

# 1 Samuel 03 - God Calls Samuel; God Restates Judgment on Eli's Household; Samuel's Ministry Begins

## I. Transition from the house of Eli to Samuel (1:1—4:1a)

(3) Samuel eclipsed Eli as the divine spokesman (3:1—4:1a)

(A) God's threefold call to Samuel rather than Eli (3:1-9)

(B) God reveals His plans concerning Eli's destruction to Samuel (3:10-14)

(C) Samuel discloses God's plans to Eli (3:15-18)

(D) Samuel confirmed as God's prophet (3:19—4:1a)

## 1 Samuel 3

(3) Samuel eclipsed Eli as the divine spokesman (3:1—4:1a)

(A) God's threefold call to Samuel rather than Eli (3:1-9)

**1** Now the **boy** Samuel was attending to the service of the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days; visions were infrequent.

**1** Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.

**1** Meanwhile the boy Samuel was serving the LORD before Eli. A word from the LORD was rare in those days, and visions were infrequent.

**1** And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.

- "...boy" - *naar*, denotes a young teenager (Cf. 17:33)

— Tradition (and Josephus [5:10:4]) states that Samuel was about 12 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 (v7).

— How important it is for those who are raised in Christian homes to make their own personal decisions for Christ

- The late Judges period was a time when special revelations from God were rare (scarce); God was not revealing Himself at this particular time

— God is beginning to move from the use of a judge and priest to the use of a prophet; the prophet became the spokesman to and for the king.

— These normally came to prophets in visions or dreams (Cf. Num 12:6; 1 Sam 28:6)

- Samuel could see clearly, both physically and spiritually; this contrasts with Eli, who could not see well either way (Cf. v2; Cf. v5-6; 4:15)
- When God's people embrace sinful ways, they quit seeking God's wisdom
- God withdrew His revelation because of their idolatry and broken promises (Joshua 24:14-18); the lack of God's Word signaled God's judgment (Amos 8:11)

2 But it happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to be poor *and* he could not see *well*),

2 It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim *and* he could not see *well*),

2 At that time Eli, whose vision was growing dim, was lying down in his bedroom.

2 And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;

3 and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God *was*,

3 and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God *was*,

3 The lamp of God had not yet been extinguished, and Samuel was lying down in the tent of the LORD where the Ark of God was.

3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep;

- Samuel was lying down before the lamp and the Ark, which signify God's presence and His mercy toward those He loves (Ex 25:10-22,31-40)

4 that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am."

4 that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am."

4 The LORD called out to Samuel, who answered, "Here I am."

4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.

5 Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, go back *and* lie down." So he went and lay down.

5 Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, lie down again." So he went and lay down.

5 He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am! You called me."

"I didn't call you," Eli said. "Go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

5 And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.

- Samuel's first thought was that the voice was blind Eli needing his help, so he ran to him (see how quick this boy obeyed when called)

6 And the LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son, go back *and* lie down."

6 The LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again."

6 Then the LORD again called out, "Samuel!" So Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am! You called me." He said, "I didn't call you, my son. Go back and lie down."

**6** And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again.

7 Now Samuel **did not yet know the LORD**, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him.

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him.

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

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.

- "...did not yet know the LORD" - he had been ministering before the Lord, but did not yet really know Him

— This doesn't imply that Samuel was an unbeliever, as that would contradict the text up to this point. It means that Samuel did not know the Lord's audible voice, as God had not previously communicated with him directly.

— He had both parents and a mentor who loved God, and spent his days in religious activities defined by God's law, but he had never spoken to God directly

— He also didn't know the Lord at that time as closely as he was about to get to know Him  
- Knowledge of God is nurtured in families and in communities, especially churches, but a genuine relationship with God never comes through association

8 So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy.

8 So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy.

8 Then the LORD called out to Samuel again a third time, and he got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am! You called me." Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the boy,

8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.

9 And Eli said to Samuel, "Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

9 And Eli said to Samuel, "Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

9 so Eli told Samuel, "Go lie down, and then if he calls you, answer, 'Speak, LORD, because your servant is listening.'" Then Samuel went and lay down.

9 Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

(B) God reveals His plans concerning Eli's destruction to Samuel (3:10-14)

10 Then the LORD came and **stood**, and called as at *the* other times: "**Samuel! Samuel!**" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."

10 Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."

10 Later, the LORD came and stood there, calling out, "Samuel! Samuel!" as he had before. Samuel said, "Speak, because your servant is listening."

10 And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

- "...stood" - the Lord called, but also stood by him, indicating that Samuel could see Him (a Theophany)

- "...Samuel! Samuel!" - the repetition of Samuel's name gave God's words a sense of urgency

- The person who surrenders to the Lord and is willing to listen will always learn God's will

- God finishes what He starts...has He started a good work in you? If so, have faith and comfort that He'll finish it.

11 Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am going to do a thing in Israel, *and* both ears of everyone who hears *about* it will ring.

11 The LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.

11 "Look," the LORD told Samuel. "I'm about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears it tingle.

11 And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.

12 On that day I will carry out against Eli everything that I have spoken in regard to his house, from beginning to end.

12 In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.

12 I'll fulfill every promise that I've spoken concerning Eli's family, from beginning to end.

12 In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.

- God's judgment on Eli's household (Cf. 2:27-36)

13 For I have told him that I am going to judge his house forever for the wrongdoing that he knew, because his sons were bringing a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them.

13 For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them.

13 I've told him that I'm about to judge his family forever because of the iniquity that he knew about. His sons committed blasphemy and he did not rebuke them.

13 For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

- Eli's sin was a sin of omission...he didn't commit adultery or violence, but he didn't restrain/discipline his sons who did. Tragically, God's almighty justice and power had not motivated Eli to discipline his sons.

14 Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the wrongdoing of Eli's house shall never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering."

14 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."

14 Therefore I've sworn concerning Eli's family that the iniquity of his family is not to be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

14 And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

- 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

- Under the Mosaic Law the penalty for showing contempt for the priesthood, for disobeying parents, and for blasphemy, was death (Deut 17:12; 21:18-21; Lev 24:11-16,23)

— This was what Hophni ("Tadpole") and Phinehas ("Black One") would experience (Cf. 4:11)

— The cutting off of Eli's line happened about 130 years later (Cf. 1 Kings 2:27,35)

### **His Message to Eli**

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. 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.

This event was a turning point in history. Up to now, God had not spoken to the people in frequent or widespread ("open") visions (v1); 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.

(C) Samuel discloses God's plans to Eli (3:15-18)

**15** So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he **opened the doors** of the house of the LORD. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.

**15** So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.

**15** Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD, but he was afraid to report the vision to Eli.

**15** And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.

- "...opened the doors" - this marks the beginning of Samuel's ministry

**16** Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am."

**16** Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am."

16 Then Eli called Samuel: "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am."

16 Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.

17 He said, "What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. **May God do the same to you, and more so**, if you hide a *single* word from me of all the words that He spoke to you!"

17 He said, "What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you."

17 Eli said, "What did the LORD say to you? Please don't conceal anything from me. May God do this to you and even more if you conceal from me one word of all that he spoke to you."

**17** And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.

- Eli realized that God's words to Samuel were significant, so he insisted that Samuel tell him everything the Lord said

- "...May God do the same to you, and more so" - an oath by which the speaker places a curse on someone if they fail to do what is specified (Cf. 14:44; 20:13; 25:22)

18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "He is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him."

18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him."

18 So Samuel told him everything—he did not conceal anything from him. Eli said, "He is the LORD. May he do what seems good to him."

18 And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.

- This was the second time Eli heard a prophecy of his family's future doom, so he knew the prediction would come to pass

(D) Samuel confirmed as God's prophet (3:19—4:1a)

**19** Now Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and He **let none of his words fail**.

**19** Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail.

**19** As Samuel grew, the LORD was with him and did not let any of Samuel's predictions fail.

**19** And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

- "...let none of his words fail" - his words were heard and cherished by those who heard
- It is taken from archery (Cf. Joshua 21:45; 23:14; 1 Kings 8:56). The arrow that falls to the ground fails to reach its target.
- In contrast, all of Samuel's words "hit their mark." They were effective because God found Samuel to be a reliable "bow" that delivered His words.

20 And all Israel **from Dan even to Beersheba** knew that Samuel was confirmed as a **prophet** of the LORD.

20 All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD.

20 All Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as the LORD's prophet.

20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

- "...from Dan even to Beersheba" - a proverbial phrase during the united monarchy to describe all the Land of Israel (Cf. Judges 20:1; 2 Sam 3:10; 17:11; 24:2,15; 1 Kings 4:25)
- Dan was on the north end of the Land, 150 miles north of Beersheba in the south
- "...prophet" - *nabbí*, emphasizes the proclamation aspect of the individual's ministry. It describes Samuel in v20 and 2 Chr 35:18.

— The Hebrew word *róeh*, "seer" describes the same office and refers to Samuel in 1 Sam 9:11,18-19; 1 Chr 9:22; 26:28; 29:29). It emphasizes the ability to perceive messages from the Lord.

21 And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

21 And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

21 The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, because he revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by means of messages from the LORD.

21 And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

- The "word" of the Lord is what Samuel communicated to the people as His prophet. He did this so consistently that Samuel's words amounted to the Lord's words (4:1a; Cf. Jer 1:2,4,11,13; Hosea 1:1; Micah 1:1).

Moses called Abraham (Gen 20:7), Aaron (Ex 7:1), and himself (Deut 34:10) prophets. Samuel became a prophet in a new sense. He was the first of those "servants of the Lord" who became primarily, not secondarily, as the former prophets had become, God's

mouthpieces. Samuel also established a company or school of prophets that he trained to serve God in this capacity. He did not, of course, train these men to get revelations from God. God gave new revelations sovereignly. He probably did, however, train his students in the general functions of the prophets that included studying God's Word, communicating it effectively, and leading God's people in worship. Schools of the prophets continued through the tenth century BC (Cf. 2 Kings 2:3). After that time we have no record of their existence. Individual prophets ministered throughout the history of Israel, though some generations saw none, others some, and others more prophets. The great writing prophets who have given us the prophetic books of the OT began their ministry in the ninth century. Moses and the other writers of the historical books of the OT were also prophets. There were no prophets who gave new revelation from God in Israel between Malachi and our Lord's days, a period of about 400 years.

### **Lessons**

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. Eli was wise to know that God was calling young Samuel. The training of children in spiritual things is a great responsibility that we must not neglect.
4. God rewards faithful obedience to His Word with further ministry opportunities (Cf. 1 Tim 1:12). Samuel became the source of God's revelations to Israel. He continued to receive revelations from God and to represent God on earth because he remained faithful. He became the most powerful man in Israel—even anointing the nation's first two kings. He was an excellent leader of the Israelites (Jer 15:1). He functioned as a judge, a priest, and a prophet, yet he glorified the kings he appointed, who were anointed by the Lord, above himself.
5. God responds to the faith of people, even insignificant people. A barren and despised woman became the mother of Israel's most powerful man because she trusted and obeyed God. This was a complete reversal of what one would naturally expect.
6. God blesses with fertility those who commit to His revealed will contained in His Law, but He cuts off those who do not.