

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

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GOD THE JUDGE

When God Speaks

Some might wonder, “does the LORD speak to us in an audible voice?” God speaking audibly even in the Bible is the exception, not the rule. Today, we will look into one of those exceptions. In biblical instances of God speaking, it is not always clear whether it was an audible voice, an inner voice, or a mental impression.

However, one thing is plain: **Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV)** ¹ *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,* ² *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* Jesus is God’s Word to us. **John 1:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* Through the power of the Holy Spirit, His Written Word speaks to us in ways only God Himself can. One such example that we all can relate to is what Jesus said in **Matthew 11:28 (ESV)** ²⁸ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* The LORD of Hosts has a Word for you no matter where you are in your life or what your need. Read His Word, be guided by His Holy Spirit and see His displays of creation; our God speaks and our God reigns! He hears and answers our prayers.

As we conclude our study of the dark times of the judges of Israel, we come to the young Samuel. He began his life as the answer to his mother Hannah’s prayer. **1 Samuel 1:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ *And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if you will... give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.”*

Hannah’s prayer revealed that she truly was a woman of faith. She set a living example for her son. Her vow to the LORD would mean that she would give her child to grow up under the instruction of Eli, the priest. Eli’s own sons were a disgrace to the ministry and to God. We are told in **1 Samuel 2:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ *Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt.* A man of God eventually came to Eli and told him that since he did not discipline his own sons the privilege of the priesthood would be taken away from Eli’s branch of the priestly family. Eli was guilty of honoring his sons above God by permitting them to continue in their sinful ways. Is there a situation in your life that you are allowing to continue even though you know it is wrong? Be warned with a word from the LORD through the experience of Eli.

Into this sinful priestly family came the young Samuel as his mother in faith left him at the temple. Undoubtedly, Samuel was a ‘breath of fresh air’ to the old priest as the child willingly ministered before the LORD so unlike his own sons. Samuel was from another branch of the priestly family. He would be the last judge of Israel and the first prophet in Israel since Moses. Samuel would also have the privilege of being the first king-maker for Israel.

The story of God's calling of Samuel is most often told to us as children. But, it is very much an 'adult story.' Be prepared to receive God's Word.

Read 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (ESV) ¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. ² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. ⁶ ... ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

We read at the end of the book of Judges in **Judges 21:25 (ESV)** ²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. This clarifies the reason that there was no frequent vision from the LORD among the people. They weren't the least bit concerned with listening for a word from the LORD.

Most conclude that Samuel was about 12 years old by this time. Chapter 2 records that his mother already had five other children. Our pastor has been speaking recently how we are never too old or never too young to serve God. The sons of Eli rebelled against the LORD. Eli's sons ignored his directions. However, Samuel was not being influenced by the bad behavior that surrounded him. Samuel is a good biblical example of a child rising above the sins of his environment and focusing on serving God.

The Lord spoke to Samuel four times, and the first three times, Samuel thought it was Eli calling him. One of the marks of a faithful servant is a listening ear and an immediate response. Yes, Samuel heard and he immediately responded but since Samuel had never heard God's voice, he did not realize who was calling. Though Eli's physical sight was dimming, he had enough spiritual insight to realize that God was speaking to the boy. Eli had already received a discouraging word from a man of God concerning his family. The thought of the LORD now calling to his young protégé must have been frightening and yet, Eli explained to the boy how to respond: *Speak, LORD, for your servant hears*. Each of us must learn to listen to the LORD's voice for our self.

Samuel obeyed Eli, went back to his sleeping place, and waited for the voice to come again. This time God spoke the boy's name twice. Jesus told how the Shepherd calls His sheep by name and gets their attention. Not only that, the Lord came and stood near Samuel as He spoke to him. This experience wasn't a dream or a vision but a manifestation of the presence of the Lord. Notice the little difference in Samuel's response from Eli's instructions: *Speak, for your servant hears*. Samuel did not address the voice as LORD. Verse 7 tells that at this time Samuel did not yet know the LORD. Remember knowing about God is different from having a personal relationship with the LORD. Samuel's life would never be same after He responded to the voice of the LORD.

Be prepared to hear what God has to say.

Read 1 Samuel 3:11-14 (ESV) ¹¹ Then the LORD said to Samuel, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. ¹² On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.”

Although we did not read the passages in chapter 2, this word from the LORD that Samuel received was the same news that Eli had received from the man of God. When God says something it is the same as done. We need to remember the promises of God are true. **John 3:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **Acts 2:21 (ESV)** ²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ **2 Peter 3:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. We do not pick and choose His promises to suit ourselves. His Word remains the same.

The phrase, *two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle* means their ears will quiver and hurt as if both ears were slapped at once. Yes, God's messages can be very painful. The message was painful for Eli but we can also understand how it was painful for Samuel.

Be prepared to deliver God’s message to others.

Read 1 Samuel 3:15-18 (ESV) ¹⁵ Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶ But Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹⁷ And Eli said, “What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told 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.”

The verse says, *Samuel lay until morning*. I suspect this young boy had a sleepless night. The excitement from hearing the voice of God coupled with the sad message for Eli was undoubtedly churning in his mind. Samuel had heard the voice of God and received the message of God, but he still got up early and went back to his old tasks.

Commentators say that Samuel’s opening the doors of the sanctuary so the people could come to sacrifice as usual showed the boy’s great humility. He had a servant’s heart. He was not so full of himself and the vision that he forgot his daily duties. Forgetting our service for the LORD is something that is very easy to do. Jesus said in **Luke 9:23 (ESV)** ²³ ... “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Following Jesus is more about faithfulness and obedience than excitement.

Forgetting our service to our Master shows our lack of concern for His continuing work. The servant's heart honors God in the small things – not just the big ones. **Psalm 84:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.* Being initiated as a prophet of God was a new beginning for Samuel and his remaining true to current duties showed his obedience to the things of God.

He said nothing to Eli about what God had told him. This shows remarkable maturity on the part of a young boy. Many might have been driven by pride from the experience but Samuel kept silent and went about his normal routine. It was only when Eli commanded him that Samuel related the message of judgment that God had given to him.

Samuel gives us a beautiful example of speaking for the LORD even when it is difficult to speak those things. It is not always easy to witness for Jesus and we can never be sure of the reception of the Word. But of this we can be sure: **Philippians 4:13 (ESV)** ¹³ *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Warren Wiersbe comments: “Eli had his faults as we all do, and we must appreciate his positive attitude toward young Samuel, his successor as the spiritual leader in Israel. It isn't every veteran servant who can graciously lay down his tools and let the young apprentice take over. Until the very end of his life, Eli at least had a concern for the Ark of God and the future of the nation; and the news of Israel's defeat and the capture of the Ark caused his death. If Eli had shown some of this concern when his sons were young like Samuel, things would have been different.”

Read 1 Samuel 3:19-4:1 (ESV) ¹⁹ *And 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 was established as a prophet of the LORD.* ²¹ *And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.* ¹ *And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek.*

It was to Shiloh that Hannah had come seeking a son from the LORD. Her son grew up at Shiloh. Shiloh was the first permanent home of the tabernacle containing the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark would be captured by the Philistines because God had forsaken Shiloh as the center of worship.

Samuel was faithful in an unfaithful society. Even those not following the LORD recognized Samuel as a spokesman for the Almighty. Our lesson concludes with the Philistines and the Israelites at war. Eli will be killed and the Ark of God captured. Upon hearing the news, the 98 year old Eli fell backwards off his seat, broke his neck and died. The daughter-in-law of Eli had a son at this tragic time. As she died in childbirth, she named him Ichabod which means the glory of the LORD has departed. Yes, the glory of the LORD had departed from Israel but the LORD's favor remained on Samuel. When the LORD speaks to you, listen, heed His words so that God will be glorified!