

Message #9

I Samuel 3:1-10

I Samuel 3 is a great chapter for young boys and girls. It is a chapter that says, if any young boy or girl is serious about doing God's will with their lives, God will direct them, use His Word to speak to them, and He will greatly use them.

In fact, this is a story that is often told to children. But I love something Dr. J. Vernon McGee said, it is time to bring the story out of the nursery and into the adult department (*I Samuel*, p. 129).

I Samuel 3 is also a very important chapter to the whole work of God:

- 1) It will bring to an end Eli's service.
- 2) It will begin Samuel's service.

What this chapter teaches is this:

GOD WILL REPLACE GODLESS LEADERSHIP WITH GODLY LEADERS AND HE WILL RAISE UP KEY INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF AGE TO ACCOMPLISH THIS.

This is a great passage of Scripture. What we learn here is that God Himself will step into the picture of things and remove those who are corrupt and He will eventually replace them with those who are righteous. He will specifically use individuals, regardless of age, to make this happen. God does things His way and His way often baffles the world.

When the chapter begins, Samuel is a boy (na'ar) (3:1). When the chapter ends, Samuel is a prophet (nabi) (3:20). **In fact, Samuel becomes the first named male prophet since Moses (Deut. 18:15-19).**

Robert Bergen, in his commentary on I Samuel, said in this one chapter, Samuel goes from being a young "juvenile" who is ignorant of the Word of God to one of the most knowledgeable and "revered spokesman" for the LORD (*I & II Samuel*, p. 84).

There are six amazing observations we may make concerning this text:

OBSERVATION #1 – We may observe the boyhood service of Samuel. **3:1a**

Samuel was growing up in the Tabernacle surrounded by worthless religious leaders, Hophni and Phinehas, and Eli, who had lost much of his spirituality. That was a rotten place to grow up. While everyone else was regressing, Samuel was progressing.

Samuel was a boy who was learning about God and serving God in any way he could. The text says he was "ministering to the LORD before Eli." What this tells us is that Samuel was faithfully serving God under the God-ordained priestly leadership of Eli. He was submissive to proper authority, which becomes obvious later in these verses.

Samuel was a “boy.” The word “boy” (na’ar) is one that refers to a male who is young. This word is used in I Samuel 30:17 and there it is translated “young men” (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 555). We don’t exactly know how old Samuel was at this point. Josephus wrote that he was twelve at the time (*The Complete Works of Josephus*, p. 122).

So what we see here is that here was a young Hebrew boy who was faithfully serving God the best he could. He was very obedient to the leadership that wasn’t the best. He probably was around twelve, perhaps an early teenager.

When a young boy or young girl decides I am going to learn the Word of God the best I can and do what I can to serve God, God will do amazing things with them. That is certainly true here. Samuel did not at this point know much. In fact, **verse 7** says he did not yet know the LORD. That was all about to change.

OBSERVATION #2 – We may observe the rare scarcity of God’s Word. **3:1b**

God was not speaking much in the days of Samuel. Inspired revelation was very rare. There were lots of religions, but there wasn’t much revelation.

In fact, the Hebrew word “rare” (yaqar) indicates that God had stopped shining forth His revealed Word. God stopped speaking through His Word to the point that any Word of God was considered precious and priceless (*Ibid.*, p. 363). The leadership was so corrupt that God had stopped speaking to them and through them. Revelatory truth was far and few between.

The more corrupt His people are, the less they will hear from God. God rarely speaks when His people are not interested in knowing Him and obeying Him. In fact, in the days of the Judges, when everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes, there were only two prophets who existed: 1) One was a woman prophetess named Deborah (Judges 4:4); 2) The other was an unnamed man (Judges 6:8). This shows us how rare it was to have God speak.

When we studied the book of Amos, we saw a prediction of Amos that there will come a time when God’s people will be starving to be fed God’s Word. They will search to and fro to try and find someone who will teach the truth, but they will not find it (Amos 8:11-12).

We are nearing that time. I believe we are living in a time when God is rarely speaking in churches anymore. We have heard from people all over the nation and the world who have told us that they cannot find a church that carefully and systematically teaches the inspired Word of God. There are many churches where they have someone give some message using a Bible, but it is very rare to find one that carefully teaches God’s Word. Most of the churches today are more interested in hearing a band rather than hearing God’s Word. This is just like it was in the days of Samuel. The Word of God was scarce.

OBSERVATION #3 – We may observe the physical status of Eli. **3:2**

Eli was old and weak. His eyesight was about gone. In fact, he could not see well during the day or night. The conjunction “and” that begins **verse 3** would certainly lend itself to the probability that Eli could not actually see whether or not the lamp in the tabernacle had gone out. He was probably pretty much confined to areas he knew. Now earlier in the book he had sharp enough eyesight that he could see Hannah moving her mouth, which caused Eli to assume she was drunk (1:13). But now he was losing his eyesight. **Eli’s loss of physical eyesight was not his greatest problem. His loss of spiritual sight was his greatest problem.**

Now this verse shows us several things:

- 1) God did let Eli live to a ripe old age - 98 years old. **4:15**
- 2) Eli could not be the kind of leader he was when he was younger. He had been a leader for 40 years. 4:18
- 3) Eli’s leadership is coming to an end, and Samuel’s leadership is about to begin.

If you have a good mind and can still learn the Word of God to the end of your days, you are blessed.

The night began like a normal night for Eli. He was in bed, lying down. He will be in bed all through the night when this event occurs. Samuel will be up and down, but Eli will remain in bed and he is about to go to sleep for a long time.

We need to realize that our ability to serve God is temporal. We need to stay focused on His Word and will as long as we can because at some point, one way or another, we too will lie down.

OBSERVATION #4 – We may observe the state of the Tabernacle lamp. **3:3**

According to Exodus 27:20-21, the lamp in the Tabernacle was supposed to be lit at all times and it was the priest’s job to see to it that it was done. According to Exodus 30:7-8, there was a morning caring for the lamps and an evening caring for the lamps. At this point, Samuel was probably responsible for it because you could not depend on Eli’s sons for anything.

Notice that the “tabernacle” is called “Temple of the LORD.” It was the sacred place of worship, where people went to do business with God. Now this was the place where “the ark of God” was located. This is the first mention of the ark in I Samuel, but this will become a key part of what will happen in the next chapters.

The point of this data is to show us that this happened in the early morning hours, in a very sacred place while the tabernacle lamp was still burning. Apparently, every morning and every evening the lamp was replenished with oil and the wicks were trimmed. So the night was far spent and it was early in the morning. Both Samuel and Eli were in bed when God decided to speak.

Now it is specifically stated that Samuel was lying down in the temple where the ark of God was. This tells us that both physically and spiritually speaking, Samuel was closest to the Word of God. He was probably in a room that was very close in proximity to where this was.

We must not ever take for granted what God might be doing when we wake up early in the morning. It is a good time to pray for those God lays on your mind and heart. It is wise to ask God if there is some special reason He woke us up.

OBSERVATION #5 – We may observe the actual speaking of God. **3:4, 6, 8, 10**

This was a literal audible voice. Four times in this context we learn that the LORD called Samuel. We learn from **verse 10** that apparently what He specifically said initially was “Samuel, Samuel.” It is obvious, from Samuel’s response that God is speaking in the normal language that Samuel can understand.

God does not speak audibly to His people, but He sure speaks to people through His Word. He especially speaks to people when His Word is accurately taught at church. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard someone say, “You were speaking right to me.” Last Sunday night right from this book of Samuel someone said God really convicted me and spoke to my heart. That is exactly what God does. He speaks to His people and He uses His Word to do it.

OBSERVATION #6 – We may observe the submissiveness of Samuel. **3:4-10**

In these verses we get a tremendous look at Samuel and the attitude he had. He was a very submissive servant and that is just the kind of person God raises up and greatly uses.

When God called Samuel, he responded in two ways:

Way #1 - Verbally he responded “Here I am.” **3:4, 6, 8**

Samuel definitely heard a voice call him by name, because he woke up and got up. He probably was some distance from Eli because he had to run to him and if you were a short distance you would not run. What this says is that Samuel could hear this, but Eli could not.

Way #2 - Physically he ran to Eli. **3:5, 6, 8**

We get a great glimpse here of the kind of young man Samuel was in his service. When he thought Eli called him and needed him, he was right there. The voice Samuel heard must have been a voice similar to Eli because he ran to him, thinking he had called him. Samuel felt this old, half-blind priest needed his help and he ran to him.

Now in the first two instances, when Samuel went to Eli, Eli told him that he did not call him and told him to go back to bed (**3:5, 6**). **It is moving to see that Eli calls Samuel “my son” (v. 6).**

He probably felt bad about his own sons, but he sure loved little Samuel who was the godly son he always wanted.

Now what is interesting is that when this first happened, Eli does not even entertain the possibility with these first two callings that God could be doing this. This was not a time when they were used to God speaking at all.

Verse 7 gives us the reason for Samuel's misunderstanding: "Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him."

Some take this to mean that Samuel did not at this point have a personal relationship with the Lord. They take the position that this was Samuel's call to salvation. Others take it to mean that at this point he had never received personal revelation from the Lord, so this is his call to being a prophet.

Perhaps both are true, but I tend to lean toward the latter position. Samuel was in the tabernacle and was learning much about God. He was serving the LORD. What hadn't happened yet was that God had not actually prophetically spoke to him. He had never experienced that and that is why he thought it was Eli calling him.

Although after Eli said, "I didn't call you," Samuel did not say, well then who did?

Now according to **verse 8**, the third time this happened, Eli decided it was God calling Samuel. Notice it was Eli who initially discerned this. God does give His leaders discerning minds. Eli realized God was specifically doing something for Samuel at Shiloh that had not been done for a very long time. I love what John Woodhouse said in his commentary, "His sight had grown dim, but he was not yet completely blind" (*I Samuel Looking For A Leader*, p. 78).

Verse 9 says that Eli told Samuel to go back to bed and if it happens again, he said say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."

Verse 9 says that Samuel did exactly that. He went back to bed. It must have been an amazing moment in Samuel's life and in the life of Eli. They must have wondered will God speak a fourth time? Samuel did not have to wait very long.

According to **verse 10**, the LORD literally and physically came in Person with His Presence, and called again to Samuel. Samuel literally had God physically in his bedroom speaking to him. We may remember that **verse 1** says the word and visions were rare; well this twelve-year-old got both. This would have been overwhelming. In fact, Samuel said, "Speak for your servant is listening."

Now carefully notice what Eli told Samuel to say:
 "Speak LORD for your servant is listening" (**v. 9**).
 Now carefully notice what Samuel actually said:
 "Speak for Your servant is listening" (**v. 10**).

Samuel leaves out the noun LORD. This is a young twelve-year-old boy who was probably so overwhelmed that he skipped a word. It is obvious that he knows this is God by his use of the word “listening.” The word “listening” (Shamah) is one that means to listen for the purpose of hearing and obeying (*Ibid.*, p. 836).

Samuel wanted to know the Word of God so that he could obey it to receive the blessings of God.

It had been a long time since someone at the Temple in Shiloh was interested in hearing and obeying the Word of God, but finally one was there. He was a boy, a boy named Samuel.

PARTING THOUGHTS

- 1. A young boy or girl who loves God and His Word can grow to become very powerful but He/she needs to go to God’s place of worship and learn.**
- 2. In corrupt and evil times, God still speaks to His faithful people through His Word.**
- 3. God raises up to those who submit to leadership, not those who reject it or try to overthrow it.**
- 4. There are specific moments in time when God convicts a person of their need to respond to Him. We do not know how many times, but we do know that it may reach a point when God no longer speaks.**