

The Lord Calls Samuel to the Office and Ministry of Prophet

1 Samuel 3

1 Samuel 3 - *"Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation. ² And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, ³ and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle^[a] of the LORD where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down, ⁴ that the LORD called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!" ⁵ So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call; lie down again." And he went and lay down.*

⁶ Then the LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." He answered, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ (Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor was the word of the LORD yet revealed to him.)

⁸ And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears."

¹¹ Then the LORD said to Samuel: "Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. ¹² In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. ¹⁴ And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." ¹⁵ So Samuel lay down until morning,^[b] and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision. ¹⁶ Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son!" He answered, "Here I am."

¹⁷ And he said, "What is the word that the LORD spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you." ¹⁸ Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him." ¹⁹ So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD."

Background Notes

Samuel is often called the last Judge and first Prophet in Israel, but there were prophets in Israel before Samuel. God said that Abraham was a prophet in Genesis 20:7 - *"Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live..."*

The basic difference between a prophet and a priest is that a prophet, by definition, speaks to the people for God. In contrast, the priest speaks to God for the people. Before Samuel, there were many men who spoke to the people for God, but the “office of prophet” had not yet been established in Israel. God called Samuel to the prophetic office, and he began the great tradition of the prophets in Israel.

Samuel was a transition between the Judges and the Prophets in Israel. He was a bridge between the times of the judges and the times of the prophets. Two Scriptures in the book of Acts are significant in this connection. In Acts 13:20, when Paul was relating the history of Israel to the Jews at Antioch at Pisidia, he said “*After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.*” And in Acts 3:24, when Peter spoke to the crowds in the Temple area, after the healing of the lame man, he said, “*Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days.*” So, Samuel began the prophetic tradition in Israel

In 1 Samuel 3, the Lord Himself officially called Samuel to be a prophet. The chapter begins by saying that the Word of the Lord was rare in those days. There was no widespread revelation. During the time of the Judges the moral and spiritual conditions were so bad that people were not open or willing to listen to the Lord and His Word. Hannah, Ruth, and other believers of the “godly remnant” in Israel were very few in number in those days.

But in His grace, God raised up Samuel to begin the time of the prophets. By the end of chapter 3 we read the good news about a turn in the right direction in Israel, and the end of the dark days of judges. Verse 19-21: “*So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the LORD.*”²¹ *Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.*” The fact that God called Samuel when he was a child is significant, and it certainly has teaching for us.

Doctrinal Points

1. God can commune with children.

Samuel was probably about 12 years of age when God called him, because verse 15 indicates that he was old enough to be in charge of opening the doors of the house of the Lord. But he was still a young boy, because verse 7 says that Samuel didn’t yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him. So, Samuel had not yet come to know the Lord in a personal way. He loved the Lord, and he obeyed the Lord, and he served the Lord -- but he didn’t yet “know” the Lord through personal communion and communication. But that was about to change. The Lord was about to speak to Samuel and communicate His Word to him.

Late one night (or early one morning), before the oil lamps of the Tabernacle had burned out, Samuel heard the voice of the Lord, but he didn’t recognize that it was the **Lord** who was calling his name! “Samuel! Samuel” – the double use of the name indicated that this was an important matter. Samuel thought that Eli was calling him, and he went to the high

priest. But Eli said, “No, I didn’t call you, Samuel. Go back to bed.” After this scenario was repeated three times, Eli perceived that it must be God calling who was calling Samuel. He counseled Samuel to say, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” Sure enough, the Lord called again, and this time Samuel answered. Then the Lord spoke with Samuel and revealed His plans to remove Eli as the high priest.

Was Samuel old enough to handle such news? Yes, he was, because God thought so! God can commune with children, even about unpleasant topics. Some Christians are reluctant to speak to children about hell, for example, but children can understand heaven and hell. In fact, God can use the doctrine of hell to bring children to Himself for salvation.

I’m constantly amazed at some of the insights that children have into the Bible. It shows that they are open to the Word of God and listening to God speak. Just the other day, Jonathan, our five-year-old grandson, asked if there was something special about the number “seven” in the Bible, and we were able to explain to him some the ways in which the number seven is special in the Bible! Children are open to the Word of God, and they are sensitive to the Holy Spirit. God can commune with children.

2. God can work through children.

Some people would say that the job God gave Samuel to do was not an appropriate job for a child. Why did God pick young Samuel to tell Eli of the judgment that was coming? Well, why not? God can work through children!

Furthermore, it certainly appears that young Samuel was aware of the sinful activities of Hophni and Phinehas. After all, their sin was going on right there in the Tabernacle complex, yet Eli had done nothing about it.

In addition, Samuel was probably aware of the message of the man of God who had come to warn Eli and to pronounce God’s judgment on his priesthood because of his family failures (1 Samuel 2). Samuel’s young soul must have been grieved that still Eli did nothing to correct the situation. Hophni and Phinehas were not removed from their office as priests, and they continued to practice their wickedness in public. So, God worked through Samuel to bring this final message of judgment to Eli.

This was not an easy job for Samuel. Verse 15 says that Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision, or message. However, under Eli’s authority, Samuel told Eli everything, and Eli humbly submitted to the message of God’s judgment given through Samuel. Sadly, Eli still did nothing to stop the flagrant sin and immorality of his sons.

As God worked through young Samuel in the Old Testament days of the Judges, so God can work through children today. In many homes, God is working through the children to bring the whole family closer to the Lord. In many classrooms God is working through godly children to refute evolution and secular philosophy. Many illustrations could be given here, and I’m sure that you have many examples that you could share with me.

Remember the biblical story of Naaman the leper in 2 Kings 5? *“Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper. And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman’s wife. Then she said to her mistress, “If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy.” And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, “Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel.”* God used a little Israeli girl to bring Naaman, the great Syrian general, into contact with the prophet Elisha so the God of Israel could heal his leprosy. God can work through children.

Practical Application

Have you ever prayed, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening”?

Eli gave Samuel good advice when he told Samuel to say, *“Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”* Samuel was not to say “Give me my heart’s desire, Lord” or “Help me with my problems, Lord.” Those are legitimate prayer requests, but at this time Samuel was to say, *“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”*

The Hebrew word used for *listening* means “to hear with a view to obeying.” Have you ever asked the Lord to “speak, for your servant is listening”? Too often we give thanks and praise to the Lord, and we ask Him to meet our needs and help us with our problems, and this is fine -- but are we willing to listen and obey Him, even when His message is difficult and unpleasant? This is a challenging question for all of us! Have you ever prayed, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!”?