

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

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Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 3

FIRST SAMUEL

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

Abraham and Moses were both called prophets of God (Genesis 20:7, Deuteronomy 34:10). But Samuel was the first prophet of a series of prophets called by the LORD to speak His Word to the people of Israel. Samuel was also the last judge. In this chapter, we learn of the call of Samuel to be the prophet of God, and also the main qualification that God expected of His prophet. The modern counterparts of the prophets of old are the preachers and teachers of the Word today. The same qualification is expected of them.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, for God is a consuming fire. The judgment on erring Eli serves as a warning to us in our walk with and service to God. God has shown that He is no respecter of persons. The events of chapter three happened at a time when the Word of God was rarely proclaimed.

COMMENTARY

The Call of Samuel

SAMUEL by now had grown to be a young teenager. The word "child" (Hebrew *nah'ar*) is used of

David when he slew Goliath (1 Samuel 17:33).¹ Samuel's age was further evidenced by the fact that he "opened the doors of the house of the LORD" (v.15). This would probably be the folding doors of the entrance to the holy place where the "lamp of God" (v.3) and the table of shewbread were placed. The shewbread comprised "twelve cakes" and they had to be replaced with fresh ones each week on the day of the Sabbath (Leviticus 24:5-9). As a young teenager, some of these responsibilities and duties could have been assigned to Samuel by Eli. Samuel had been faithful in discharging these duties. One must first be faithful in smaller things before greater and bigger things are assigned.² God assesses a servant by his faithfulness rather than by how much he has accomplished. It is not the result that counts but the manner in which every deed is done, whether it is with or without faith. Samuel was now ready for greater things.

The Word of the LORD was "precious" or rare in those days. There was "no open vision", meaning that there was no revelation given by God openly to Israel. The reasons were twofold. Firstly, this was the period of Judges where every man simply did what was right in his own eyes. Secondly, the priesthood was corrupt and wayward.

When Samuel heard a voice calling him, he did not know that the voice was from the LORD. The time

¹ 1 Samuel 17:33 And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a **youth**, and he a man of war from his **youth**. David was probably about 17 years old.

² Compare Luke 19:17 And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been **faithful** in a very **little**, have thou authority over ten cities.

had come for God to reveal His will and purpose through prophets.

Eli's eyesight was failing and Samuel must have been attending to him constantly. Eli was lying down in the temple, together with Samuel who was sleeping. Then the LORD called Samuel. It was an audible voice for Samuel woke up. He thought that Eli was calling for him, and he ran to Eli, saying, "Here am I; for thou calledst me" (3:5). Eli replied that he did not call for him and told him to go back and sleep. This was repeated three times. On the third occasion, Eli sensed that it was the LORD who had called Samuel. The lack of an open vision from the LORD made it difficult for Eli to figure out that it was the LORD on the first two occasions.

Finally after the third time, Eli instructed Samuel on what he should do when he hear the call again. He was instructed to say, "Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth" (the word 'heareth' includes 'to obey'). The divine commentary records that Samuel "did not yet know the LORD" (3:7). Although Samuel had been serving in the temple under the supervision of Eli, he had not yet known the LORD in a personal way. He had not received God's Word by divine revelation or vision. Eli helped Samuel to discern the call of the LORD.

The fourth time, the *LORD came, and stood, and called Samuel* (3:10). This means that the LORD appeared to Samuel. It was not a dream. Now Samuel not only heard the voice of the LORD calling out his name, he could see the LORD. There was both voice and vision. This is a *theophany* – God appeared in human form. This was a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord

Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead.³ Samuel responded exactly as Eli had taught him.

The Judgment on the House of Eli

The LORD gave a very difficult message to Samuel. The contents of the message concern the judgment of Eli and his house. It was a reiteration of what the "man of God" had foretold to Eli (2:27-34). The LORD said that He would perform a thing that would ring in the ears of everyone that heard about it. God would choose the day when He would judge Eli and his descendants. The judgment would be certain and irrevocable. The LORD expressed it thus: "when I begin, I will also make an end" (3:12). God had spoken of His purpose and He would bring what he had begun to its conclusion.

The LORD further told Samuel that Eli knew about his sin and the sins of his sons. Eli did nothing about it. He did not restrain his sons for their vile sins against the LORD. He had honoured his sons above the LORD. Eli was guilty of the sin of presumptuousness (literally, 'with a high hand'), which God condemned (Numbers 15:30-31).⁴ He had allowed his sons to continue to do their abominable deeds, ignoring the

³ The LORD appeared to Abraham with two angels: Genesis 18:1 And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; 2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,

⁴ Numbers 15:30 But the soul that doeth ought **presumptuously**, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same **reproacheth the LORD**; and **that soul shall be cut off from among his people.** 31 Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

commandments of the LORD. His children had made themselves “vile” or “accursed”. The “iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever” (3:13). For this kind of grievous offence, there was no atonement and the death penalty would be applied. The nature of the sin was too serious and heinous in the sight of God. This is an example of the kind of sin which John mentioned as a sin “unto death” (1 John 5:16-17).⁵

Samuel Reported the Whole Truth

After the LORD had spoken to Samuel, he *lay until the morning* (3:15). It was not mentioned that he went back to sleep. It would be quite natural for him to stay awake after what he had heard from the LORD. Samuel must have thought through the rest of the night till morning. Eli was his spiritual mentor and had been like a father. The impending judgment upon Eli, his family and descendants must have shaken him. Morning had come and it was time to get up and begin his morning task of opening the doors of the house of the LORD.

Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision. It was natural for him to be afraid. The message which he received from the LORD concerning Eli and his household was very severe. Eli was the high priest. He was his benefactor and guardian. But Eli took the initiative of asking him what the LORD had told him. Eli solemnly charged Samuel to tell him “all the things” that the LORD had said to him. He must not hide

⁵ 1 John 5:16 If any man see his brother **sin** a **sin** which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that **sin** not unto death. There is a **sin** unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. 17 All unrighteousness is **sin**: and there is a **sin** not unto death.

anything from him. If he did not tell everything to him, God would judge him (3:17). In this regard, Eli should be commended. He taught Samuel to tell “the whole counsel of God”. Eli knew the Word but he did not apply it to his own life and that of his sons.

And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him (3:18). Samuel was a bearer of God’s Word. Samuel knew that he would have to tell Eli, the high priest, his benefactor and guardian. It was a test for Samuel who would be called to be the LORD’s prophet — the spokesman for God. Although it was bad news for Eli, Samuel told him everything. Samuel passed the test by speaking the whole counsel of God.⁶ It took great courage to tell Eli the whole truth. This indicates that Samuel had the tenacity to be God’s prophet to the people of Israel. What Samuel did in not adding to or subtracting from the Word of God is the measure of a true prophet of God.

Eli did not doubt that the message was from the LORD. He had been earlier told by the “man of God” (2:27). Eli accepted that the LORD had spoken to him through Samuel. Eli then expressed, “It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.” (3:18). Eli graciously and humbly submitted to God’s discipline and judgment.

Samuel Recognized as God’s Prophet

And Samuel grew (3:19). The focus is now on Samuel. He grew bodily, mentally and spiritually, and in favour with God and with men. The

⁶ Compare him with Paul: Acts 20:27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

LORD was with him, *and did let none of his words fall to the ground*. The LORD'S presence with him gave the assurance that his prophetic messages were from God. All that he proclaimed were fulfilled.

As Samuel matured to manhood, he was recognized by all the people of Israel as the prophet of the LORD. The expression "from Dan to Beersheba" meant the whole country. Dan was the northern most part of Israel, whereas Beersheba was the southern most part of Israel. The distance, as the crow flies, between them is about 150 miles. Samuel's spiritual authority over Israel was established.

The LORD appeared again to Samuel in Shiloh. Shiloh was where The Tabernacle was, and symbolized the presence of God. The LORD revealed Himself to Samuel, teaching and instructing him. The LORD had found a vessel fit for His use. Samuel ministered the Word of God to the people of Israel.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Why was the Word of the LORD "rare" in the days of Eli, the high priest, in Shiloh? Was God reluctant to give His Word to Eli? It is not God's reluctance because the LORD wants us to know Him, love Him and do His will. It is rather a lack of faithful men who would receive and speak the Word of God faithfully. Eli and his sons were found wanting in these aspects. Hence, God raised Samuel. And at the end of the chapter, the LORD established him as His prophet (spokesman).

God called Samuel three times. Samuel did not know that it was the voice of God calling him. Each time he ran to Eli, who was old and almost

blind. Samuel thought Eli had called him. Because Samuel went to him three times, it caused Eli to discern after the third time that it was the LORD who had called Samuel. Thus he was able to give the proper advice and instruction to Samuel. When Samuel relayed the severe message to him, Eli accepted it graciously as from the LORD. God uses many different ways to call someone into the ministry -- His Word, personal experiences, through other people or through communing with God.

Samuel's fear to tell Eli what God had told him was natural. Many preachers and lay leaders may be afraid to tell their friends and loved ones the Word of God, like Samuel. But if they are true preachers and teachers of the Word of God, they must speak the whole counsel of God and not withhold anything or add anything to make the Word of God more palatable or acceptable to sinful men. If they want to be used by God as His spokesman, they have to faithfully speak forth the Word of truth. Samuel passed the test. God found him faithful and true. His faithfulness in speaking the whole counsel of God brought him great blessings.

It was a sad ending for Eli. He had "loved" his sons to the extent that he was incapable of disciplining and restraining them. Eli's failure as a parent was compounded by his failure as the high priest. He failed to discipline his sons severely when they functioned as priests in God's house. They caused the people to despise the offerings which God had instituted for the people of Israel. By Eli's words to young Samuel we conclude that Eli practised double standards. What he demanded from Samuel was not what he demanded from his own sons. Samuel learned

from Eli's good points. Samuel did not allow the bad testimony of Eli's two wicked sons to stumble him.

The blessings which Samuel received from the LORD were tremendous. The LORD was with him. There is no greater blessing than to know experientially in a personal way that the LORD is with us. God is with us as Christ has promised all His children in the Great Commission (cf. Matthew 28:18-20). As Paul says (Romans 8:31): "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*" Samuel was greatly used by God for the blessing of Israel. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 19:7-14.

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 3:11-14; Romans 8:28-30.

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 3:15-18; Acts 21:10-14.

Thursday: 1 Samuel 3:19-21; Hebrews 1:1-4.

Friday: 1 Corinthians 12:6-11; Galatians 1:15, 16.

Analysis

Text	Practical Value
1 Samuel 3:1-10	
1 Samuel 3:11-14	
1 Samuel 3:15-18	
1 Samuel 3:19-21	

Discussion Questions

1. How important is a person's calling in his life? Do you know what is God's calling for you?

2. What attribute can we learn about God in this chapter?

3. Do you think that God was too harsh in judging Eli and his entire household? Give reasons for your answer.

4. What can you learn about listening to God from Samuel's example in this chapter?

5. Do you dare to speak the whole counsel of God? What would make you most afraid?
