the truth** - it's called: "**Attaching God's name to it**".

**Verse 15** mentions it and **Verse 21** reinforces the same thing: "The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, **in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God...**".

Evidently things become magically alright because they are "for God" OR "connected to God" OR EVEN we might suggest that something has been "sent OR said by God"!

- One **final technique** (and I'm not saying that these are all of the things we do - by any measure) this is called "**Offset a wrong with a right**".

So, Saul was reasoning, that because it was all being done in a good cause, that means that it was no longer reprehensible, it was no somehow admissible - even admirable.

Q. I wonder if any of these methods are familiar to you, ones that you have been accustomed to using?  
Let me restate the proposition that we have been working out:

SIN IN THE HEART is such that we can live IN DENIAL, that we have a huge capacity for SELF-DECEPTION:

- **This almost unlimited capacity to hide the truth from itself when it's too painful.**
- **The facility we have to hear but not really hear.**
- **That ability that exists to know something and yet not know it because you don't want to know it.**

### Wrapping up

So by way of wrapping up I want to seek to resolve two questions that I think are left hanging at this point:

**QUESTION #1:** Q. What then was **the painful truth** for which Saul was living under SIN's cover of SELF-DECEPTION?

**QUESTION #2:** Q. What is the solution that Scripture supplies so that we no longer need to live under the dominion of DENIAL and SELF-DECEPTION?

Ok - question #1 then:

- Q. What was Saul's **painful truth**:  
WHEREBY **he heard but he didn't hear**,  
WHEREBY **he knew but did not know**?

**Verse 17** points at it when Samuel says to Saul: "Although **you were once small in your own eyes**, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel?..."

This was where Saul began, but evidently things had changed by degrees - and the passage shows us where things have ended up:

**Verse 12** " Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, 'Saul has gone to Carmel. **There he has set up a monument in his own honour** and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.'"

Saul had started as one who had a very humble and un-inflated view of himself AND THEN God had raised him up. NOW he has taken that as his cue and has fundamentally changed - NOW he is seeking to make something of himself.

He is redefining what it means to be great on his own terms. Greatness now is ensuring his own glory NOT God's glory. Saul has become the epicentre of his own life and God has been demoted to the level of an accessory!!

Ok - if that is the **painful truth**:

- Q. What is the **Scripture solution**  
OR are we destined to repeat many of these SMOTHERING techniques  
destined to succumb to our inbuilt capacity for SELF-DECEPTION?

So often the NT adds much needed light to bring Jesus to bear on our predicament in SIN: **Hebrews 10** reads:

**(Verse 5-7)** " Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.

Then I said, '**Here I am**—it is written about me in the scroll— **I have come to do your will, O God.**' "

This is a **quotation** of **Psalm 40 verses 6-8** in fact **MORE THAN THAT** it is a **fulfilment** of that OT Prophecy that a Messiah would come who would perfectly obey the will of God.

Jesus was self-consciously GREAT

His obedience to the perfect will of God His Father was self-consciously PERFECT

AND YET - he chose to make Himself of no reputation

Q. AND WHY? So that we might be lifted up, so that we might be made great in God sight, so that we might no longer go through all manner of SELF-DECEPTIVE loops trying to lift ourselves up by our own boot straps.

Q. What are we now?

Revelation tells us in **chapter 1** and **chapter 5** that we are "a kingdom of priests" - that one day we will sit on thrones sharing rule with Him who died for us, with Him who lost power that we might gain power.

This is the death blow to us MAKING SOMETHING OF OURSELVES with our own hands.

Scripture has left us this pivotal chapter as a warning to all of us who go on with our own schemes whilst living IN DENIAL and the deadly night of SIN's SELF-DECEPTION.

Let us praise the LORD Jesus that He became nothing that we might become A WONDERFUL and amazing ANOINTED KINGDOM of PRIEST - All glory be to God!! What redemption, what release!! Thankyou Lord!!

Let's pray - AMEN