

FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 3

The LORD Calls Samuel

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. 2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. 3 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. 4 Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" 5 and 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. 6 And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." 11 Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God,^[a] and he did not restrain them. 14 Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." 15 Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16 But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." 17 And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." 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." 19 And 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 was established as a prophet of the LORD. 21 And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

3:1-10 The first point to be made is that like God's choosing, God's calling is undeserved. This applies both to Israel as a nation (Deut 7:6-9) and to the prophets God chose and called to serve his people. In the calls of Moses (Exodus 3-4), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1), and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1-3), a common feature is the prophet's protest that he is sinful, unworthy, and incapable of fulfilling his call without a special disposition of God's grace. God responds by sanctifying the prophet's mouth in some way so that he will be able to proclaim God's word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

It is important to remember that these calls were not sought. In fact, they came as a surprise, indeed as a shock . . . [the calls] were not regarded as a summons to greatness (i.e., honor and acclaim) but rather to humble service . . . [they] plunged a person into both inner torment and outward persecution at the hands of those being served. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

The perfect paradigm for called prophets, pastors, and indeed all believers, is the Messiah (Is 42:1; 52:13–53:12). He is the role model, yet much more than a mere example. He is our righteousness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

In the Servant Songs we have the profoundest use of *kaleo* . . . linked with an exceptionally frequent appearance of *eklegomai*, *choose*. It is the elect one (Is. 41:8; 43:10) whom God calls in righteousness (Is. 42:6) and by name (Is. 43:1; 45:3). He is a type of all who have been called from the beginnings of humanity (Is. 41:2,4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

God’s call comes through the Word. Samuel and the other prophets received a special call into the office directly from God in person (1 Sam 3:10). The call to all God’s people also comes through the Word, but the gospel is mediated to them through the called prophets, apostles, pastors, and teachers (2 Thess 2:14). All those called respond by calling on God. The called apostle tells those whom God has called through him that they are “called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

The verb *kara*, “to call,” dominates our OT text, occurring 11 times in the 10 verses. Of these, 5 occur in connection with Samuel’s mistaken assumption that Eli had called to him, while 6 are in reference to Yahweh who is the true source of the call. The confusion over who is calling is a major issue in the account. It results from Samuel’s inexperience with direct revelation and the scarcity of such revelations in those days (1 Sam 3:1, 7). One reason for God’s relative silence may be inferred as the wickedness of the priests (1 Sam 2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

The divine call came to Samuel in time and space. The physical location was the Lord’s tabernacle, by the ark of God (1 Sam 3:3), the place where the glory of the Lord resided. Similarly, Isaiah received his call in the temple (Isaiah 6). God’s glory (*cavod*) is his “incarnational” presence which is fully realized in the Word made flesh who dwelt among us (*eskēnōsen*, John 1:14, alluding to *mishkan*, the tabernacle). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

3:1 *young man Samuel*. See 2:11, 18. Samuel is now no longer a little child (see 2:21, 26). The Jewish historian Josephus places his age at 12 years; he may have been older. (CSB)

Samuel continued his faithful assistance to the aged Eli. Many of his duties could best be described as custodial – opening the doors of the house of the Lord, trimming the wicks on the lamp just outside the Most Holy Place, and filling them with enough oil to last the hours of darkness. (PBC)

the word of the LORD was rare. See Pr 29:18; Am 8:11. During the entire period of the judges, apart from the prophet of 2:27–36, we are told of only two prophets (Jdg 4:4; 6:8) and of five revelations (Jdg 2:1–3; 6:11–23; 7:2–11; 10:11–14; 13:3–21). Possibly 2Ch 15:3 also refers to this period. (CSB)

People had little interest in hearing what God had to say. The five books of Moses were kept in the tabernacle, but even the priests neglected them. Not since the death of Moses had there been a great prophet in Israel. This was also true in the time of Luther. No greater judgment can fall upon a nation than when it suffers the loss of God’s Word. When people do not appreciate the gospel, God often takes it from them. Are we aware that by our repeated neglect we can bring about such a famine of God’s Word? (PBC)

Literally, “there was no vision spread abroad,” made public frequently. There was lacking, on the one hand, a pious, God-fearing priesthood and, on the other hand, an appreciation of the divine Spirit’s work through the Word. “Jehovah had indeed promised His people to send prophets, who should reveal to them

His will and counsel, Deut. 18, 15 ff.; cp. Num. 23, 23; but since divine revelation presupposes willingness to accept the truth on the part of man, the unbelief and the disobedience of the people was able to hinder the fulfillment of this and similar prophecies, and God could in punishment deprive the idolatrous people of His Word.” (Kretzmann)

Amos 8:11-12 “The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “when I will send a famine through the land— not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.”

vision. Cf. Ge 15:1. (CSB)

Implies that prophets typically received God’s Word through visions. Although God’s Word was still active in sustaining creation and was continually handed on in the Law and in sacrificial worship, God did not frequently proclaim His Word through inspired prophets. His Word was not widely received in faith by the people (cf Am 8:11-12). (TLSB)

Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.”

Hebrew *chazon*, revelation from God, which has been preserved in the Scriptures. The Lord moved the prophets to preach His Word lest the people circumvent and distort the moral law through sinful reasoning. Secular moral philosophy cannot sustain a nation. (TLSB on Proverbs 29:18) (CSB)

3:3 *The lamp of God had not yet gone out.*† The reference apparently is to the golden lampstand, which stood opposite the table of the bread of the Presence (Ex 25:31–40) in the Holy Place. It was still night, but the early morning hours were approaching when the flame grew dim or went out (see Ex 27:20–21; 30:7–8; Lev 24:3–4; 2Ch 13:11; Pr 31:18). For the lamp to be permitted to go out before morning was a violation of the Pentateuchal regulations. (CSB)

temple. May mean Samuel was in the tabernacle courtyard, not within the tabernacle itself. The wording suggests that Samuel was ready for priestly service and that his character was fit to hear God’s voice. (TLSB)

ark of God was - The ark was the hub of God’s presence in the tabernacle. The technical term used to express Yahweh’s presence on the ark was *yashav*, “to sit (enthroned).” “If the ark was viewed as a throne, as far as the human eye could tell, it was an empty throne upon which Yahweh was invisibly present . . . the visible testimony to the invisible and continuing presence among the Hebrews of Yahweh, their God from Sinai.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

3:4 *here I am* – Expresses willingness to serve, as in “Yes, sir!” (TLSB)

3:5 *ran o Eli* – At first, Samuel was sure that Eli was calling him. The next two times Samuel was called (vv 6-8), he did not run to Eli, but simply “arose and went, suggesting Samuel’s growing uncertainty about who was calling him. (TLSB)

did not call you. Eli’s failure to recognize at once that the Lord had called Samuel may be indicative of his own unfamiliarity with the Lord. (CSB)

3:7 *did not yet know the LORD.* In the sense of having a direct experience of him (see Ex 1:8), such as receiving a revelation from God (see the last half of the verse). (CSB)

Eli's sons did not "know" the Lord (2:12) because of their refusal to submit to God. Samuel does not yet "know" God because of his lack of experience with God's direct revelation. Samuel will "know" God through his submissive trust in God's direct revelation. (TLSB)

3:8-9 It seems likely that the Lord does not reveal Himself to Samuel in Eli's presence because the Word of judgment that has to give. The Lord, in commissioning Samuel to be He messenger of judgment, frees Samuel to exercise trust in His Word, rather than seek human approval. (TLSB)

3:10 *came and stood* - The concreteness of Samuel's call is emphasized by the phrase "The Lord came and stood there" (3:10). "This was no mere dream . . . When Samuel responded as Eli told him to, God addressed him with the articulate words in a physically audible voice. The contents of the message could leave Samuel no doubt as to the identity of the Speaker. God announced that he would not only execute judgment on the house of Eli but also would bring about disaster that would cause ears to 'tingle' (3:11 or 'ring') with astonishment and horror." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

speak for your servant hears – Isn't it interesting that when the Lord looks for someone to speak for him, the very first qualification is that the person be willing to listen when the God speaks. The secret of Samuel's success as a prophet was not that he excelled in speaking but in listening. (PBC)

Samuel is not only an example of obedience, but also of willingness to hear the voice of the Lord. Like him all believers should open their ears and hearts to God and give heed to the voice which comes to us in the Word. (Kretzmann)

A prayer worthy of memorization by every believer. Recite this each time you open Scripture or hear God's Word from a faithful preacher. (TLSB)

3:11-14 The Lord's first revelation to Samuel repeats the message Eli had already received from the "man of God" (2:27-36), thus confirming the fact that the youth had indeed received a revelation from God. (CSB)

The Lord's first directive to the young prophet was no small assignment. (PBC)

3:11 *it will tingle* – Expression describing the experience of dread that comes from hearing God's word of judgment (2 Ki 21:12; Jer 19:3). (TLSB)

3:13 *iniquity*. Brings together Eli's own warning to his sons (2:22-25) with the message of the "man of God" (2:27-36). Eli is charged with doing nothing to extinguish the corrupt priestly office of his sons. The Lord has sworn judgment: no atonement will be made for the sin of Eli's house. (TLSB)

3:14 *by sacrifice* – The point of the Lord's words was not that Eli could not be forgiven but that the offense and damage his family had brought on God's house could not be removed by any sacrifice or offering they made. Those who serve as spiritual leaders in the church are to set an example by their family life. (PBC)

It was no longer a warning, but a definite statement of a curse which was about to descend upon Eli and his house for his neglect of the duty which he should have performed to his sons as father, high priest, and judge, by employing severe chastisement and punishment upon them. The harm done by the crimes of the priests affected the whole family, even their descendants. This story should be heeded more in our days, when mawkish sentimentality is making a farce of bringing up children. (Kretzmann)

3:15 *doors of the house of the LORD.* The tabernacle itself did not have doors. This may refer to an enclosure in which it stood. (CSB)

The entrance to the tabernacle had curtains rather than doors. However, doors of a more permanent structure could have been added to the tabernacle courts. (TLSB)

3:17 *May God do so to you and more.* A curse formula (see 14:44; 20:13; 25:22; 2Sa 3:9, 35; 19:13; Ru 1:17; 1Ki 2:23; 2Ki 6:31), usually directed against the speaker but here used by Eli against Samuel if he conceals anything the Lord said. (CSB)

Eli probably made a gesture (such as running his finger across his neck) suggesting death by slaying. (TLSB)

3:18 *let him do what is good to him.* Eli bows before God, accepting the judgment as righteous (see Ex 34:5–7). (CSB)

Eli gave evidence that he had not lost his faith. He acknowledged that Samuel was a prophet of the Lord by accepting his message unquestionably. (PBC)

He expressed his humble submission to the will of the Lord, for with all his weakness and in spite of his transgression he was a believer in Jehovah of Israel, and he realized the justice of the punishment. (Kretzmann)

3:19 *he let none of his words fall to the ground.* Because none of Samuel's words proved unreliable, he was recognized as a prophet who spoke the word of the Lord (see vv. 20–21). (CSB)

Just as God did not let His Word be unfruitful or unfulfilled (Jsh 21:45; 23:14; 1 Ki 8:56), so He did not allow Samuel's words to "fall." Samuel, instead, was established as God's true prophet. (TLSB)

Samuel had passed the first real test of a prophet. He had spoken God's words faithfully and unashamedly. (PBC)

3:20 *Dan to Beersheba.* A conventional expression often used in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles to denote the entire land (Dan was located in the far north and Beersheba in the far south). (CSB)

3:21 *at Shiloh.* But not after the events narrated in chs. 4–6 (see Jer 7:12–14; 26:6). (CSB)

The Lord continually revealed Himself to Samuel and so strengthened Samuel in his calling as a prophet. (TLSB)

God made known His will to the people by the revelation of His Word to Samuel, who was thus the first exponent of the permanent prophetic order. It has happened repeatedly in history that the Lord graciously visited His people after a season of spiritual drought and gave them His Gospel in rich measure. (Kretzmann)

Ch 3 While the Lord's word of judgment against Eli's house is confirmed through His revelation to Samuel, that same revelation confirms Samuel's own calling as a prophet. The judgment against Eli is threatening also to us when we fail to restrain those under our authority who do evil. But also hear the assurance that human weakness will not thwart God's will to bring the Good News of salvation to His creation! • Lord, give us humility to receive and speak Your Word without fear of those who oppose You. Amen.