

1 Samuel Chapter 3

1 Samuel 3:1 "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."

"The child Samuel": Samuel was no longer a child (2:21, 26). While Jewish historian Josephus suggested he was 12 years of age, he was probably a teenager at this time. The same Hebrew term translated here "boy" was used of David when he slew Goliath (17:33).

Samuel lived at a time when prophets rarely spoke to Israel. The Israelites' hearts were hard, and the Lord knew they would not listen.

"Word of the Lord was precious": The time of the judges was a period of extremely limited prophetic activity. The few visions that God did give were not widely known.

"Visions": A divine revelation mediated through an auditory or visual encounter.

The severity of Israel's apostasy (Judges 21:25), caused a dearth of God's revelatory work. The condition was perpetuating and self-defeating (Prov. 29:18). By God's grace, the prophetic institution would receive renewed impetus and standardization in the person and work of "Samuel" (3:21; 19:20).

The idea of the "Word of the LORD being precious" means that there was very little of the Word of God spoken to men in those days. This made the thing that happens to Samuel in this lesson, even more special. "Vision", in this particular verse above, means seeing something in the spirit that those around you do not see. This type of vision had not happened in a long time. We will see both of these things happen to Samuel here. From birth, he had been dedicated to God.

1 Samuel 3:2 "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;"

The passage should be rendered thus: "And it came to pass at that time that Eli was sleeping in his place; and his eyes had begun to grow dim; he could not see. And the lamp of God was not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the Lord where the Ark of God was; and the Lord called Samuel, etc."

Eli's old age and dimness of sight is probably mentioned as the reason why Samuel thought Eli had called him. Being a blind and feeble old man, he was likely to do so if he wanted anything, either for himself, or for the service of the temple.

We do not know the exact age of Samuel or of Eli here. We do know that the sight of Eli had deteriorated. His physical and his spiritual sight had deteriorated. We know the LORD did not like him overlooking the sins of his sons. The fact that the eyes had gradually gotten dim, indicate that his blindness is from his age.

1 Samuel 3:3 "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];"

“The lamp of God went out in the temple”: The golden lampstand, located in the Holy Place of the tabernacle, was filled with olive oil and lit at twilight (Exodus 30:8). The lamp was kept burning from evening until morning (Exodus 27:20-21). Just before dawn, while the golden lampstand was still burning, Samuel was called to his prophetic ministry.

“The Ark”: The “Ark” at Shiloh apparently was housed in some type of permanent structure (verse 15). The “lamp” was situated outside of the veil in the Holy Place and burned from evening until morning (Lev. 24:3; see Exodus 25:10-22).

We know that the lamp of God was never to go out in the tabernacle where the Ark was. One of the duties of the priest was to fill the lamp with oil twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. This was to be a perpetual light. Samuel lay down to sleep, because it was night.

1 Samuel 3:4 "That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here [am] I."

By a voice which came forth from the most holy place, from between the cherubim, the seat of the divine Majesty:

"And he answered, here am I": Which was not intended to declare the place where he was, but to express his readiness and cheerfulness to do anything that was required of him.

We can safely assume that Samuel had never heard the voice of God at this time. He answered "Here am I", when he heard his name, thinking it was Eli calling him. He had served Eli all of his life. He is probably, still under 12 years old at this point or perhaps was just 12. We know he is still a youth.

1 Samuel 3:5 "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."

He got out of his bed as fast as he could, and put on his clothes, and ran with all haste to the apartment where Eli lay, supposing he wanted some immediate assistance, which he was there ready to give him to the utmost of his ability; and he made the more haste, as knowing his age and infirmities, and being desirous, out of affection to him, to help him as soon as possible.

"For thou calledst me": He took it to be the voice of Eli, partly because there was no other man in the tabernacle, it being in the middle of the night, or early in the morning, before the doors were opened, or any of the priests were come in to minister, and partly because the voice might be very much like Eli's, and which was done to direct him to him.

"And he said, I called not, lie down again": He signified he wanted nothing, and so had no occasion to call him, nor had he, but bid him go to bed again, and sleep quietly.

"And he went and lay down": And very probably fell asleep again.

The commitment that had been made on Samuel's life had been made by Samuel's mother. Perhaps, it is time for Samuel to decide for himself. Eli had no idea at first, that this was the LORD calling Samuel. We know the condition of Eli's sons and the LORD was angry with Eli, as well. They had not heard the voice of God, and now, Samuel hears God but thinks it is Eli calling.

1 Samuel 3:6 "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."

Called him a second time by his name, with a like audible voice as before.

"And Samuel arose, and went to Eli": Did not run as before, being perhaps more thoughtful of this affair that he should be called a second time, and careful not to awake Eli, should he be mistaken again, and find him asleep.

"And said, here am I, for thou didst call me": Perceiving that he was awake, he desired to know what he wanted, and he was ready to help him; for he was now certain of it that he did call him:

"And he answered, I called not, my son, lie down again": By this appellation, my son, he expresses his affection to him, and signifies he took it kindly that he should show such readiness to do anything for him and would not have him be discouraged and abashed, because he was mistaken, but return to his bed and rest again.

This reminds me of the way God calls all of us to be his sons. He calls and we do not recognize His voice at first. Sometimes He calls several times, before we even realize it is God calling. Again, this second time, Samuel hears the voice and mistakes it for Eli's voice. He runs to serve Eli, but Eli had not called him. Notice Eli calls him son here as he had been as a son to Eli.

1 Samuel 3:7 "Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him."

"Samuel did not yet know the Lord": Samuel had not yet encountered the Lord in a personal way, nor had he received God's Word by divine revelation (see 2:12).

Even though he had learned about Him his whole life, knowing about God is not the same as a personal relationship with Him.

Babies are many times dedicated to the LORD by their parents. This does not save the person. All a dedication does, is a promise by the parents to raise the child in the ways of God. When a person comes to the age, that they are responsible enough to make their own decisions, they must come to God themselves. We call it the age of accountability.

We know that Samuel had been raised right, but now, he must make his own decision to follow God. He did know of God, because he had worked in the sanctuary. He did not know the LORD personally, however. He did not know the Word of God either. Notice, the word "revealed", in

the verse above. We can read the Word of God, and still not know what it means, until it is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

1 Samuel 3:8 "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."

The whole story of the eventful night is told so naturally, the supernatural wonderfully interwoven with the common life of the sanctuary, that we forget, as we read, the strangeness of the events recorded. The sleeping child is awakened by a voice uttering his name. He naturally supposes it is his half-blind old master summoning him. The same thing occurs a second and a third time. Then it flashed upon Eli the boy had had no dream.

We can well fancy the old man, when Samuel again came in, asking, "Where did the voice you thought was mine come from?" and the boy would reply, "From your chamber, master." And the old high priest would remember that in the same direction, only at the extremity of the sanctuary, behind the veil, was the Ark and the seat of God. Was, then, the glory of the Lord shining there? And did the voice as in old days proceed from that sacred golden throne? So he told his pupil; go to his chamber again, and if the voice spoke to him again, to answer, not Eli, but the invisible King "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

"Eli perceived": Eli was slow to recognize that God was calling Samuel. This indicates that Eli's spiritual perception was not what it should have been as the priest and judge of Israel (see also 1:12-16).

We see from this that the LORD continued to call, until somehow, Samuel could know this was the LORD calling. Eli finally realizes that this is the LORD calling Samuel. We must remember that Eli was the only spiritual leader that Samuel had had.

We must never discount the fact that God might be speaking to someone. When they tell us something has happened to them, we who teach must listen carefully to what they are saying. Then we may give our opinion. Now we see that Eli realizes this is the LORD. Eli still understood about visions and Words from God. The man of God had spoken to Eli you remember.

1 Samuel 3:9 "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."

Once more:

"And it shall be, if he call thee": The voice, or the Lord by it.

"That thou shalt say, speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth": His meaning is, that he should not rise and come to him, as he had done, but continue on his bed, on hearing the voice again, but desire the Lord to speak to him what he had to say, to which he was ready to attend.

"So Samuel went and lay down in his place": Which, is commonly understood, was in the court of the Levites (see 1 Sam. 3:3).

Now, Eli explains to Samuel how to answer this voice. We see from this, that Samuel was obedient to Eli. He tells Samuel exactly what to say when the voice calls him.

1 Samuel 3:10 "And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth."

God's call to Samuel came with greater intensity each time. This last time He called his name twice, a signal that this was a crucial moment. Other people whom God called by repeating their names include Abraham (Gen. 22:11), Jacob (Gen 46:2), and Moses (Exodus 3:4).

"Thy servant heareth": "To hear with interest," or "to hear so as to obey."

This means that while Samuel was fully awake, the presence of the LORD came into the room where Samuel was and spoke to him. The other times, there had just been a voice. This time the presence is in the room with Samuel. Samuel does not call the presence by name, because he is not acquainted with Him.

1 Samuel 3:11 "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."

"Ears ... shall tingle": A message of impending destruction, here of Eli's house (see 2 Kings 21:12; Jer. 19:3).

This happening will be of such impact, that those who hear of it will have their ears tingle from the hearing.

1 Samuel 3:12 "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."

"All things which I have spoken" (see 2:27-36). The repetition of the oracle against Eli to Samuel confirmed the word spoken by the man of God.

This is speaking of the day that God kills Eli's two sons, and Eli dies. The man of God had brought news before, that God was displeased with Eli for the way he handled the sins of his sons. Probably Eli had not shared that with Samuel. Now, the LORD is telling Samuel, before it happens.

1 Samuel 3:13 "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."

"His sons made themselves vile": LXX reads "his sons blasphemed God." Cursing God was an offense worthy of death (see Lev. 24:11-16, 23).

“He restrained them not”: Eli was implicated in the sins of his sons because he did not intervene with judgment. If his sons were blaspheming God, they should have been stoned (see Lev. 24:15-16).

Samuel needs to know why the LORD will destroy Eli and his sons. The LORD also makes Samuel aware that Eli has already been told of this. The main thing is that he tells Samuel of what Eli's sin is, so that Samuel will never make the same mistake.

1 Samuel 3:14 "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."

“Not be purged with sacrifice ... for ever”: Eli’s family was apparently guilty of presumptuous sin. For such defiant sin, there was no atonement and the death penalty could be immediately applied (see Num. 15:30-31).

The sacrifice and offering are speaking of the bloody and the bloodless offering. Whatever they do to try to repent, God will not accept because they had time to repent and did not.

1 Samuel 3:15 "And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to show Eli the vision."

This is another notice which indicates that the sanctuary of Shiloh was enclosed in a house or temple. We have no record of the building of the first house of the Lord, but from the references contained in the record of Samuel’s childhood it is clear that the sacred Tabernacle had been for some time enclosed by, and perhaps covered in with permanent buildings.

"And Samuel feared to show Eli the vision": Here was Samuel’s first experience of the prophet’s cross: the having unwelcome truth to divulge to those he loved, honored, and feared. Jeremiah felt this cross to be an exceedingly heavy one (Jer.15:10; 17:15-18; 20:7-18).

This does not say that Samuel slept. It is almost certain that he did not sleep after such an encounter with the LORD. He did stay lying down until time to open the sanctuary, however. Perhaps, this was so he would not disturb Eli. Samuel was reluctant to tell the vision to Eli, because it condemned Eli and his sons.

1 Samuel 3:16 "Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here [am] I."

Perceiving he was risen by the opening of the doors of the tabernacle, which he might hear; and observing he did not come to him as usual, to know whether he wanted anything, and being impatient to hear what was said to him of the Lord.

"And he said, Samuel, my son": Called him by his name, and in a very tender and affectionate manner, the more to engage him to hasten to him, and thereby also putting him in mind of his respectful duty to obey him.

"And he answered, here am I": Ready to attend and perform any service required of him.

In all of this, we must take notice of the obedient spirit that Samuel had.

1 Samuel 3:17 "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."

"God do so to thee, and more also": This is an oath of imprecation. Eli called down God's judgment on Samuel if he refused to tell everything he knew.

Eli's charge to Samuel is phrased in the familiar oath formula of the ancient Near East.

From the statement Eli made here, we can see that he knew this was to be news of the same thing the man of God had said to him. He knows it is not good news or Samuel would have been anxious to tell him. Samuel knows he must tell him.

Verses 18-19: The Lord's message to Samuel is the same one Eli received from the man of God (in 2:26-36). The similarity of the two messages confirms the authenticity of Samuel's. God "let none of his words fall to the ground" means that all of Samuel's prophecies, delivered to him by God, came true, further confirmation of his prophetic office.

1 Samuel 3:18 "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."

"Let him do what seemeth him good": Eli resigned himself to divine sovereignty, without reluctance.

Samuel obeyed Eli, and told everything the LORD had told him. Eli already knew in his heart what he had said. He humbly accepts the punishment of the LORD upon himself and upon his sons.

1 Samuel 3:19 "And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground."

"The Lord was with him": The Lord's presence was with Samuel, as it would be later with David (16:18; 18:12). The Lord's presence validated His choice of a man for His service.

"Let none of his words fall": Everything Samuel said with divine authorization came true. This fulfillment of Samuel's word proved that he was a true prophet of God (see Deut. 18:21-22).

In this one sentence, Samuel grew from a youth to a man. He was not an idle talker. All of his words were for a good purpose. He only spoke, when the words were of use to the LORD.

1 Samuel 3:20 "And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel [was] established [to be] a prophet of the LORD."

“From Dan even to Beer-sheba”: serves as a familiar geographic description for all Israel from its northern to its southern limits.

“Dan even to Beer-sheba”: The traditional limits of the land of Israel from the north to the south.

“Prophet of the Lord”: Samuel’s status as a spokesman of God’s message was acknowledged by all throughout Israel.

Samuel was not only a prophet of God, but the last of the judges, as well. He was such a Godly man, that all knew he was called of God. We know that Eli, probably told everyone about why Samuel was living with him, instead of with his mother and father. He perhaps, even told of the call of the LORD to Samuel. He probably had turned many of his duties over to Samuel.

1 Samuel 3:21 "And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD."

In the tabernacle there; he had appeared before to Samuel, when he called him, and declared to him what he designed and resolved to do to Eli and his family, and now appeared again to him in the same place before the battle of the Israelites with the Philistines, of which there is an account in the following chapter. Such appearances had not been usual in Shiloh for a long time, but were now renewed and repeated.

"For the Lord revealed himself to Samuel by the Word of the Lord": By Christ, the Word of the Lord, who appeared to him, it is probable, in a human form, as he was wont to do to the patriarchs and prophets. And by whom the Lord revealed his mind and will unto them, being the Angel of his presence, and the messenger of his covenant. Or by giving him a word of command to be delivered by him to the children of Israel, and which is expressed and delivered, in the next chapter.

The Ark was at Shiloh in the tabernacle. The Ark symbolized the presence of the LORD. This had not been just in a symbolic form that Samuel had heard the voice of the LORD. It was, in fact, the presence of the LORD that spoke to Samuel. The Word of God is Jesus Christ. We know this revelation of Himself in His Word, is what this is speaking of. Samuel's spiritual eyes were opened, and he understood the Scriptures.

1 Samuel Chapter 3 Questions

1. What was meant by the "Word of the Lord being precious" in those days?
2. What is "vision", in verse 1, speaking of?
3. Who do both of these things happen to in this lesson?

4. What was the condition of Eli in those days?
5. What did the LORD have against Eli?
6. Eli's blindness was from _____.
7. The lamp of God was to _____ go out.
8. What was one of the duties of the priest?
9. How often was the lamp to be filled with oil?
10. Who called Samuel, while he was lying down to rest?
11. Who did he think it was?
12. How did Samuel answer?
13. How old does the author think Samuel is at the time of verse 4 and 5?
14. What did Eli tell him to do?
15. How many times did the LORD call Samuel, before Eli realized who was calling?
16. Why did Samuel not know this was the voice of the LORD?
17. What does a dedication by your parent do for you?
18. He knew ____ God, but did not know Him personally.
19. Who was the only one who had ever taught Samuel?
20. Why was Eli able to perceive that the LORD called Samuel?
21. What did Eli tell Samuel to answer to the voice?
22. What did the LORD do differently the fourth time?
23. How did Samuel answer?
24. In verse 12, the LORD tells Samuel He is against whom?
25. What had the sons done?
26. Why was Eli being punished for what his sons did?
27. What was the usual way of being purged from sins?
28. Will the LORD accept this for the sons of Eli?

29. Why did Samuel lie there, until the morning?
30. Why had Samuel not told Eli what the LORD had said?
31. When he did tell, what reaction did Eli have?
32. Who accepted Samuel as a prophet of the LORD?