

THE ADULT TEACHER
LESSON 3 ~ THE DILEMMA OF OBEDIENCE
OCTOBER 18, 2020

Background Scripture: I Samuel 3
Lesson Passage: I Samuel 3:10-21 (NASB)

Introduction: God never speaks to us in dramatic ways, but in ways that are easy to misunderstand. Then we say, “I wonder if that is God’s voice?” Isaiah said that the Lord spoke to him “with a strong hand,” that is, by the pressure of his circumstances ([Isaiah 8:11](#)). Without the sovereign hand of God Himself, nothing touches our lives. Do we discern His hand at work, or do we see things as mere occurrences? Get into the habit of saying, “Speak, Lord,” and life will become a romance ([1 Samuel 3:9](#)). Every time circumstances press in on you, say, “Speak, Lord,” and make time to listen. Chastening is more than a means of discipline—it is meant to bring me to the point of saying, “Speak, Lord.” Think back to a time when God spoke to you. Do you remember what He said? As we listen, our ears become more sensitive, and like Jesus, we will begin to hear God all the time.

Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision. Should I tell my “Eli” what God has shown to me? This is where the dilemma of obedience hits us. We disobey God by becoming amateur providences and thinking, “I must shield ‘Eli,’” who represents the best people we know. God did not tell Samuel to tell Eli—he had to decide that for himself. God’s message to you may hurt your “Eli,” but trying to prevent suffering in another’s life will prove to be an obstruction between your soul and God. It is at your own risk that you prevent someone’s right hand being cut off or right eye being plucked out (Matthew 5:29-30).

Scripture Reference: 1 Samuel 3:10-21 (NASB)

10 Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for Your servant is listening.” 11 The Lord said to Samuel, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 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. 14 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.” 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 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.” 19 Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. 20 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.

Topic Explored: “*The Dilemma of Obedience*” ~ We don’t know how old Samuel is when he begins to minister with Eli; but he is probably an adolescent or a young man. The last we heard was that he “grew on, and increased in favor both with Yahweh, and also with men” (2:26). There are two significant phrases in this part of this verse. First, Samuel is ministering to the Lord—doing what Hannah promised God that he would do. Secondly, he is doing so under Eli’s supervision. Eli is a deeply flawed priest and his days are numbered, but he is still the priest in charge of the temple at Shiloh. Eli and his sons have not been faithful, so God has withheld His word. But God has not

absented Himself permanently. He is about to appoint Samuel as prophet, and Samuel will (reluctantly) bring the Word of the Lord to the people.

Memory Verse: *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* (I Samuel 3:15) NASB

Lesson Focus: I Samuel 3:10-21 (NASB)

Verse 10-14 ~ Once again the Lord calls Samuel's name twice. This time Samuel answers, "Speak; for your servant hears." It is the right response. Samuel acknowledges his servant status before the Lord. He also acknowledges the Lord's right to speak and Samuel's need to listen. The Lord promises to do something stunning—something that will get every Israelite's attention—something so dramatic that people will later remember where they were when they heard the news.

Verse 12, refers back to the man of God who rebuked Eli for dishonoring his office and who told Eli that the Lord would soon "cut off your arm, and the arm of your father's house, that there shall not be an old man in your house" (2:27-36). The prophecy was made in the last chapter. Now the Lord intends to fulfill it.

God's intent was that Eli and his family "should walk before me forever" (I Samuel 2:30), but Eli's unfaithfulness has transformed a forever blessing into a forever punishment. It does not appear that Eli was guilty of misusing his office or blaspheming God personally, but he was guilty of allowing his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, to do these things. Hophni and Phinehas "had no regard for the Lord or for the duties of the priests to the people" (2:12-13). They treated the sacrificial offerings as their own personal feeding trough (I Samuel 2:13-16). They "despised the offering of Yahweh" (I Samuel 2:17).

This contempt constituted blasphemy. Torah law prescribes, "he who blasphemes the name of Yahweh, he shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him" (Leviticus 24:16a). If Eli had inflicted proper discipline when they were small, they would not have lost their way so completely. If he had confronted them earlier, no harsh discipline would be required now. Because Eli's sons "despised the offering of Yahweh" (2:17).

Verses 15-17 ~ We can imagine Samuel lying awake all night—troubled by the terrible word that he has heard from the Lord—troubled by the part that the Lord has called him to play in this drama. When morning comes, Samuel begins his day as if it were any other. He opens the doors of the house of the Lord. He no doubt finds solace in his routine. Routines often comfort us in troubled times.

This is Samuel's first experience as a prophet, and he has been given an especially difficult mission. Eli occupies a position at the top of Israelite society. He has charge over the Shiloh temple and its furnishings. He handles the things of God on a daily basis. He performs the sacrificial ministry called for in the law. But, more than that, he has been a surrogate father to Samuel—a good father—a better father to Samuel than to his own sons. It is no wonder that Samuel is afraid to tell Eli of the terrible things that God has revealed to him. It is no wonder that he seems paralyzed.

But Eli, to his credit, is not paralyzed. He hears Samuel stir. He hears the doors opening. He knows that something significant has happened, so he initiates a conversation with Samuel. He wants to know what Samuel has learned in his encounter with God. Eli has heard the rebuke and devastating prophecy of the man of God. He knows that the Lord has revealed something to Samuel, and can imagine that it has to concern him. A thousand possibilities must be going through his mind—all of

them fearful—but he needs to hear the truth. He pronounces a curse on Samuel if Samuel fails to tell him everything.

What enables this letting go is Eli had profound trust in God. Following God's revelation to Samuel, Eli requests that the young Samuel inform him of all that had been spoken by the Lord, holding nothing back. Samuel shares all, including the ending of Eli's house. Eli responds, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to him." (1 Samuel 3:18) Eli's trust in the Lord was perhaps one of his greatest gifts to the young Samuel. At this point, everything Eli had been about was negated yet he is able to offer this profound statement of trust in the Lord. In the end, the most important thing is that God's will be done.

Verse 18 ~ This is the great test of Samuel's prophetic calling—the most difficult thing that he has ever been called to do or will ever be called to do. Young Samuel rises to the occasion, telling Eli everything that he has heard. Eli knows that his sons have committed terrible sins, and he knows that he shares their guilt. He has failed as a father and as a priest. His conscience is weighing heavily on him. He is therefore able to accept God's judgment as just and right. It is a graceful note at the end of a sadly flawed life.

Verse 19-21 ~ God is present in Samuel's life and in his words. Samuel has been faithful to God, so God blesses his words and his works. Dan and Beersheba are respectively the northernmost and southernmost cities of Israel, so from Dan to Beersheba is a conventional way of saying "throughout the whole land."

Let's talk about it. . .

- 1. What positive mentoring characteristics do we see in Eli?** *Possible Answer: First, consider how Eli passively got out of Samuel's way. Once it was established that it was God calling Samuel, Eli gave simple instructions and let the boy encounter God on his own. Eli demonstrated masterful mentoring by not intruding. He stepped out of the picture. He sent Samuel back to listen to God alone. Second, Eli made no attempt to re-state, interpret, re-interpret, or control the negative message Samuel heard from God. Even though God's message to Samuel, and the boy's own growth in leadership, ultimately undermined Eli's leadership, Eli let God's plan play out. Nothing in the text indicates that he resisted God's new direction under Samuel's leadership. Eli is a mentoring hero – he reminds us that the key to mentoring is not always in what we do, but it is sometimes in what we don't do!*
- 2. What are some other things we see about Eli that is worthy of reflection?** *(Possible Answers: 1) Eli was a man of prayer who was able to eventually recognize what was occurring and then give good instruction to the young man. 2) Eli put what was in Samuel's best interest before his own. 3) Eli trusted in God.*

Making it personal:

Closing Prayer: *Lord God, Almighty Father, we thank You for Your care and love. Please allow us to let Your love surround us and cast out any fear or doubts. Help us to live in love with You, accept Your will for our lives and give us obedience to Your revelation. May we trust in the way You direct us to go. In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen!"*