

1 Samuel 3

The Calling of Samuel: Light Out of Darkness

INTRODUCTION

People of God today is the first Sunday of the Epiphany season. And during Epiphany we remember how the revelation of God's glory and light breaks forth into the darkness of this world in the person of the Word of God. The prophet Isaiah declared,

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

²*For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.*

³*And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isaiah 60:1-3).*

Epiphany celebrates the revelation of the light of Christ to the nations, a light that exposes sin, overcomes darkness, and calls His people to repentance and faith, and new beginnings.

In the spiritual darkness of Israel, 1 Samuel 3 foreshadows the dawn of hope through Samuel's prophetic call, ultimately pointing to Jesus Christ, the true light who dispels darkness and ushers in God's glorious kingdom.

CONTEXT OF GOD CALLING SAMUEL

After the Man of God prophesied judgment on Eli's house in chapter 2, the story continues with God's call to Samuel. Verses 1–3 set the stage: Samuel, a boy likely between 12 and 19, is faithfully ministering under Eli's supervision. At this time, the Angel of the Lord, who is referred to as the Word of the Lord, had not appeared for a long time, and no prophets were proclaiming God's Word. With divine revelation being rare, Israel had become corrupt and ripe for judgment. Eli's failing eyesight also signified the spiritual darkness of Israel, and the people's blindness to God's truth.

There is an inverse relationship between the revelation of God's Word and the health of society. When people abandon God's Word to do what is right in their own eyes, divine visions diminish, and corruption increases. As Proverbs 29:18 warns, *"Where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint."*

This scarcity of God's revelation in Samuel's day mirrors our own current need for the light of God's word to illuminate the souls of men. The modern secular age began at a time period which scholars call the "enlightenment" but it was actually an endarkenment, as it rejected divine revelation as being trustworthy to guide the sciences, government, and the social order. And as was predicted, the people have only continued to become more enslaved

to the darkness of their sins as a result, and society has spiraled down the drain of its own incoherent irrationality

The only true way out of such spiritual darkness is to return to wide spread faith in the self-revelation of God in the Bible, which alone reveals the truth of the Light and glory of God Jesus Christ.

THE LAMP OF GOD

Yet, verse 3 offers hope that God's presence remained despite the darkness, saying "*the lamp of God had not yet gone out,*"

This indicates that Samuel's call came at night, just before dawn, as the lamps had to be tended to every morning during the time of the morning offering of incense. This symbolized that despite Israel's spiritual darkness, God's presence remained, and a new day of prophetic revelation was about to dawn.

CLOSENESS TO GOD

The text also says Samuel was lying down "*in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was.*" Contrary to some depictions in children's Bibles, Samuel was not sleeping in the Holy of Holies in a sleeping bag by the Ark of the Covenant. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of

Holies, and that only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

Samuel was lying down in the Holy Place itself, so he could tend the lampstand throughout the night to ensure its continued burning. But the detail about Samuel lying *"where the ark of God was"* indicates that Samuel was not only spatially but also spiritually close to God. Thus he is in a prime position to receive the light of the revelation of the word of the Lord.

THE CALL OF GOD TO SAMUEL

In a pattern reminiscent of the calls of Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, Samuel repeatedly responds, *"Here I am."* However, he does not initially recognize the Lord's voice, assuming instead that it is Eli summoning him. Verse 7 explains Samuel's confusion: *"Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him."*

This does not imply Samuel was rebellious or ignorant of God like Hophni and Phinehas, who *"did not know the Lord"* because of persistent sin and hardened hearts. Rather, Samuel's unfamiliarity stemmed from his lack of direct revelation from God.

After the third instance, Eli finally discerns that the Lord is calling Samuel, and instructs him to respond, “*Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.*”

This moment is significant: Samuel, who had faithfully ministered in God’s house from a young age, is now being called into a new phase of his service. While Eli and his household are destined for judgment, Samuel is being raised up as a faithful prophet to carry the light of God’s Word to a darkened and wayward Israel.

This foreshadows the ultimate fulfillment of light and revelation in Jesus Christ. Just as Samuel faithfully ministered in God’s house before being called to prophetic office, so Christ ministered faithfully in His Father’s house (Luke 2:49) before commencing His public ministry at His baptism. Samuel’s call at the dawn of a new prophetic era mirrors Christ’s call to proclaim the kingdom of God—the dawn of a new covenant and the true light of the world breaking forth into darkness.

THE MESSAGE OF GOD TO SAMUEL

On the final call, the Lord came and stood, calling, “*Samuel, Samuel.*” Samuel replied, “*Speak, for your servant hears.*” Appropriately, the name Samuel means “heard of God” or “one who hears God.”

Samuel's call and response echo that of Moses who met God in Exodus 3 at the burning bush, where God called, "Moses, Moses," and Moses answered, "*Here I am.*"

The bible also says that "*the Lord came and stood, calling at other times, 'Samuel, Samuel.'*" There are a couple of things worth noting here.

First, where did the Lord come and stand as He called Samuel? A reasonable inference is that he came and stood near the lamp of God that is in the holy place.

The lamp of God was a large candlestand designed as a stylized. It has seven oil-filled lamps represent the Seven-fold Spirit of God, while also possessing 22 cups which decorated each of the 7 branches. These 22 cups corresponded to the 22 letters of the Hebrew Alphabet, signify the illuminating power of God's Word.

Furthermore, the Lamp's cups possessed an almond design, which carried further significance. In Hebrew, the word for almond (*shaqed*, שָׂקֵד) shares a root with the word for "watch" (*shaqad*, שָׁקַד). This linguistic connection is highlighted in Jeremiah 1:11–12, where God shows Jeremiah an almond branch and declares, "*I am watching over My Word to perform it.*"

The lampstand in the tabernacle was also meant to burn continually from evening until morning (Exodus 27:20–21), symbolizing God's perpetual presence with His people.

As Psalm 121 reminds us, “*He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*”

The lampstand, complete with cups, bulbs, flowers and branches, resembled a burning bush, and served as a constant reminder of God’s watchful presence through His Spirit and Word. This symbolism is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the true light of the world, who watches over His Church and ensures God’s promises.

The parallel is striking: just as Moses was called to lead Israel out of Egypt and physical bondage at the burning bush, Samuel also meets the Lord at a burning bush of the lampstand, and is called to lead Israel out of Philistine oppression and spiritual decline.

The phrase “*the Lord came and stood*” also suggests that Samuel’s role in leading Israel out of spiritual darkness is a journey into the light of God’s glory. In Exodus 34, after Moses asked to see God’s glory, the Lord *descended in a cloud and stood with Moses* on Mount Sinai, revealing His glory in His name and character:

“*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness... but who will by no means clear the guilty...*” (Exodus 34:6–7).

In all three encounters—the burning bush, Sinai, and I by the lampstand—the Lord revealed Himself and His glory

through His Word for the sake of a people trapped in spiritual darkness.

JUDGMENT ON ELI'S HOUSE

The message entrusted to Samuel was one of severe and irrevocable judgment upon Eli's house: Eli's sons, through their blasphemous actions, cursed themselves, and Eli had failed in his duty to restrain them. Therefore, the Lord declared,

"The iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever" – 1 Samuel 3:14.

This underscores a sobering truth: blaspheming and dishonoring God ultimately brings people under a curse – individually, and nationally. Eli's failure as a father and priest sealed the fate of his household, and the nation.

The rejection of Eli's house and the judgment upon his line foreshadow the eventual fading of the old sacrificial system, whose offerings could never truly atone for sin but only pointed to Christ's ultimate sacrifice. As mediator of a new and better covenant, Christ secured eternal redemption through His blood, rendering the old order obsolete (Hebrews 8:6).

With the Word of God coming and standing and revealing Himself to the time of prophetic silence has come to a close. Just as visions were rare during Eli's time, there was

also a 400-year silence between the final Old Testament prophet, Malachi, and John the Baptist. Samuel's ministry ended Eli's priestly line and prepared the way for Israel's monarchy under King David. Likewise, John the Baptist's ministry signaled the end of the Old Covenant and the arrival of the true Davidic King, Jesus Christ (Luke 1:32–33).

THE NEW GATEKEEPER

After the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel, he rose early and opened the temple doors. Though routine, this action holds deeper significance. Eli had sat by the doorpost when Hannah prayed for a son, and Hophni and Phinehas defiled the holy space by sinning with women at the entrance to the temple. Now Samuel, after receiving the Word, opens the doors of the temple at dawn, symbolizing his new role as Israel's gatekeeper. His calling marks the dawn of a new spiritual era—one of renewal and awakening, where the Word of God is going to be more common. Samuel thus assumes the mantle of judge and prophet leading Israel toward righteousness.

Samuel's ministry, however, like most prophets, begins with a hard message of judgment. Prophets arise not when times are good but as covenant lawyers, proclaiming how

God's covenant has been broken and warning of impending punishment.

APATHY

When a prophet declares judgment, it forces a choice upon those who hear the sentence of doom: repent in humility or resign yourself to fate. Tragically, Eli chooses the latter. Many commentators view Eli's response as one of submission to God's will, seeing in it a final flicker of piety: *"It is the Lord; let Him do what seems good to Him"* Or literally, *"Let him do what is right in His own eyes."* However, this response seems more akin to apathy than genuine piety. The same apathy that kept Eli from restraining his sons now prevents him from pleading for mercy. True piety would have driven him to repentance, to fall on his face before God, to cry out for forgiveness. Instead, Eli's words reflect passive resignation—a fatalistic acceptance that mirrors the indifference that plagued his life and leadership.

THE CONFIRMATION OF SAMUEL'S CALL

The chapter then concludes with God confirming Samuel as a prophet by ensuring that none of his words fail, or rather, by establishing all His words. Samuel's growing reputation spread throughout Israel as a faithful messenger of the Lord. This chapter then marks the beginning of a

new era of divine revelation, as God continues to reveal His word through Samuel at Shiloh.

Samuel's ministry is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, who perfectly reveals God's Word and will. Just as none of Samuel's words failed, Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, speaks with complete authority and truth (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:1-2). Through Christ, God's final and full revelation is made known, and His light shines forth to all nations, establishing the glory of the kingdom of God.

Also, the spread of Samuel's word from Dan to Beersheba reminds us of the success of the Great Commission under Christ, the whole world will be full of the glory of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

CONCLUSION

Today, as we reflect on Samuel's call, we are reminded of a simple yet profound truth: even in times of darkness, God's light still shines. When the word of the Lord was rare and corruption reigned in Israel, God raised up Samuel to lead His people out of darkness and into the light of His truth. Samuel's faithfulness in hearing and proclaiming God's word changed the course of his nation's history.

This story calls us to take action in three key ways:

First, we must never lose hope, even when we see darkness growing around us. The lamp of God had not yet gone out in Samuel's time, and it has not gone out in ours. As long as we have His Word and His Spirit, there is hope for renewal. Our task is to not quench the Spirit of God within us, but to keep fanning the flame of God through hearing God's Word by faith, and living faithfully and closely to the incarnate Word of God through the written Word of God.

Second, we are called to resist the apathy that characterized Eli's life. What is Apathy? Apathy means a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern. It describes an emotional indifference toward things that typically evoke strong feelings or responses. We however, cannot afford to sit passively by, and remain indifferent as our society drifts further from God's truth. Instead, we must have the courage to speak, act, and lead in whatever sphere God has placed us. Like Samuel, we must fear God more than man, trusting that He will empower us to stand firm, even when others around us shrink back.

In the face of God's judgment and impending doom, it is Apathy which says, "There is nothing I can do. Oh well." It abdicates responsibility and submits to hopelessness disguised as pious submission. Our own culture suffers

from this same spiritual disease—apathetic in the face of clear signs of judgment, responding not with repentance but with a hollow fatalism, echoing Eli’s refrain: *“It is the Lord; let Him do what seems good to Him.”*

Just because the Lord uses evil to bring about good does not mean we should resign ourselves to indifference in the face of punishment and judgment. It is not good and right not care about our future and heritage and nation. We are called to care, to speak out, and to seek change, so we do not drift passively toward judgment. “Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound? By no means.” Yet this very attitude—resignation in the face of corruption and incompetence—prevails today among many Christians.

Contrast Eli’s apathy with King Hezekiah’s response when Isaiah delivered a message of impending death. Rather than accepting his fate, Hezekiah turned to the Lord in desperate prayer, pleading for mercy. God heard his cry, relented, and extended his life by fifteen years. He even delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrians. This reminds us that it is never too late to repent—until life itself is gone. Eli could have pleaded for mercy, expressed righteous anger over sin, and executed judgment on his sons as an act of repentance. Such drastic action might have stirred God’s compassion.

But Eli didn't. He remained passive, trapped in the apathy that defined his life, accepting judgment without protest. His story warns us: apathy in the face of evil breeds more apathy, which is itself a sin and a further judgment for sin. True piety is never passive—it calls for humility, trembling at God's word, genuine repentance, and decisive action that bears fruit.

Today, however, in an age marked by weakness and apathy, zeal for the Lord and his good gifts is often condemned by people who are indifferent to their own cowardice and destruction. The apathetic urge people to repent - but not of sin, rather of their passion for righteousness and their desire to awaken others from the malaise of spiritual darkness. But as long as we have breath in our lungs, as long as God watches over us through His Spirit and Word, there is hope, and we will not keep silent. We will not go quietly into the dark. We will take the shine the light of God's Word into the darkness of our apathetic culture, and we will help bring about its repentance and salvation.

Finally, just as Eli failed to restrain the iniquity of his sons, and so allowed them to bring the curse of God upon them, so have our leaders brought a curse upon our nation, and no one has stopped them. Almost everyone in the halls of political and ecclesiastical power have either neglected or

even promoted values that are fundamentally at odds with our Christian heritage. This isn't just about personal moral failings but about the failure of our leaders to rightly steward our nations moral compass for the temporal and spiritual good of the people.

When our leaders care more about the political correctness then correctly doing politics, then we have a problem. A recent example coming out of England, but I would not be surprised if similar things were happening in our country as well. The Government of England had failed to approve an inquiry into Pakistani rape gangs that have been terrorizing girls for almost three decades in England with very little resistance by the people or the police, for fear of the fact that the ethnicity of the suspects would make it look like England was racist for noticing that they have a problem of Pakistani's in their land being too rapey.

“Everyone's been too scared to address the ethnicity factor” said chief inspector Alan Edwards in 2011 to the Times of London Newspaper.¹

And so instead of having a righteous zeal for justice, foolish darkness of political correctness has turned England and much of the rest of Western Civilization into a bunch of Eli's.

¹ <https://www.thetimes.com/imageserver/image/%2Fmethode%2Ftimes%2Fprod%2Fweb%2Fbin%2F5820fb6d-fd644d2e-898e-7ba0d2918437.jpg?crop=3137%2C4037%2C0%2C0&resize=1180>

The judgment on Eli teaches us that passivity in the face of moral decay will only is not an option. We need leaders who are not afraid to speak up about real sins, and who refuse to cower in the face of fake sins of political correctness, which allows girls to be sexually exploited, just like with Hophni and Phineas. We need leaders, like Samuel, who will take decisive, courageous action to restore God's word and sane values to the people, much like Samuel was called to do in his time.

This means advocating for policies that reflect Christian ethics, supporting leaders who stand firm in their faith, and promoting a public discourse that values biblical truth over the fleeting trends of secularism and the ever weakening threats of liberal political correctness.

We must get rid of those who benefit from the liberal status quo, and we must actively support and even help raise up new leaders who will actively work to reverse the moral and spiritual curse we have brought on ourselves. We must raise up leaders who ensuring that our laws, our schools, and public policy and life once again reflect the light of God's Word, without the liberalizing edge that is nothing less than a Satanic attack on the Word of God and Jesus Christ's Lordship over this nation.

As Christians, we must pray for such leaders, but we must also be willing to be those leaders ourselves, in whatever

sphere God has placed us. Whether in our families, our workplaces, or our communities, each of us can contribute to this restoration by standing for what is right, by being the light in a world that increasingly seems to embrace darkness. Let us learn from Eli's mistake and strive to be proactive, not passive, in upholding our faith in Jesus Christ and the Word of God, which is what makes us a nation under God.

May the Light of Christ's Word continue to be revealed in us and through us, to help bring our people out of darkness and into His glorious Light. Amen.