

1 Samuel 3
March 13, 2022

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Do you think God still speaks to His children while we sleep? If anyone has had that experience, we would love to hear it! [Let people engage]

Q: If not, what are other ways and times that God speaks to us? [Let people engage]

Transition: This passage is one of the most familiar Bible stories told in this chapter. We can only guess Samuel's age at this time. He's obviously not a baby, and we get the impression that Samuel has been living with Eli for a good while. Samuel heard a voice that woke him up that he mistook as Eli's. Each time Samuel ran to Eli and was told to go back to bed. Finally, Eli realized that God was speaking to Samuel, and told Samuel that if the voice called again, he was to say, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening."

I can only imagine the different ways we would react to hearing an audible voice arouse us from out sleep, but let's be assured that the Lord is not trying to scare us. And when He wants to speak to us, we need to listen! Let's see how this story unfolds. Would someone volunteer to read this chapter out loud?

BOOK:

3 The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple (tabernacle) of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

⁶ Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

¹¹ And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. ¹² At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³ For I told him that I would judge his family

forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’”

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, ¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.”

Samuel answered, “Here I am.”

¹⁷ “What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

¹⁹ The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We can take comfort in the fact that God knows us by name. He speaks to each of us in a variety of ways and continues to speak to us. Would you recognize His voice? If you’re not sure, ask the Lord to make His voice clear to you so that it is unmistakable.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Sam 3)*. Victor Books.

A. His call from the Lord (vv. 1–10).

Tradition states that Samuel was about twelve years old at this time. He had grown up in the presence of the Lord and learned to serve in His tabernacle, yet he did not have a personal experience with the Lord (v. 7). How important it is for those who are raised in Christian homes to make their own personal decisions for Christ. Samuel had filled the lampstand with oil; it was close to daybreak and the lamp was about to go out. Samuel was sleeping and the Lord called him. His first thought was that blind Eli needed his help, so he ran to him. (See how quick this boy was to obey when called.) Verse 10 (NJKV) records Samuel's conversation: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." Later on, God would say to Samuel, "Speak servant, for your Lord hears!" For Samuel became a great man of prayer.

B. His message from the Lord (vv. 11–14).

The person who surrenders to the Lord and is willing to listen will always learn God's will. Eli had disobeyed the Lord and put his family first, so God could not speak directly to him. It was a message of judgment on Eli's house, and it must have weighed heavily upon Samuel's heart. Samuel loved Eli and had learned much from him, but Samuel knew he must be true to the Lord in spite of his personal desires.

C. His message to Eli (vv. 15–21).

This tremendous spiritual experience did not keep Samuel from doing his daily tasks the next morning. He did not "parade" himself before the people; no, he walked in great humility, carrying within his heart the burden of the Lord. Just as he had said "Here am I" to the Lord, so he replied "Here am I" when Eli called him. Those who honor the Lord will also honor their elders. Samuel would rather keep the sad message in his own heart, but Eli asked him to tell him all; so he did. While we do not admire Eli's failure with his own family, we do admire his resignation to God's will even though it meant death to him and his sons. This event was a turning point in history. Up to now, God had not spoken to the people in frequent or wide-spread ("open") visions (v. 1); but now everyone knew that Samuel was God's prophet and that the Lord was with him. The Lord was now able to appear once again because there was a servant whom He could trust. Certainly God would do more for His people even today if He could find devoted believers willing to be His servants.

Several practical lessons are found in these chapters:

1. Never underestimate the power of sin in a family. Eli's sons needed discipline, but he pampered them instead. This cost him his life, and eventually cost the family the priesthood.
2. Never underestimate the power of prayer in a home. Hannah and Elkanah were people of prayer, and God answered their prayers. We are blessed today because of the dedication of Hannah, for through her, God gave the world Samuel, the last of the judges and the first of the national prophets.
3. God speaks to children and young people, and adults should make it easy for them to hear God's voice and respond in faith. How wise Eli was to know that God was calling young

Samuel. The training of children in spiritual things is a great responsibility that we must not neglect.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). 1 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 435-436) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

For centuries God had rarely visited His people with revelation (v. 1). Now He had one to whom He could entrust His message. He called the young lad Samuel.

1. THE DIVINE VOICE (3:1–10)

3:1–10. Though Samuel had been dedicated to the Levitical ministry at Shiloh and had undergone training in the things of **the LORD**, he **had not yet been** addressed by the direct revelation of God (v. 7). At last the time came for **the LORD** to fulfill His promise to remove Eli's priesthood and establish another, so the divine silence was broken. While **Samuel** was reclining **in the** tabernacle (the meaning of the Heb. *hēkāl*, **temple**, v. 3) attending to the burning **lamp**, he heard the voice of **the LORD**, which he mistakenly took to be that of **Eli**. Finally **Eli** discerned that the lad was being addressed by **the LORD** so he advised him to submit himself to whatever **the LORD** would have him do.

2. THE DIVINE MESSAGE (3:11–14)

3:11–14. The message consisted of the announcement that the promised removal of Eli's family from the priesthood was about to occur. It was an announcement so shocking that it would cause **the ears** of the people to ring like hammer blows on a bell. The reason is explicitly stated—Eli's **sons** were wicked, and though **he knew** it **he failed to restrain them**. Though the message was given right then to Eli through Samuel, Eli himself lived for a short time thereafter, and indeed the priesthood continued in his family for three more generations. This is clear from 14:3—Ahijah served as priest to King Saul. He is identified as the great-grandson of Eli through Phinehas and Ahitub. The prophecy to Samuel came to pass fully when Abiathar, son of Ahijah (the same as Ahimelech of 22:9–12), was apparently replaced by King David with Zadok after Abiathar sided with Adonijah against Solomon (1 Kings 1:7–8; 2:27, 35). Thus the time between prophecy and fulfillment was more than 130 years. Yet it did come to pass and the priesthood switched to Zadok, a descendant of Aaron's son Eleazar, and it remained with his offspring throughout Israel's subsequent history.

3. SAMUEL'S VINDICATION (3:15–21)

3:15–21. This first act of **Samuel** as a prophet was recognized by **Eli** as having come from **God**. This was only the beginning of a public ministry as prophet, which would last through a lifetime and be recognized by all the people as a divine calling. The **word of the LORD** had been rare in those days (v. 1). Now, however, it would be common, for God had found a man to whom He could entrust it. The sign that **Samuel** was a spokesman for God was the fact that God **let none of his words fall to the ground** (v. 19), that is, everything he prophesied came to pass. **All Israel from Dan to Beersheba** (the northernmost and southernmost towns in Israel—a distance of about 150 miles) **recognized that Samuel was ... a prophet of the LORD**. There was no

clearer indication that a man was called to be a prophet than the fact that his predictive word invariably was fulfilled (Deut. 18:21–22). When it was understood that Samuel’s credentials as a prophet were established, a new era was under way. Revelation through priest and ephod was passing away, and revelation through prophets was beginning.

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). 1 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (pp. 165–166). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The passage.—The shift in religious leadership anticipated in the first two chapters, now comes into full view. God’s actions will breathe a new vitality into the religious establishment at Shiloh which had become decadent through the years (vv. 1, 21).

While sleeping in the temple as an attendant at the ark of the Lord, Samuel received a vision from God. The form of the story highlights the tragic novelty of the divine visitation. Samuel’s youth would explain his interpretation of the nocturnal voice, but the entire passage implies that Eli should have been more experienced in such matters. Finally, after the third summons, Eli instructs Samuel to await God’s revelation.

The burden of Samuel’s vision lay in the proclamation of God’s imminent judgment on the house of Eli. Even Eli himself was to be punished with his sons because he knew of their deeds and did not restrain them (v. 13). Samuel was reluctant to share the dread news with his aging tutor, but Eli demanded forthright answers from his young pupil. Eli courageously learned of his fate and submitted himself unto the Lord.

Even before God’s judgment on Eli’s house was carried out, Samuel’s renown as a prophet of the Lord spread. Shiloh was no longer important solely as a ceremonial site. Now divine power was being evidenced in the personality of the new young leader who lived there.

Richards, L.O. (1987). The Teacher’s Commentary (p.202). Victor Books

Samuel’s call (1 Sam. 3:1–21). One of the most familiar of all children’s stories is told in this chapter. Samuel heard a voice that he mistook as Eli’s. Each time he ran to the old priest, he was told to go back to bed. Finally Eli realized that God was speaking to Samuel, and told Samuel that if the voice called again, he was to say, “Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.”

Usually children are not told Samuel’s message. For that message is a dark one. God told Samuel that the judgment of which He had warned Eli was coming soon. This was in fact a prediction of the future: a prediction which when announced by Samuel and fulfilled, marked him as a prophet, one who would speak God’s message to His people. The passage observes that God continued to reveal Himself to Samuel, and that as Samuel grew up He “let none of his words fall to the ground” (v. 19). This phrase simply means that everything that Samuel foretold came true. As a result, Samuel was recognized as a prophet of God.

[1 Samuel 3: Questions for Bible study discussion | The Living Word Library](#)

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 3:1-21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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