The Prophet is Called

1 Samuel 3:8-20
SS Lesson for 11/01/2026

Devotional Scripture: Rom 11:25-29

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Prophets filled one of the three essential roles in ancient Israel, the other two being priest and king. Prophets had close relationships with the Lord and received his words directly. Therefore, they spoke in the name of God, proclaiming and interpreting God's words to whomever he directed. Usually, this was to the people of Israel; at other times, it was to ungodly nations. Prophets were often attached to places of worship or royal courts. They spoke truth to power, challenging authorities on ethical grounds when they neglected God's justice or mercy. The Bible shares the stories of many prophets. A short list includes Moses, Miriam, Deborah, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Some served only in prophetic ministry; others had political, military, or leadership roles alongside their prophetic responsibilities. Samuel was one of the latter, being acknowledged today as the last judge of the era of the judges and the first prophet of the era that followed. The time frame of his ministry was about 1067-1043 BC.

Today's lesson picks up partway through what scholars call Samuel's "prophetic call narrative" (compare Exodus 3-4; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1; Ezekiel 1). The chapter begins by noting that it was uncommon for the people of Israel to hear from God directly or to see him (1 Samuel 3:1). God was not absent from the Israelites, but it may have felt like it. A later prophet will describe such times as a "famine" (Amos 8:11-12). Samuel was being raised in the tabernacle, the tent structure that housed the Ark of the Covenant at Shiloh, because his mother had promised him to God. Samuel's mother, Hannah, could not conceive and prayed for God to grant her a child (1 Samuel 1:10). She vowed to dedicate him to God's service if God answered her prayer (1:11). Eventually, young Samuel was old enough to minister "before the Lord under Eli the priest" (1 Samuel 2:11), although he was still a "boy" in that capacity (2:18; 3:1). One night, while Samuel was asleep in the tabernacle, he heard a voice calling his name (3:3-4). Assuming it to be Eli, Samuel hurried over to his elderly mentor's bed to see what he needed (3:5). Eli sent Samuel back to sleep. A little while later, Samuel heard his name called a second time and rushed over to Eli - and again Eli sent him back to bed (3:6). Today's text begins with the third calling of Samuel's name

Key Verses: 1 Sam 3:9

Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

God Calls (1 Sam 3:8-14)

8 And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy.
9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.
10 Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears."
11 Then the Lord said to Samuel: "Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.
12 In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.
13 For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.
14 And 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."

The call identified (8-9)

A calling of God to holiness (2 Tim 1:8-9)

> 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

A calling of God to accomplish His purposes (Rom 8:28)

> 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.

A calling of God into justification and glorification(Rom 8:30)

> 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

A calling of God to live a holy life (1 Thess 4:7)

> 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

The call is responded (10)

Responded by accepting His call (Exodus 3:4)

> 4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."

Responded by recognizing the voice of Jesus (Acts 9:10)

> 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

Responded by recognizing the authority of Jesus (John 20:16)

> 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

Responded like Jesus who offered to sacrifice Himself (Heb 10:5-7)

> 5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, 'Here I am, it is written about me in the scroll, I have come to do your will, O God.'"

The call's message (11-14)

Message of revelation (Amos 3:7)

> 7 Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets.

Message of destruction (Josh 23:15)

> 15 But just as every good promise of the Lord your God has come true, so the Lord will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you.

Message that will be carried out (Num 23:19)

> 19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Message of judgment (Ezek 7:3)

> 3 The end is now upon you and I will unleash my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices.

Prophecy Revealed (1 Sam 3:15-20)

15 So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision.
16 Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son!" He answered, "Here I am."
17 And he said, "What is the word that the Lord spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you."
18 Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him."
19 So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.
20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord.

Samuel's fear of the prophecy (15)

Fear of being a child (Jer 1:6)

> 6 "Ah, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."

Fear that desires someone else to do it (Exodus 4:13)

> 13 But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

Fear of the reception of the prophecy (Dan 4:19)

> 19 Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!

Fear of God's anger (Mic 2:7)

> 7 Should it be said, O house of Jacob: "Is the Spirit of the Lord angry? Does he do such things?" "Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?

Eli's request for the prophecy's message (16-18)

Requested because of knowledge of sin (Judg 10:15)

> 15 But the Israelites said to the Lord, "We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now."

Requested knowing that one must accept the trouble as well as good (Job 2:10)

> 10 He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

Requested because being silent in the past (Ps 39:9)

> 9 I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this.

Requested without complaining (Lam 3:39)

> 39 Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins?

Samuel's establishment as prophet (19-20)

A prophet who spoke as God led him (Acts 3:24)

> 24 "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.

A prophet that God established (Acts 13:20)

> 20 All this took about 450 years. "After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet.

A prophet that God reveals Himself to (Num 12:6)

> 6 he said, "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.

A prophet all of his life (1 Sam 7:15)

> 15 Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

The Call of Samuel (3:1-14)

Samuel is referred to in verse 1 as a **"boy,"** a term flexible enough to use with reference to a newborn infant or to a young man.[10] Here in our text, I understand it to refer to Samuel as a young man, 12 years of age or so. It seems several years have passed since the end of chapter 2 and that chapter 3 picks up in Samuel's teen years.

The writer informs us that, **"word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent"** (verse 1). Men were not listening to God in those days, and God did not speak very often. This "silence" is often a form of divine judgment, and if not broken, would prove to be Israel's undoing (see 1 Samuel 28; Psalm 74:9; Isaiah 29:9-14; Micah 3:6-7; also Proverbs 29:18). We are told that prophecy was rare, so that we see the calling of Samuel as an end to God's silence (see 1 Samuel 3:19-21).

The details provided for us in verses 2, 3, and 7 help us understand the setting in which the events of chapter 3 take place. Samuel is lying down in his appointed place inside the tabernacle, not that far from the Ark of the Covenant, which is inside the Holy of Holies. Eli is sleeping somewhere else, not too distant for Samuel to hear when he calls. As the author informs us, Eli's eyesight has greatly deteriorated, so that his vision is seriously impaired (see also 4:15). With Eli's age, weight, and visual limitations, he needs the help of a boy like Samuel. Samuel can bring Eli a drink of water or run other errands for him. It is only natural for Samuel to assume that a call late at night comes from his master, Eli.

From the writer's statement in verse 3, we know that the call of Samuel comes in the early hours of the morning, for he says that **"the lamp of God had not yet gone out."** The lamp is the golden lampstand, with its seven lamps which are to **"burn continually"** (Exodus 27:20-21; Leviticus 24:2). This does not mean they are to burn 24 hours a day, but that they are always to burn at night. This becomes clear from the words of 2 Chronicles 13:11:

11 "And every morning and evening they burn to the LORD burnt offerings and fragrant incense, and the showbread is *set* on the clean table, and the golden lampstand with its lamps is *ready* to light every evening; for we keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken Him."

There is no need for a lamp to burn in the daytime, but during the day oil is prepared so that the lamps can be lit before dark. They will burn through the night and burn out at daybreak. Since the lamp of God has not yet gone out, we know it is still dark, in the early morning hours, that God calls to Samuel.

Like Eli's sons, Samuel does not know the Lord (compare 1 Samuel 2:12 and 3:7). The difference between Samuel and the sons of Belial is that Samuel does not *yet* know the Lord. It is obvious that Eli's sons did not know God, and never would. It is important to see, however, that Samuel is not saved at the time of his calling. He, like Saul (Paul) in the New Testament (see Acts 9), is saved and called sometime during his encounter with God.[11]

The first two times Samuel is called by God, the young lad assumes he is hearing the voice of Eli, his master. It makes sense, especially if Eli sometimes calls to Samuel for assistance during the night. It is not until the third "call" that Eli finally grasps the situation and realizes that God is calling Samuel to reveal His Word to the boy. At his instructions, Samuel responds to God when He once again calls. A portion of that first revelation (if not all of it) is recorded in verses 11-14.

God announces to Samuel that what He is about to do will cause the ears of those who hear the news of it to tingle, both ears![12] This is no exaggeration. When Eli hears, he collapses, resulting in his death (see 4:18). The message seems to be a personal one addressed to Eli. It is somewhat like the prophecy God reveals to Eli in 2:27-36, except that the prophet is identified. In fact, the prophet will be Eli's replacement, functioning as a prophet, a priest, and a judge. The prophecy of chapter 2 is more distant, having apparently been delivered

several years before Israel's defeat by the Philistines as described in chapter 4. The prophecy given to Eli through Samuel seems to speak of the defeat of Israel and the death of Eli's sons as an imminent event.

The message given to Samuel focuses on Eli's sin more than on the sins of his sons. More specifically, God indicates that He is bringing about judgment on Eli and his house because Eli knows of the sins of his sons and does nothing to hinder them. In contemporary terms, Eli is an "enabler." He facilitates his sons' sinful behavior rather than resist and oppose it.

I am disappointed in the translation of verse 13 in the NASB:

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."

It certainly appears that Eli actually does verbally rebuke his sons as we read in 2:22-25. While the word "rebuke" is absent, this is the sense of his words. I do not believe God judges Eli for failing to rebuke his sons, but for failing to go beyond mere verbal rebuke when they refuse to listen to him.

The context certainly raises questions with the word **"rebuke"** in 3:13, and a concordance study shows these questions have much merit. The term used here is an interesting one. The term is never translated **"rebuke"** elsewhere in the Old Testament (in the NASB) and should not have been rendered this way here. Interestingly, it is the same word found in verse 2 of the same chapter (3) in reference to Eli's failing eyesight. It is used of the eyesight of Moses, which is good (Deuteronomy 34:7), and of the poor eyesight of Isaac (Genesis 27:1) and Job (17:7). It has the normal sense of growing weak, dim, or faint. It is the term used in Isaiah 42:3 and 4 for the *dimly burning* wick, which our Lord will not extinguish, and for the spirit of Messiah, which will not be *disheartened*.

How then did the translators come to render the term **"rebuke"**? I fear they were overly influenced by the rendering of the LXX (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament). The Septuagint (LXX) translators chose to render the Hebrew term in our text with the Greek term *noutheo*, the word Jay Adams employs to characterize his method of counseling, which he calls *nouthetic counseling*. *Noutheo* does mean admonition or rebuke. This, however, does not seem to be the primary sense of the Hebrew term or the meaning required by the context.

I believe the best rendering is found in the King James Version, the New King James Version, the NIV (essentially), the American Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version and others, all of which employ the term **"restrain."** In our text, it looks like the author is making a play on words. Eli's eyes are dim; they can barely see. Eli does not take a dim enough view of his son's actions. Using the analogy of light, his sons' sins are on high beam. He may not be able to extinguish the "light" of their sins, but he can have a dimming effect. He can exercise some restraint -- for example, he can remove them as priests. He can make it difficult for them to sin. Instead, he facilitates their sins, and it is for this that God deals so severely with Eli and his entire house.

Verse 14 indicates that the sin of Eli's house is now beyond repentance; God's judgment is imminent. There is no sacrifice or atonement to set this matter straight, only judgment. In simple terms, Eli and sons have passed the "point of no return." They refuse to repent, and judgment is coming. This is because Eli's sin and the sins of his sons are committed with a "high hand;" they are sins of presumption.

Samuel's Reticence and Eli's Persistence: The Prophecy is Told (1 Samuel 3:15-18)

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. 16 Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." 17 And 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." 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."

When morning comes, Samuel seems to avoid Eli. He goes about his regular routine, just as always, as though nothing has happened. Eli knows better. He knows that God has called Samuel three times during the night. He knows it is God who is about to reveal something to Samuel. He does not know what it is, although he surely has his fears. The last message he received from a prophet was a foreboding one. And so Eli presses Samuel to tell him all that God spoke to him. He does not allow Samuel to hold back. And so Samuel reluctantly tells Eli the whole message.

What is most disturbing, to me at least, is the response of Eli to the prophecy. Eli is informed that judgment is coming, and this time at least, it cannot be stopped. God's judgment cannot be avoided, but Eli can at least repent of his own sins of neglect. Instead, Eli speaks words which have a religious ring and appear to be an

evidence of his submission to the sovereign will of God, but which are really an expression of Eli's willingness to continue on in his sin. What we read is not an expression of faith in God's sovereignty, but an expression of fatalism couched in religious terms.

Samuel's Accreditation as a Prophet of God (3:19-21)

19 Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. 20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. 21 And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

I take it that the first encounter Samuel had with God is his conversion experience, as well as his call as a prophet. As mentioned earlier, this is much like Saul's experience on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9). The author now informs us that this encounter with God, and the resulting reception of a word from the LORD, is the first of many. Verse 21 tells us specifically of a second appearance of God to Samuel at Shiloh, and the inference is that others will follow. It is here, at the first appearance of God to Samuel, that he not only seems to become a believer (in the wording of the author, he came to know the LORD),[15] but he also becomes a prophet. Soon, he will become a priest and a judge as well.

The way a true prophet is accredited is spelled out in Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:14-22. A true prophet speaks in a way that calls upon men to follow God, to obey Him. Furthermore, a true prophet is one whose words come to pass. Our author tells us literally that God let none of Samuel's **words "fall to the ground"** (verse 19). Everything Samuel says will happen does happen. And every Israelite realizes that God's hand is upon Samuel and that He speaks the Word of the LORD. From Dan, the northern-most part of the land, to Beersheba, the southern-most city, all Israel recognizes Samuel as a prophet of God. The silence is broken.

(Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/4-rise-samuel-and-fall-eli-and-sons-1-samuel-31-422)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

In the Old Testament, prophets were called to proclaim God's word. Young as he was, Samuel proved himself to be a faithful prophet, receiving the word of the Lord and declaring all of it despite the difficulty of the message. Perhaps his mother's determination to fulfill her vow to God weighed into his understanding and actions (1 Samuel 1:11, 24-28). Many other Old Testament prophets also faced the challenge of giving hard messages. Jeremiah, for example, spoke God's words to the prophet's personal detriment (Jeremiah 37:1-38:9). However, the honor and respect each prophet gave God in faithfully serving and obediently speaking is worthy of emulation. The human perspective is skewed when it comes to the consequences of sin. God's justice requires righteousness, which results in negative consequences for those who refuse to obey him. Sometimes, what God deems "good" feels ugly, harsh, or disappointing. The prophet's role was often to foretell unpleasant outcomes when people refused to heed warnings. This ministry was difficult—it required great fear of the Lord, a desire to serve him alone, and a substantial love for the people to whom the message pertained. Their call was vitally related to the commandments on which Jesus would say that "all the law and the prophets" hang: (1) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and (2) "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-40). Still today, there is substantial love in a willingness to obey God by proclaiming hard-to-accept truth.