



Sunday, June 5, 2022

Lesson Text: I Samuel 3:1-9, 19-20; 7:3-5, 10, 12; **Time of Action:** The first part about 1093 B.C. and the second part about 1047 B.C.; **Places of Action:** Shiloh; Mizpeh; between Mizpeh and Shen

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

I. INTRODUCTION. Something many people struggle with is determining what the will of the LORD is. How can someone tell whether God is calling him or her into some aspect of service, such as missions? It seems that the account of Samuel's call in Scripture gives us some insight along with other helpful pointers in terms of hearing God's call to ministry or service. The call of God is not necessarily a quick and fleeting call that a person might miss if he or she is not tuned into God at a precise moment. With Samuel, at least, along with others such as Moses (see Exodus 3:2-3), the call of God persisted. It would not go away. This seems to be something someone should look for when deciding the will of God for his or her life. His call just will not go away.



II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. During the time of the judges, the nation of Israel was surrounded by enemies that occasionally attacked one or more tribes, enslaving them, but God raised up judges or deliverers for His people (see Judges 3:9, 12-31; 11:1-40:13:1). With religious life at a low ebb (see Judges 10:10; 18:30), the nation was in grave danger of losing its distinctive place as a witness for the LORD in the midst of heathen nations. Under Joshua's leadership Israel had conquered Canaan and received their tribal inheritances, and at that time they generally followed the LORD (see Judges 2:7). But after Joshua's death, things became chaotic. The spiritual condition of Israel also declined. Israelites often adopted the idolatrous and immoral practices of native peoples and surrounding neighbors, which invited God's judgment (see Judges 2:11-15). But the LORD still had mercy on His people and raised up judges to deliver them from their enemies (see Judges 2:16). However, even some of the judges were men of mixed character, like Samson. The priesthood also reached a low point under Eli and his sons who brought disgrace to the priesthood through their dishonest and immoral acts (see I Samuel 2:12-17, 22-36). It was in this atmosphere that our lesson takes place. From the outset, Samuel was a special child born in answer to the prayer of the childless Hannah. She made a vow or promise to the LORD that if a son was born to her, she would dedicate him back to the LORD for his entire lifetime (see I Samuel 1:9-18). True to her word, after she had weaned Samuel, Hannah took him to the tabernacle at Shiloh and presented him to Eli the priest to serve in the tabernacle (see I Samuel 1:24-28; 2:18).



III. SAMUEL'S CALL FROM GOD (I Samuel 3:1-9, 19-20)

A. The circumstances of the call (I Samuel 3:1-3).

1. (vs. 1). Our first verse says **"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."** As noted in the Lesson Background, after weaning Samuel, Hannah presented him to the priest in the tabernacle where **"the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli."** This means that **"Samuel"** was attending to the service of the LORD in the tabernacle under the supervision of **"Eli."** We cannot be certain how old **"Samuel"** was at this time since the Hebrew word translated **"child"** can mean anything from an infant (see Exodus 2:2-3) to a young man. Abraham's first son Ishmael was at least fourteen years old when Isaac was born (see Genesis 16:16; 17:17; 21:1-3), and he is also referred to as a **"child"** (see Genesis 21:14-15). The last part of this verse says **"And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision."** The word **"precious"** can mean *"rare,"* which appears to be the meaning here. **"The word of the LORD"** is described as **"precious"** or *"rare"* meaning that **"the LORD"** didn't speak directly to people very often **"in those days."** The phrase **"there was no open vision"** means that also **"in those days"** there was no one who was publicly known to have **"visions."** God follows the pattern of revealing His truth to those who are open to receive it. When



hearts become callous or hard, God follows the principle of not casting pearls (His truth) before swine or those who will not receive it (see Matthew 7:6). Both Ezekiel and Amos foretold times when sin would hinder both "**visions**" and revelations from God (see Ezekiel 7:20-26; Amos 8:1-7, 11-12) and it is reasonable to believe that this happened in "**Samuel's**" day as well.

2. (vs. 2). This verse says "**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.**" In this verse and the next one, the circumstances are given when Samuel received God's first call. Here we are told "**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.**" First, we see that it was night when Samuel would receive God's call (see verses 3&4) for we are told that the time of day was when "**Eli was laid down in his place**" or when he went to his room to go to bed. The fact that the writer says that Eli's "**eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see**" was probably mentioned to explain why Samuel, when he heard his name called, would go to "**Eli,**" for he was probably accustomed to assisting him.

3. (vs. 3). This verse says "**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.**" This verse continues to give the circumstances when "**Samuel**" would receive God's call. The writer says it was "**ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.**" The "**ark of God**" is also called the



"ark of the covenant" (see Deuteronomy 31:25-27; I Samuel 4:4) which contained a pot of manna, Aaron's rod and the Ten commandments (see Hebrews 9:2-4). The words **"ere the lamp of God went out"** means that **"the lamp"** or candlelight was still burning. **"The lamp"** refers to the seven-branched lamp-stand that stood in the holy place (see Exodus 28:43) outside of the holy of holies **"where the ark of God was."** It was to be filled with oil and lit in the evening and kept burning until morning (see Exodus 27:20-21). Another indication that this was at night was that we are told **"Samuel was laid down to sleep."** This does not mean that he slept in the tabernacle itself, but he slept in the courtyard where dwelling places for priests had been built. Although the place **"where the ark of God was"** is here called **"the temple,"** it was actually the tabernacle. The temple had not yet been built by Solomon (see I Kings 6:1). However, the tabernacle was no longer a traveling tent (see Exodus 39:32; 40:2) like it was in the wilderness wanderings (Exodus 40:34-38). Now, at Shiloh, it seems that it had taken on some aspects of permanence since it had doors (see I Samuel 3:15).

B. God's first call and Samuel's response (I Samuel 3:4-5).

1. (vs. 4). This verse says **"That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I."** Whether **"Samuel"** had fallen asleep or not is not clear. What we do know is that he had laid down to sleep (see verse 3) and it was then **"That the LORD called Samuel."** This was **"the LORD's"** first call to **"Samuel."** God called him by his name



and He knows ours as well (see Exodus 33:17; I Kings 13:2; Isaiah 43:1; John 10:2-4). He even knows the names of all the stars (see Psalms 147:4; Isaiah 40:26). When **"the LORD called Samuel...he answered, Here am I."** This was the same answer Isaiah gave when God asked the question, *"whom shall I send"* (see Isaiah 6:8).

2. (vs. 5). This verse says **"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."** When Samuel heard his name being called (see verse 4), he assumed that it was **"Eli"** calling for him **"And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me."** It appears that Samuel, even as a young boy was so accustomed to obedience that he made himself immediately available to **"Eli"** even in the night. He may have even answered similar summons from **"Eli"** before. Here we see the readiness of Samuel to serve **"Eli."** Thinking that it was **"Eli"** who called him, Samuel hastened out of his warm bed and ran to him to see if he wanted anything, and maybe even fearing that **"Eli"** was not well. Samuel's action is a good example to servants to come when they are called; and to the younger ones, not only to submit to the elder or older ones, but to do it with humility (see I Peter 5:5). When Samuel came to **"Eli"** he said, **"Here am I; for thou calledst me."** But **"Eli"** knowing that he had not called Samuel told him so when he said **"I called not."** Then he told Samuel to **"lie down again"** or go back to bed. It's possible that at this point Samuel may have thought that a sound in the night could have aroused him and given him the false impression of a voice, so he obeyed **"and he went and lay down."** He



returned to his bed.

C. Samuel's response to a second call (I Samuel 3:6). This verse says "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." For the second time, "the LORD called yet again, Samuel." And again thinking that "Eli" was calling for him, "Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me." In the previous verse, "Samuel" simply said "for thou calledst me." But here he said "for thou didst (did) call me" which seems to indicate that "Samuel" had no doubts that "Eli" had called him this time. "Samuel" and "Eli" were undoubtedly the only ones in that area so "Samuel" believed that it had to be "Eli" who called him. But just as "Eli" had done before, he said, "I called not, my son" and then once again told "Samuel" to "lie down again" knowing that he had not summoned him. **Note: Although "Eli" assured "Samuel" that he did not call him, he did not rebuke him for disturbing him by being overzealous to serve him. He didn't call "Samuel" a fool, nor did he tell him that he had been dreaming, but he mildly told him to "lie down again" for he had nothing for "Samuel" to do. A good lesson here is that if servants must be ready when their masters call, masters must also be tender and concerned about their servants' comfort. This surely applies to the employer-employee relationship as well.**

D. The reason for Samuel's response (I Samuel



3:7). This verse says **"Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him."** At this point the writer paused to explain why **"Samuel"** did not recognize the voice of God. It was because **"Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him."** In other words, at this time **"Samuel did not yet know"** or personally experience **"the LORD,"** and **"the word of the LORD"** had not yet been **"revealed"** directly to him. **"Samuel"** had received training in how to worship and serve **"the LORD,"** but he didn't have the intimate knowledge that came from hearing His voice and receiving His revelation. Therefore, the voice **"of the LORD"** was unrecognizable to **"Samuel."**

E. Eli's advice to Samuel (I Samuel 3:8-9).

1. (vs. 8). This verse says **"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 writer now tells us that **"the LORD called Samuel again the third time"** and again **"Samuel"** dutifully reported to **"Eli"** for **"he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me."** After hearing for the second time that **"Samuel"** was convinced that **"Eli"** had called him (see verse 6), **"Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child."** This means that by now, **"Eli"** the priest had surmised that God was speaking to **"Samuel."**

2. (vs. 9). This verse says **"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."

Now that "Eli" had suspected that God was speaking to "Samuel," the writer said **"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."** Knowing that he hadn't called for "Samuel," once again "Eli" told him to go back to bed, but this time he also told "Samuel" that if he heard the same voice call him again, he was to answer saying **"Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth."** "Eli" instructed "Samuel" on what to say if he heard the voice again. He must call himself God's "servant" and desire to know the mind and will of God by saying **"Speak, LORD,"** or speak to me. In addition, "Samuel" must be prepared to hear and obey, for "Eli" also told him to say **"Thy servant heareth."** **Note: "Eli"**

proved to be right. The call came for a fourth time (see I Samuel 3:10 which is not part of our printed text). This time the LORD came and stood and called "Samuel's" name twice. "Samuel" answered the LORD just as "Eli" had instructed him to do saying "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." The fact that at this time "the LORD stood and called as at other times" (see I Samuel 3:10) indicates that this was now some visible appearance of the divine glory to Samuel, a vision that stood before him. As a result, God gave this young boy his first revelation (see I Samuel 3:11-14). And what a revelation it was! It announced the fall of "Eli" and his household from the priesthood in graphic terms. "Samuel" was afraid to reveal this revelation to



"Eli," and it was only after "Eli" threatened him with divine judgment if he didn't tell him what God said that "Samuel" disclosed the revelation to "Eli" (see I Samuel 3:15-18). With this, "Samuel" was introduced to the privileged position of prophet (see Acts 3:24).

F. The evidence of Samuel's call (I Samuel 3:19-20).

1. (vs. 19). This verse says **"And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground."** Now our lesson text moves to the time when **"Samuel"** had grown up. The writer said **"And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him."** The evidence that God was with **"Samuel"** was in the fact that God **"did let none of his words fall to the ground."** This expression, derived from water being spilled and wasted, means that **"the LORD"** fulfilled all He had spoken through **"Samuel."** This was one of the signs of a true prophet (see Deuteronomy 18:22). If a person is truly called by God to present His message, God will fulfill it. God's words are always trustworthy, and if a person is faithful declaring them, he or she can be certain that the LORD will do through them everything He ordains (see Isaiah 55:10-11).

2. (vs. 20). This verse says **"And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD."** It wasn't long before **"all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD."** The town of **"Dan"** was the most northern town in Israel and



"Beersheba" was Israel's southernmost town about 150 miles from **"Dan."** The expression **"from Dan even to Beersheba"** came to mean the entirety of the Israelite nation (see Judges 20:1). In essence, **"all Israel"** came to know that **"Samuel was established"** or appointed as **"a prophet of the LORD."** Here, the word **"established"** means *"accredited"* or *"certified."* **"Samuel"** was a genuine **"prophet"** through whom God's word came to pass (see verse 19), and God continued to reveal Himself to Samuel at Shiloh (see verse 21 which is not part of our printed text). Not since Moses had such a **"prophet"** come forth. The Hebrew word translated **"prophet"** refers to someone who speaks forth God's message. Since **"Dan"** and **"Beersheba"** were at the extreme northern and southern borders of Israel, respectfully, the entire nation of **"Israel"** recognized **"Samuel"** as a **"prophet."**

IV. SAMUEL'S MINISTRY TO ISRAEL (I Samuel 7:3-5, 10, 12). A number of years passed between the two sections of our lesson. While Samuel was still a youth, Israel went to war with the Philistines, but the campaign was a disaster. Not only were the Israelites defeated, but the Ark of the Covenant was taken (see I Samuel 4:1-22). But after the Philistines suffered seven months of trouble, they sent the ark back (see I Samuel 5:1-6:18). It was eventually put in Kirjath-jearim where it remained for twenty years (see I Samuel 6:21-7:2), and during those years, the Israelites *"lamented (or grieved) after the LORD"* (see I Samuel 7:2). The absence of the ark from Shiloh combined with the



Philistine occupation of their lands led the Israelites to search their hearts and yearn for the LORD. This is where the next part of our lesson begins.

A. An invitation to repentance (I Samuel 7:3-5).

1. (vs. 3). This verse says **"And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."** While the Israelites were lamenting or yearning for the LORD, **"Samuel"** urged them to repent. But what did repentance involve? First, they were to **"return to the LORD with all (their) hearts."** If they repented or had a change of **"heart,"** they had to prove it with an outward act. They were to **"put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among (them).** The term **"strange gods"** means **"gods"** of the stranger or non-Israelites. **"Ashtaroth"** is the plural form of **"Ashtareth"** (also known as **"Astarte"**) the Canaanite goddess of fertility and war. The Israelites seemed to be constantly attracted to these nature deities with their crude and immoral worship. To show their repentance, the Israelites had to abandon those **"strange gods."** Instead of worshiping those false **"gods,"** the Israelites were told by **"Samuel"** to **"prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only."** In other words, the Israelites were to commit themselves to **"the LORD"** and **"serve (or worship) him"** exclusively. They had compromised with foreigners or strangers in their land for



too long and God hated it. It was time for a change of heart and behavior. Once the people committed themselves to repentance—a change of heart and behavior, **"Samuel"** told them that God **"will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."** This change of **"heart"** and behavior was essential to a deliverance from **"the Philistines."** We must remember that repentance is more than turning to the LORD; it is also turning away from anything that draws away the devotion He alone deserves.

2. (vs. 4). This verse says **"Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only."** The **"children of Israel"** followed Samuel's instruction and **"did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only."** The term **"Baalim"** is the plural of *"Baal,"* the chief god of the Canaanites. The plural **"Baalim"** like **"Ashtaroth"** is used to indicate the hundreds of variations of Baal found throughout Canaanite territory. Baal was considered by the Canaanites to be the storm god who helped restore fertility to the earth each year. Samuel had the satisfaction of seeing his people abandon these false objects of worship and **"serve"** or worship **"the LORD only."**

3. (vs. 5). This verse says **"And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD."** After the people committed to repentance, **"Samuel"** gave an order for a general convocation (assembly) at **"Mizpeh"** where he promised to **"pray"** for them. The words **"all Israel"** here does not necessarily imply that every single Israelite had to attend, but it did



require representation from every tribe and clan. **"Mizpeh,"** which was about seven miles north of Jerusalem seems to have been a favorite place for such gatherings (see Judges 20:1; I Samuel 10:17). At this assembly in **"Mizpeh"** the Israelites fasted, prayed, and confessed their sins (see I Samuel 7:6 which is not part of our printed text). They also poured out water, probably as a symbol of their remorse before **"the LORD."**

B. An evidence of forgiveness (I Samuel 7:10). This verse says, **"And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel."** According to verses 7-9 which are not part of our printed text, when **"the Philistines"** heard of Israel's assembly at Mizpeh, they sent forces against them. Being stricken with terror, the Israelites begged **"Samuel"** to continue to pray for them, especially for their deliverance from **"the Philistines."** Then **"Samuel,"** who also acted as priest (Eli had since died; see I Samuel 4:12-18), offered a burnt offering to accompany his prayer, which **"the LORD"** heard. Now this verse tells us that even **"as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel."** But just as **"the Philistine"** army approached the Israelites, **"the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them."** The words **"discomfited them"** means that the LORD's thunderous actions threw **"the Philistines"** into a state of fear and



confusion. This resulted in **"the Philistines"** being **"smitten (or defeated) before (or at the hands of) Israel."** Verse 11 which is not part of our printed text reveals just how badly **"the Philistines"** were defeated when the Israelites pursued them. As a result of this defeat, **"the LORD"** proved that He, not Baal, was the God of the storm (see comments on verse 4) who controlled the elements as He pleased.

C. A memorial of deliverance (I Samuel 7:12). Our final verse says **"Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."** After the defeat of the Philistines, **"Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen."** He erected this monument in order to commemorate this occasion. **"Samuel"** called this **"stone"** monument **"Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us."** The name **"Ebenezer"** means *"stone of help."* It reminded the Israelites that up to this point **"the LORD"** had **"helped" (them)**. Although the Philistines were by no means completely subdued (see I Samuel 9:16; 13:3-5), they restored lands that they had previously taken and were kept in check during Samuel's days (see verses 13-14 which are not part of our printed text).

V. Conclusion. Samuel was an exceptional Old Testament leader. God called him in a special way and used him in a special way to judge and lead His people at a crucial time in



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their history. Samuel's spiritual leadership resulted in spiritual revival and military victories for a nation besieged by a hostile enemy. This week's lesson ought to challenge us to keep communication with God open and to maintain spiritual priorities for our lives.

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