

# Scripture Lesson Text

**1 SAM. 3:1** 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.

**2** 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;*

**3** 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;*

**4** That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here *am* I.

**5** 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.

**6** 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.

**7** Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.

**8** 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.

**9** 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.

**19** And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

**20** And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established *to be* a prophet of the LORD.

**7:3** 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.

**4** Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.

**5** And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.

**10** 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.

**12** Then Samuel took a stone, and set *it* between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

# Samuel's Call and Ministry

Lesson Text: I Samuel 3:1-9, 19-20; 7:3-5, 10, 12

Related Scriptures: I Samuel 1:1-28; Judges 2:16-23

TIMES: about 1093 B.C.; 1047 B.C.

PLACES: Shiloh; Ramah; Mizpeh;  
between Mizpeh and Shen

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"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).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **SAMUEL'S CALL FROM GOD— I Sam. 3:1-9, 19-20**

The circumstances of the call (I Sam. 3:1-3). Our lesson introduces Samuel as a child, carrying out duties at the tabernacle for Eli, the high priest. Although humble and inconspicuous at this point in his life, Samuel was to become a towering figure in the history of Israel. He marked the period of transition from the judges to the monarchy. He is known to us as the last judge, the first named prophet after Moses, and the anointer of kings.

Samuel was from the outset a special child, born in answer to the prayer of the childless Hannah. She vowed that a son born to her would be dedicated to the Lord and under a Nazarite vow for his entire lifetime (I Sam. 1:1-11). True to her word, Hannah took Samuel to the tabernacle at Shiloh after she had weaned him. There she presented him to Eli for service (vss. 24-28).

The days in which Samuel grew up were difficult ones. Politically, Israel was a loose confederation of tribes, sometimes warring against each other, and having no central authority to

organize them against their enemies (cf. Judg. 21:25). Under these conditions, the Philistines threatened to overwhelm them.

Israel's spiritual condition was deplorable. The aging high priest, Eli, could not control his wicked sons, who brought the priesthood into disrepute through dishonest and immoral acts (I Sam. 2:12-17, 22-25). Moreover, "the word of the Lord was precious (rare) in those days; there was no open vision" (3:1). God did occasionally send a prophetic message, as He did to Eli (2:27-36), but the nation as a whole did not receive special revelation.

These were the general circumstances in which God called Samuel. The immediate circumstances at the tabernacle are given in our text as well. The call came at night, "when Eli was laid down in his place" (I Sam. 3:2).

Samuel himself had lain down to go to sleep (I Sam. 3:3). This does not mean he slept in the tabernacle proper, but within its courtyard, where dwelling places for priests had been built. No longer a traveling tent, the tabernacle at Shiloh had taken on some aspects of permanence (see the "doors" in verse 15).

**God's call and Samuel's response (I Sam. 3:4-5).** When the Lord first called Samuel, Samuel answered, "Here am I," but he immediately went to Eli's quarters, which must have been near his. There he repeated his answer, "Here am I; for thou calledst me." It is noteworthy that this boy was so accustomed to obedience that he made himself available promptly, even in the night. It is likely that he had answered such summonses before.

Eli knew that he had not called Samuel, and he told him to lie down again. A sound in the night could have aroused him and given the false impression of a voice; so Samuel returned to his bed.

**Samuel's response to a second call (I Sam. 3:6).** Samuel heard his name called a second time. As before, he immediately reported to Eli. Once again, the aged priest told him to lie down, knowing he had not summoned him.

**The reason for Samuel's response (I Sam. 3:7).** The author here paused to explain why Samuel did not recognize the voice of God. It was because he "did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him." He had received training in how to worship and serve the Lord, but he did not have the intimate knowledge that came through hearing His voice and receiving His revelation. The voice was thus unrecognizable to him.

Samuel's faithfulness and willingness to learn, however, had prepared him for this moment. It is noteworthy that in the previous narrative about the wickedness of Eli's sons, brief statements about Samuel are interspersed that contrast him with them (cf. I Sam. 2:11, 18, 21, 26).

**Eli's advice to Samuel (I Sam. 3:8-9).** When God called him a third time, Samuel again dutifully reported to Eli. By this time the priest surmised that God was speaking to him; so he ad-

vised Samuel that if he heard the call again, he should answer, "Speak, Lord [Yahweh]; for thy servant heareth."

Eli was proved right. The call came to Samuel a fourth time. Samuel answered Him appropriately, and He gave the boy his first revelation (vss. 11-14). And what a revelation it was! It announced the fall of Eli and his household in graphic terms. Samuel feared to reveal it to Eli, and only after Eli threatened him with divine judgment did he disclose it (vss. 15-18).

**The evidence of Samuel's call (I Sam. 3:19-20).** Now that God had a trustworthy and courageous prophet, His words to the nation would no longer be rare. As Samuel grew up, the Lord gave evidence that He was with him. He "let none of his words fall to the ground." This expression, derived from water being spilled and wasted, means that God fulfilled all He had spoken through Samuel. This was one of the signs of a true prophet (Deut. 18:22).

Soon "all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord" (I Sam. 3:20). Dan was the northernmost town in Israel, lying in the uppermost reaches of the Jordan Valley and near the foothills of Mount Hermon. Beersheba, in the Negev region, was Israel's southernmost town, 150 miles from Dan. The expression "from Dan to Beersheba" came to mean the totality of the Israelite nation (cf. Judg. 20:1).

## **SAMUEL'S MINISTRY TO ISRAEL— I Sam. 7:3-5, 10, 12**

**An invitation to repentance (I Sam. 7:3-5).** A number of years passed between the two passages in 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 (4:1-22). After seven months of trouble,

however, the Philistines sent the ark back (5:1—6:18).

During those years, the Israelites “lamented after the Lord” (I Sam. 7:2). The absence of the ark from Shiloh, combined with the Philistine occupation of their lands, led them to search their hearts and yearn for the Lord.

While they were in this frame of mind, Samuel urged the people to repent. This change of heart was essential to a deliverance from the Philistines. But what did repentance entail? First, they were to return to the Lord with all their hearts.

If they were to return with all their hearts, they had to prove it by an outward act. They were to “put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among [them]” (I Sam. 7:3). “Strange gods” means gods of the stranger.

In place of the false gods, the Israelites were to commit themselves to the Lord and serve Him exclusively. Compromise had ruled their region too long, and God detested it.

The people of Israel followed Samuel’s instruction, putting away “Baalim and Ashtaroth” and serving Yahweh alone (I Sam. 7:4).

Samuel had the satisfaction of seeing his people abandon these objects of worship and serve Yahweh alone. Then he ordered a general convocation at Mizpah (“Mizpeh” in I Samuel 7:5), where he promised to pray for them.

**An evidence of forgiveness (I Sam. 7:10).** When the Philistines heard of Israel’s convocation at Mizpah, they sent forces against them. The Israelites, stricken with terror, implored Samuel to continue to pray for them, especially for deliverance (vss. 7-8). Samuel, who also acted as priest, offered a burnt offering to accompany his prayer, which the Lord heard (vs. 9).

Even as Samuel offered the sacrifice, the Philistine army approached (vs. 10). But the Lord “thundered with

a great thunder” against them, confusing and frightening them. The Israelites then seized the opportunity to pursue and inflicted on them a terrible defeat (vs. 11).

**A memorial of deliverance (I Sam. 7:12).** Samuel commemorated the occasion by erecting a monument, which he called “Ebenezer” (the stone of help). It reminded the Israelites that thus far the Lord had helped them. Although the Philistines were by no means subdued, they restored lands they had previously taken and were kept in check during Samuel’s days (cf. vss. 13-14).

Samuel was a man fitted for his times.

—Robert E. Wenger.

## QUESTIONS

1. Where did young Samuel live? Under whom did he serve?
2. What were spiritual conditions like during Samuel’s childhood?
3. What was Samuel doing when the Lord first spoke to him?
4. What qualities prepared Samuel to receive God’s call?
5. How did God’s first message to Samuel test his courage and faithfulness?
6. How did Israel know that Samuel was a true prophet of God?
7. What troubles gave Samuel the opportunity to call Israel to repentance?
8. How were the people to indicate their sincere return to God?
9. How did the Lord honor Israel’s repentance at Mizpah?
10. What did the stone called Ebenezer commemorate?

—Robert E. Wenger.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We should not assume that God is not at work just because we live in dark times (I Sam. 3:1-4).
2. A willingness to receive God's word and respond in obedience is essential for servants of the Lord (vss. 5-9).
3. It should be evident to all that God's people are blessed with His empowering presence (vss. 19-20).
4. Repentance is not simply turning to the Lord; it also means turning away from anything that draws away the devotion He alone deserves (I Sam. 7:3; cf. I Thess. 1:9).
5. Holy lives and prayer are crucial, divinely ordained means to spiritual victory (I Sam. 7:4-5, 10; cf. Eph. 6:10-18).
6. Thanksgiving for the victories God gives us should be a priority in our lives and in our corporate worship (I Sam. 7:12).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What personal qualities prepared Samuel for his prophetic ministry (I Sam. 3:1-9; cf. 2:11, 18, 26)?
2. In what ways was Samuel's call unique? Can you see any parallels between the way God worked in his life and the way He deals with us?
3. What things identify us to others as godly people (3:19-20)? What are some false signs of spirituality?
4. If the Lord were to send a prophet to your community today, what do you think he would call people to turn from (7:3)?

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**"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).**

Are you attuned to God's voice speaking to you? Samuel learned how to hear God's voice and obey Him. Notice how this happened.

First, Samuel had to realize that the Lord was capable of speaking to him. When Samuel first heard his name called, he thought it was the priest, Eli. Eli knew God was capable of speaking to His servant, and Samuel had to learn that truth as well.

Believers today need to realize anew that the biblical God is capable of speaking to them and that He does so through His special revelation, the Word of God.

Second, Samuel had to learn to listen to the Lord when He spoke to him. Samuel's words, "Speak; for thy servant heareth," are basically the words Eli told Samuel to say (I Sam. 3:9). Eli knew that the Lord must be listened to when He speaks. Samuel needed to learn the art of listening to the Lord. His response would be evidence that he had his ears and heart open to what the Lord was saying.

Finally, Samuel had to commit himself to being a servant of the Lord, open to His teaching and ready to do His will.

It is easy for Christians today to forget that they are servants of the living God. It always seems easier to do one's own will.

—Paul R. Bawden.