

1 Samuel 3: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Samuel chapter 3 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. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place.

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. Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, Here I am, 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. 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. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 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. 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.

[1 : 1 5] And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. And Samuel said, Speak, for your servant hears. 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.

On that day I will fulfil against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 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, and he did not restrain them.

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. 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. But Eli called Samuel and said, Samuel, my son. And he said, Here I am. 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. So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the Lord.

[2 : 2 6] Let him do what seems good to him. And 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 was established as a prophet of the Lord.

And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. 1 Samuel chapter 3 begins with a lengthy setting of the scene in its first three verses.

It begins with a threefold lack of light. First, there's the lack of the light prophetic vision of the word of the Lord. Second, there's the lack of the light of the eyes of the high priest.

They have grown dim, and he clearly lacks perception. Spiritual perception, not just physical perception. He failed to perceive that Hannah was praying in the temple. He fails adequately to perceive the wickedness of his house.

And then third, it seems as though the lamp of God was soon to go out. The light symbolises the Spirit's illuminating presence and the presence of the anointed servant in the Lord's sanctuary.

[3 : 28] It's the lamp that God has established to represent the high priest and other things like that. The word of the Lord is paralleled with vision, and its rarity at this time is a sign probably of judgment.

The lamp of God is described in Leviticus chapter 24 verses 1 to 4. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly.

Outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent meeting, Aaron shall arrange it from evening to morning before the Lord regularly. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.

He shall arrange the lamps on the lampstand of pure gold before the Lord regularly. Samuel is lying down in the temple of the Lord, and the immediate impression reading this is that he was in the holy place, the main chamber of the tabernacle building.

The ark of God is there, although it will be captured in the next chapter. The book of Samuel speaks of the temple, but we're still dealing with the tabernacle building here. However, the tabernacle has probably developed into a larger complex of settled buildings at this point.

[4 : 34] In reality, Samuel was probably not in the holy place, where he would not have been permitted, but he was somewhere else in the temple complex. However, Samuel is represented as being remarkably close to the Lord's presence.

He has been given to the Lord by his mother, yet he doesn't yet know the Lord. His presence in the temple itself associates him with the Lord in a way that others are not. He is, as it were, in his father's house.

While Samuel is lying down, he's called by the Lord. And this is the first of a number of calls, and there's a rapid series of events. He responds, here I am. He runs to Eli, he speaks to him.

Eli denies that it was him who called Samuel. Samuel goes, and then he lies down again. Samuel is presenting himself to his father figure. When he hears the voice of the Lord, it sounds like the voice of Eli, and so it's Eli to whom he goes.

The same thing happens a second time, and here we're informed that Samuel did not yet know the Lord. He didn't have a personal relationship with or acquaintance with the Lord. He merely served him in his house.

[5 : 38] Having been sent back by Eli a second time, Samuel is called once more. This third time, Eli now recognises what is happening, and he instructs Samuel how to respond if it happens again.

We should see the significance of a threefold repetition here. This is often a narrative device that highlights an important event. When the Lord addresses Samuel the fourth time, he speaks to Samuel, Samuel, Samuel.

This twofold declaration of Samuel's name might remind us of previous occasions when this occurred. In the story of Abraham in Genesis chapter 22 verse 11, when the angel calls to Abraham.

Or in the story of Jacob in Genesis chapter 46 verse 2. Or in the story of Moses at the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3 verse 4. These are pivotal events in these stories, and Samuel here is about to be set apart as a prophet of the Lord.

[6 : 43] He repeats a message that the man of God from the previous chapter had delivered to Eli. And Samuel is now set up as a second witness. He is also now acting as a prophet.

Eli's eyesight is growing dim, and his spiritual perception is being lost. But the Lord speaks to this young lad in his house. After hearing this word from the Lord, Samuel lies down until the morning, and then he opens the doors of the house of the Lord.

In the story of the Exodus, for instance, or the story of the annunciation of Isaac's birth. Here, as it were, there's a new sort of birth event taking place. There's something new that's going to begin.

And Samuel responds, Here I am. By this point, we should probably pick up on some light allusions to the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis chapter 22. In the earlier chapters of this book, Samuel is the son who is offered up to the Lord by his mother.

However, here the difficult word comes to the son in the relationship, not to the father. In both this story and the story of the binding of Isaac, the expression, here I am, is a repeated and crucial expression.

[8 : 58] It addresses the situation that was introduced at the beginning. Now there is the light of God's word, and it is coming through Samuel. This chapter involves a movement from the dominance of Eli to that of Samuel.

Samuel transitions from functioning as the son of Eli to functioning as the son of the Lord, and now Eli's house is going to be judged. A question to consider.

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