

1 Samuel 3

- We've covered Samuel's birth and his arrival in Eli's family
 - And now the story turns to Samuel's call to serve the Lord
 - Of course, we already know that Hannah has dedicated Samuel to the Lord
 - And we know why she made her vow
 - But what of Samuel's own perspective?
 - We might wonder how he felt about being "dumped" at the tabernacle by his parents?
 - He saw them periodically, so we know he knows them
 - Therefore, he knows he's been dedicated to the temple service
 - But what does this mean to a young boy?
 - At some point, the true purpose in his dedication must become real for him
 - And the day has come for a revelation from the Lord
 - Chapter 3 is Samuel's call, and his first prophecy, from God
 - And once again, that prophecy centers on Eli's family

1Sam. 3:1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.

1Sam. 3:2 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),

1Sam. 3:3 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,

1Sam. 3:4 that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am."

1Sam. 3:5 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.

1Sam. 3:6 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."

1Sam. 3:7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him.

- The start of Samuel's ministry is both humorous and profound
 - First, we're told again that Samuel is ministering to the Lord before Eli
 - The Hebrew word for boy in v.1 is a word that generally refers to a young man, not a young child
 - Josephus said that Samuel was 12 years old in this moment
 - Young, but at the same time he's been working in this role for sometime now
 - Yet until this point, Samuel hadn't heard from the Lord personally
 - We're told he was ministering to the Lord though, so clearly the young man was intent on being a servant of God
 - But until the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel, his service was merely an aspiration
 - And his purpose in service was to fulfill a calling assigned to him by his parents
 - But if Samuel's service was to become genuine, it required a call from the Lord
 - Unless and until the Lord called Samuel and anointed him, his service couldn't fulfill God's purpose
 - His situation is something like that of a child that has been baptized as an infant and is told to go to church
 - And he says his prayers at night and knows the Bible stories by heart
 - But until the Lord places a call on that boy's heart, his acts of piety are works of ritual and obedience to his parents
 - But in time, the Lord will reveal Himself to such a one, and in that moment the heart quickens to serve the Living God
- The Lord is ready to give Samuel a call as a prophet, a man who will hear the voice of the Lord and relate what he learns to men
 - Notice at the end of v.1 we're told this is a time in which men didn't routinely hear from the Lord
 - Visions from the Lord were not absent

- But they were rare, which means men were living with only the Law and the book of Joshua to guide them
- And it has been 300 years since Joshua was written
- Beyond that, the Lord has only revealed His word in moments through judges
- Now the Lord is going to call Samuel as a prophet, and being a prophet is a thankless, difficult job
 - You have to respond to the word of the Lord no matter when He calls
 - You can't take a day off or tell the Lord you're busy
 - And you have to be willing to tell people things they won't want to hear
 - And you have to place your allegiance to the Lord above human relationships, being willing to leave behind family and friends
 - Remember that few prophets lived out their lives, since most were martyred
- So given Samuel's young age, it makes sense that the Lord's first call upon Samuel would give him an opportunity to see what the prophet's job entails
 - Eli is lying down in his bed located in the tabernacle courtyard
 - As High Priest he essentially lived in the tabernacle compound, which was his home
 - This is long before the high priest became a position of riches and wealth, though we can see the seeds of such thinking in his sons
 - But in this day the job was more like a fireman, living in the firehouse
 - Meanwhile, Samuel is also sleeping in the tabernacle, probably in the courtyard
 - In v.3 we're told Samuel is in the temple
 - But the Hebrew word for temple is *hekal*, which is better translated "court"

- So Samuel isn't sleeping inside the Holy Place, since priests were required to remain standing inside the tabernacle
- Instead, he's sleeping somewhere in the courtyard of the tabernacle, where the ark of the Lord was kept
- While he sleeps, the Lord calls to Samuel
 - We don't know what that call was like, of course, but it appears to be an audible voice
 - Because Samuel responds as if he's heard Eli calling him
 - Samuel's first response is to say "Here I am"
 - When he gets no further response, he gets up to find Eli, assuming Eli called him
 - At this point, he finds Eli sleeping, and when he wakes Eli, the old man says I didn't call you...go back to sleep
- So far this scene has a comical quality to it, as we see the Lord calling Samuel and Samuel mistaking the voice of the Lord for Eli's voice
 - In fact, the entire exchange happens a second time
 - A second call from the Lord and a second trip to Eli
 - And again, Eli says go back to sleep, it wasn't me
 - As we laugh at the situation, stop and ask yourself why the Lord let this moment develop
 - Notice in the first encounter Samuel immediately responded "Here I am"
 - If the Lord wanted to have a conversation with Samuel, He has His moment
 - The Lord could have avoided any possibility of mistaken identity right then
 - But instead, the Lord says nothing, leading Samuel to get up and investigate
 - Only once Samuel has encountered Eli and returned to his place does the Lord call again

- And once again the Lord allows the scene to play out without interrupting it
- Clearly, the Lord is orchestrating this moment for some purpose
- Can we make some conclusion for what the Lord wants to teach Samuel and us?
- Remember, Samuel is about to receive his call to serve the Lord
 - And this call will lead to Samuel representing the Lord to the people of God
 - He will bring the word of the Lord
 - He will no longer answer to the authority of an earthly priest like Eli
 - The Lord wants Samuel to understand that his instructions will come from a God Who has elected to reveal Himself to one man only
 - Not all men will hear what Samuel hears
 - Not even the High Priest of Israel will hear what the Lord will reveal to Samuel
 - What better way to make this clear than to demonstrate to Samuel that no one else is hearing what Samuel is hearing
 - And in a perfect pattern of three, the Lord calls Samuel
 - By the time Samuel realizes this call is from the Lord, he's also been made aware that his call is unique
- Notice in v.7 we're told that Samuel did not yet know the Lord and had not had the word of the Lord revealed to him
 - This phrase raises some interesting questions:
 - Does the comment simply mean Samuel had not yet had a personal encounter with the Lord of the type he's having now?
 - That's a common interpretation, but that interpretation makes the entire statement unnecessary
 - Obviously, Samuel had never heard from the Lord as yet
 - That's the whole point of Chapter 3, and so this statement seems entirely unnecessary if that is its only point

- Another possibility is that this is the moment that the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel's heart, bringing Samuel saving faith
 - In this interpretation, we view Samuel's earlier dedication in the tabernacle as simply service rendered as a dutiful son
 - He's serving the ritual of the Law without actually knowing the reality of the Living God
 - Under these circumstances, Samuel would be very much like the millions and millions of men and women who have attended churches of one kind or another
 - And have genuflected, prayed, kneeled, and chanted on cue
 - But have no personal relationship with the Lord
- Perhaps this is the moment of Samuel's calling into faith, a moment like the one Paul had on the road to Damascus
 - Remember, Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees, as he put it
 - He was the pre-eminent student in Judaism
 - Paul would have put even Samuel to shame
- And yet Paul didn't know the Lord in his heart
 - It required that Paul encounter the Word on the road, to truly answer His call
 - And remember, when Paul received his call he responded to the voice yet wasn't even sure Who he was answering
 - But it was the moment the Lord revealed Himself to a man who had been supposedly serving God all his life
- And what did it take to bring both Paul and Samuel into the Light? As v.7 says, it required that the word of the Lord be revealed to both
 - In Paul's day, the Word had already become flesh, and so Paul's exposure to the word came in the Person of the Risen Lord Himself
 - But in Samuel's day, the Lord was still called the Angel of the Lord
 - And so Samuel is going to have an encounter with the Lord in this form

1Sam. 3:8 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.

1Sam. 3:9 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.

1Sam. 3:10 Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."

1Sam. 3:11 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.

1Sam. 3:12 "In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.

1Sam. 3:13 "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.

1Sam. 3:14 "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."

- On the third occasion, the Lord calls Samuel and once more Samuel goes to Eli
 - Samuel must have thought that Eli was playing a trick on him
 - We should note that Samuel's patient heart of service is evident in this moment
 - Who among us would show this much patience under the same circumstances?
 - Wouldn't we start to show frustration at this point?
 - Or perhaps we would just stay in bed assuming it's a prank?
 - But young Samuel is so dedicated to service that he gets up each and every time he's heard a voice and returns to Eli without complaint
 - And Eli must have known Samuel's heart for service
 - So when Samuel returns a third time, Eli suspects something else is going on, since he knows the boy wouldn't be playing
 - And he comes to realize the Lord is speaking to Samuel
 - Given how rare it was to hear the Lord's voice, you have to wonder if Eli was surprised by this encounter

- Or perhaps the earlier visit from the oracle was intended to get Eli's attention
- And because he had recently heard from the Lord, perhaps he was more sensitive to that possibility
- In any case, Eli tells Samuel to go back and lay down and when the voice returns, say "Here I am Lord" and then listen
 - Eli gives instructions like he's been there before himself
 - When Samuel returns, sure enough the Lord responds
 - And Samuel has his encounter with the Word of the Lord
 - Once again, why didn't the Lord just begin with His message in the first encounter?
 - We already said the Lord wanted Samuel to appreciate that he was receiving something uniquely appointed
 - But this call and response pattern is also an important detail to the story
 - Samuel needed to learn to hear the Lord's call and recognize it
 - Not because the Lord is incapable of making Himself heard
 - But because He is intent on training His servant to know Him intimately
 - Samuel didn't know the Lord, but it was time he came to know Him
 - And that process of coming to know the Lord begins with a call from the Lord to those the Lord selects to hear
 - And then once the time arrives to hear, the word of God opens the ears and the called will hear and respond
 - And so Samuel awaits the call, and then only when he hears the call and responds does the Lord reveal Himself
 - As Paul says

Rom. 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

- At this point the Lord gives Samuel his first “word from the Lord”
 - The Lord’s first words to Samuel aren’t an explanation for Who He is or what’s happening
 - There’s no “Hello Samuel, I’m the Lord”
 - If you remember in Acts when Saul meets the Lord on the road, Jesus doesn’t make introductions either
 - When the Lord steps into our lives and calls us into a relationship with Him, He needs not introduce Himself
 - His revelation of Himself is sufficient to bring us into the family of God
 - As Paul said elsewhere:

2Cor. 4:6 For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

- Samuel has had the Light of Christ shined into his heart, and now he’s in a relationship with the Living God
 - Since the relationship is established, it’s time to get down to business
 - Once we enter into that relationship, the expectation is that we immediately begin to serve the Lord
 - As Jesus said to Peter and Andrew

Matt. 4:18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

Matt. 4:19 And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Matt. 4:20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

- For Samuel, the first assignment is not a pleasant one
 - The Lord tells Samuel He is prepared to do something so remarkable in Israel that people who hear about it will be amazed
 - This phrase is more than just hyperbole
 - It’s a marker to indicate what news the Lord is preparing to bring

- We know it includes the revelation about Eli's family
- But it goes beyond that detail
- The Lord is looking beyond this single moment of revelation
 - He's referring to the revelation that a monarchy is going to be established in Israel
 - How do we know that?
 - Because this comment about ears tingling only occurs one other place in the Bible, in Jeremiah 19 (quoted again in 2 Kings 21)

[Jer. 19:1](#) Thus says the LORD, "Go and buy a potter's earthenware jar, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests.

[Jer. 19:2](#) "Then go out to the valley of Ben-hinnom, which is by the entrance of the potsherd gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you,

[Jer. 19:3](#) and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle.

[Jer. 19:4](#) "Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods, that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent

[Jer. 19:5](#) and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind;

[Jer. 19:6](#) therefore, behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when this place will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-hinnom, but rather the valley of Slaughter.

- In this passage the Lord declares the end of the Jewish monarchy
 - Just as it began with Samuel with ears excited at the news
 - So it will end with ears shocked by the revelation that Israel will cease having a king
 - Until the Messiah comes, that is
 - No man apart from Christ will ever rule as king over Israel
 - Some like Antiochus and Herod have tried, but they were not legitimate nor did their reign last

- So the Lord's announcement is an allusion to greater things to come beyond this single revelation concerning Eli
 - The Lord tells Samuel that there is big news coming and he's the man who will deliver it to Israel
 - But before we get to all that, the Lord needs Samuel to deliver Eli a personal message
 - Eli gets confirmation that he and his sons are going to be cut off
 - Notice in v.12 the Lord says that everything He's already spoken concerning Eli is going to happen
 - So this is not new information for Eli...it's a confirmation
 - He repeats that Eli's house will have no opportunity for atonement for these sins but they will have a curse placed on them
 - Once again, we wonder why the Lord needed Samuel to deliver this confirmation to Eli?
 - First, Eli is the high priest, so the Lord could have spoken to Eli directly
 - Secondly, the Lord has already revealed this truth to Eli through an earlier prophet so why bother repeating Himself through Samuel?
 - The answer has little to do with Eli and everything to do with Samuel
 - This is Samuel's opportunity to practice delivering bad news to people who won't like to hear it
 - This will take courage and it will teach him a lesson about serving God rather than pleasing men
 - When the Lord says speak, we speak
 - And whatever response the word of the Lord generates is the intended reaction the Lord wanted
 - We can't control it nor should we attempt to soften it
- Today, believers aren't arrested at night with a "word from the Lord", since Hebrews tells us that the counsel of God is complete in Christ through His word

- But we have a similar challenge when we're tasked to share what we know from the word
 - There are many places in scripture that won't please those we might share it with
 - People won't like to hear what the Bible says about sin, especially sin that society has embraced and determined is acceptable
 - People don't like to learn that Hell is a real place that real people go when they die in their sins
 - And people don't like to know that they aren't OK the way they are and that they must repent
- But these messages, and many more truths, are the word we've been told to share with the world
 - The same word that condemns sin also proclaims the good news of salvation
 - The same word that speaks of Hell offers the promise of Heaven
 - The same word that convicts us saves us
- We need to learn the lesson that the Lord is working to teach Samuel
 - We take what the Lord gives us and we share it without editing and without fear
 - The Lord in His wisdom has determined this is the one right message
 - We do not have liberty to change it or hide it
- This was the situation Samuel faced at this moment...does he dare share this news with his surrogate father and the high priest of Israel?
 - What will be the repercussions? What might the High Priest do to Samuel when he hears this statement?
 - As we watch what Samuel does, remember he's likely about 12 years old
 - And Eli's sons are fully grown and ruthless
 - This is a test of Samuel's heart to speak the word of the Lord without concern for the personal consequences

- This is a test for every prophet
- But we're getting a chance to see how the Lord trains His prophets for this difficult assignment

1Sam. 3:15 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.

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

1Sam. 3:17 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."

1Sam. 3:18 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."

- Smartly, Samuel decides he's probably woken Eli one too many times already tonight
 - Probably better to save this news until morning, so Samuel goes back to sleep
 - But when morning comes, Samuel isn't feeling much more like sharing what he's learned
 - Nevertheless, he got up and begun the duty of the day
 - And naturally Eli eventually encounters Samuel
 - Eli asks Samuel to share the news, which we can see as a measure of God's grace to prompt Samuel to do the right thing
 - Confronted with the question, Samuel has little choice but to answer Eli
 - In fact, Eli pronounces his own prophecy on Samuel
 - That if Samuel isn't willing to share the word the Lord gave him, then the things God proclaimed would come upon Samuel
 - Clearly Eli could tell Samuel had bad news he was reluctant to share, which made Eli all the more curious to hear it
 - So Samuel shares the news the Lord commanded him to share, and Eli's reaction is nothing like Samuel expects
 - As we said last week, when a man hears the Lord is prepared to take the lives of his sons, we might expect him to react with more concern or passion

- But Eli seems either indifferent or simply resigned to what's coming
- But at the very least, we see no indication of repentance in Eli
- Eli is a man who is old, tired and weary under the burden of serving
 - He has raised two sons who have no regard for the Lord and who despise the priesthood
 - His sons will die
 - His family will be cut off from the priesthood
 - And he will live out his remaining days with the burden of knowing what the Lord has planned
 - The only blessing in his life was a young man that the Lord entrusted into his care for a few years, and now even that man is a source of pain
 - Not for who is or what he does but for what the Lord says through him
 - Such is the life of a prophet
 - They bring the word of the Lord, good news to those who love the Lord and serve Him obediently
 - But sorrow to those who are far from the Lord
 - And as is usually the case, those who are in power are those who know the sorrow of the Lord's word
 - And as a result, they are prone to bringing persecution against the Lord's prophet
 - Samuel will be spared much of that persecution
 - But later prophets will not be so fortunate
 - And in fact, from Samuel to Christ, the Lord's prophets are increasingly persecuted for they minister to an increasingly apostate people
- Meanwhile, the young Samuel has just begun his work for the Lord

1Sam. 3:19 Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail.

[1Sam. 3:20](#) All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD.

[1Sam. 3:21](#) And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

- Samuel grew to adulthood, and the Lord was with him and let none of Samuel's words fail
 - This means that every time the Lord gave Samuel a word to share, the word Samuel spoke came to pass as the Lord promised
 - And Samuel says specifically that the Lord let none of his words fail (literally: fall to the ground, as in an arrow that misses)
 - So Samuel was always 100% accurate in his prophecy
 - This is important, because this is the biblical test for anyone who calls themselves a prophet
 - In Deuteronomy 18, Israel was told that the only legitimate prophet is one that is never wrong

[Deut. 18:17](#) "The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well.

[Deut. 18:18](#) 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

[Deut. 18:19](#) 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.

[Deut. 18:20](#) 'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'

[Deut. 18:21](#) "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'

[Deut. 18:22](#) "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

- The Lord promised Israel would receive a Prophet, Who was to be Christ
- But of course other prophets would also arise before the Messiah appeared, and the test is the same for all of them
- When they speak from the Lord, everyone must listen to the prophet

- If they reject the word of the Lord, the Lord will reject them
- But then the Lord anticipates the people's question of how do we tell the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet?
 - The answer the Lord gives is: perfection
 - If something the prophet says does not come to pass, they are showing themselves to be a false prophet
 - You shall not fear such a person, meaning you can safely ignore what he says, since he isn't speaking with the authority of God
- Elsewhere, the Lord says such a person must be put to death because they were not a prophet at all
 - Essentially, the rule is someone is either 100% perfect in his pronouncements or else he was always 100% fraud
 - No true prophet is ever wrong
- So Samuel's own testimony to the legitimacy of his office is his perfect record of prediction
 - And that perfect record spreads as news throughout Israel
 - From Dan, which was the northern most tribe
 - To Beersheba, the Southern most city in the land
 - Everyone knew and accepted Samuel's authority as a prophet
 - Given how long it had been since the people had been given a prophet (over 300 years), this must have been a dramatic development for the people
 - When the Lord steps out of 300 years of virtual silence and provide a prophet, you have to wonder what's coming
 - And there were big changes coming for the people
 - But those changes are foreshadowed by events with the Ark
 - Which Samuel introduces in v.21 – which takes us to Chapter 4 next week