

The Call of Samuel to be a Prophet

I Samuel 3

From the NLT Version, with slight rephrasing from the Hebrew, **bolding for emphasis and [comments]**
By Bill Bjoraker, Ph.D.

Samuel continues in service in Shiloh. Eli, the high priest of Israel, gave Samuel basic daily tasks like lighting and extinguishing the menorah. Samuel was obedient and responded well. Eli, who saw the hand of God on his life, was his mentor. The call of God comes to the youth. God speaks; Samuel is not sure who is speaking. He is taking baby steps in hearing God. God continues to speak until Samuel hears Him. Watch how Samuel finally comes to know it is Yahweh speaking to him.

The contrast between the spiritual progress of Samuel and the spiritual regress of Eli is apparent. We witness the beginning of the fall of the House of Eli, as we see the rise of Samuel the Prophet. A regime change is happening in Israel, as God transfers the authority from Eli to the young prophet Samuel. The storyteller gives us a Hebrew chiasm structure here to highlight the rise and fall:

A. Absence of the Word of the LORD (3:1)

B. Eli's Fading Powers (3:2)

C. Three Divine Calls to Samuel (3:3-9)

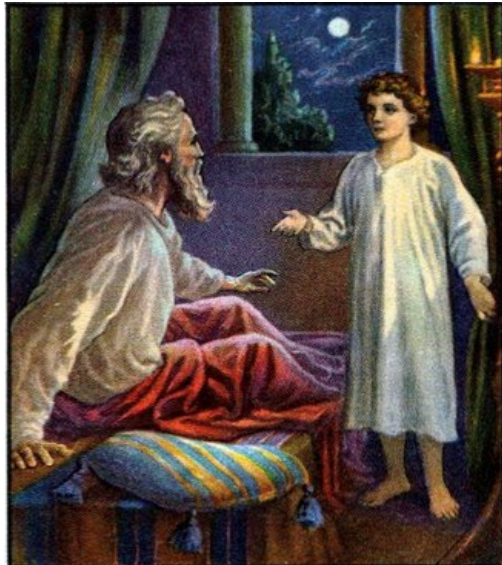
D. A Revelatory Word to Samuel (3:10-15)

C1. Eli's request for Samuel's Report (3:16-18)

B1. Samuel's Rising Powers (3:19a)

A1. The Return of the Word of the LORD (3:19b-4: 1a)

God reveals and confirms more of His intended destiny to Samuel—he will be a prophet to “All Israel.” Note the spiritual formation in Samuel, his character qualities. The one whose life was itself an answer to prayers heard by God, who is named Shmu-El (“One heard of God”) now hears God, as a true son of Israel who hears —Sh’ma Israel!



3:1 Meanwhile, the youth Samuel ministered to the LORD under Eli. Now the Word from the LORD was rare in those days, and visions were quite uncommon.

2 One night Eli, who was almost blind by now, had gone to bed.
3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle near the Ark of God. **4** Suddenly the Lord called out,

"Samuel!" [Shmu-el, in Hebrew- "One heard of God"]

"Here I am" [Hebrew- **Hi-nay-nee!**] Samuel replied. **5** He got up and ran to Eli. *"Here I am. Did you call me?"*

"I didn't call you," Eli replied. *"Go back to bed."* So he did.

6 Then the Lord called out again, **"Samuel!"**

Again Samuel got up and went to Eli. *"Here I am. Did you call me?"*

"I didn't call you, my son," Eli said. *"Go back to bed."*

7 Samuel **did not yet know the LORD** because the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. **8** So the LORD called a third time, and once more Samuel got up and went to Eli. *"Here I am* [Hebrew- **Hi-nay-nee!**]. *Did you call me?"*

Then Eli realized it was the LORD who was calling the boy. **9** So he said to Samuel, *"Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'"* So Samuel went back to bed.

10 And the Lord came and **stood** and called as before,

"Samuel! Samuel!"

And Samuel replied, *"Speak, your servant is listening."* [**Dah-bayer, ki Shomay-ah Avdecha**]

-Finish oralizing story here.

11 Then the LORD said to Samuel, *"I am about to do a shocking thing in Israel, so shocking that whoever hears it, both his ears will ring. **12** I am going to carry out all my threats against Eli and his household, from beginning to end. **13** I have warned him that judgment is coming upon his family forever, because his sons are blaspheming God and he has not restrained or disciplined them. **14** So I have vowed that the sins of Eli and his sons will never be atoned for by sacrifices or offerings."*

15 Samuel stayed in bed until morning, then got up and opened the doors of the Tabernacle as usual. He was afraid to tell Eli what the LORD had said to him. **16** But Eli called out to him, *"Samuel, my son."*

"Here I am," [**Hi-nay-nee!**] Samuel replied.

17 *"What did the Lord say to you? Tell me everything. And may God strike you and even strike you dead if you hide anything from me!"* **18**
So Samuel told Eli everything; he didn't hold anything back. *"It is the Lord's will,"* Eli replied. *"Let Him do what He thinks best."*

19 As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him, and everything Samuel said proved to be reliable [**literally, "He let none of his words fall to the ground"**]. **20** And **all Israel**, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, knew that Samuel was confirmed as a faithful prophet of the Lord.

21 The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, for the LORD was revealed to Samuel in Shiloh through the Word of the LORD, and Samuel's word was upon **all Israel**.

The Call- Sh'ma Israel!
Hushed was the evening hymn;
The temple courts were dark;
The lamp was burning dim
Before the sacred ark;
When suddenly a voice divine
Rang through the silence of the shrine.
The old man, meek and mild,
The priest of Israel slept;
His watch the temple child,
The little Levite kept;
And what from Eli's sense was sealed,
The Lord to Hannah's son revealed.
O give me Samuel's ear,
The open ear, O Lord,
Alive and quick to hear
Each whisper of your word,
Like him to answer at your call
And to obey You first of all.

Questions for Reflection of Group Discussion

1. What symbolic and spiritual meaning do you see in Eli's "eyesight growing dimmer" (3:2)? And for Israel in the phrase, "the lamp of God had not yet gone out (3:3)?"
2. Both Eli and Samuel heard the sound of the voice. One finally "listened." Discuss the difference between hearing sounds and listening in the Hebraic sense of "Shema Israel."
3. As we read the Bible, is God usually observed to be speaking to people, or writing to people. Does the Bible = the Word of God? Are they exactly the same?

4. Young Samuel experientially “did not yet know the LORD” (3:7). Have you ever been unsure of the voice or call of God in your life (who hasn’t?). What can you learn from God’s call(s) to Samuel that gives you assurance that you will finally hear Him, and know his call on your life (if you have not already)?
5. Reflect on the following conversation a friend of mine had with his little daughter, Gracie, *"Dad, I don't hear God's voice," Grace told me recently.*
"Grace, do you think it's because He's not talking, or you're not listening?" She frowned a bit and said, "I'm not sure."
"Well, when I say, 'Grace, would you like some ice cream?' do you hear that?" Her face lit up with expectation, "Ya, sure!"
"And when I say, 'Grace, clean your room,' do you hear that?"
"Umm, I dunno," she replied.
"Honey, I think our problem is not that we can't hear God but that we're not very interested in hearing Him."