

Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" (1 Samuel 3:8b-9)

Lord of all, it is by your call that we come to you and are given new life in you. Help us to hear your call and to respond with eagerness and trust. We thank you for those whom you've placed in our lives who help us to hear you and to follow in faith. We pray this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

When Samuel was a boy, he served the Lord at Shiloh by helping Eli the priest. One night, when Samuel was sleeping on a mat in the tabernacle, the Lord called his name. It was at this young age that God gave the prophet Samuel his first message to speak.

Read: 1 Samuel 3:1-20

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

The Biblical Context

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel and the books of 1 and 2 Kings tell the story of Israel as a united nation and the subsequent division into north and south kingdoms.

In the time prior to the Monarchy, God raised up the great prophet Samuel to guide his people in faith. His mother, Hannah, had been childless, and prayed to God for a baby. Samuel's birth was an answer to her prayer, and she gave Samuel over to Eli's care at the tabernacle. He ministered to God's people his whole life and became a great prophet.

When Samuel grew old, the people clamored for God to give them a king like the other nations around them (1 Samuel 8). God relented, but he warned the people that having a king could easily lead to tyranny.

Discussion Questions

1. This story takes place years before the great temple in Jerusalem was built. Where was the Ark of the Covenant kept at this time (1 Samuel 1:3)? In those days, what served as God's temple, often referred to as the *tabernacle*?
2. How did little Samuel come to minister at the tabernacle with Eli (1 Samuel 1:24-28)? In what sense was Samuel's whole life an offering of thanks to God? How might our lives be lived in the same way?
3. Why do you think Samuel thought it was Eli who was calling him? Do you imagine that you would have made the same assumption? How do you think Eli knew what was happening?
4. Much more is said about the bad attitude and behavior of Eli's sons in 1 Samuel 2:12-17. What sins were they guilty of? In what way would their sinful behavior reflect badly on God himself?
5. What was Eli's sin in the matter of his sons? Why would God hold Eli just as accountable as he did Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's sons? Is this fair? Discuss.
6. Was Samuel's first message positive or negative? Who determines the message of a true prophet? When God speaks his Word in your life, do you expect to always *like* what you hear or read?
7. In 1 Timothy 4:11-16, the Apostle Paul gives direction to his young "ministry assistant" Timothy. What advice and encouragement does he give? Why is this important, especially for faith leaders?