

1 SAMUEL 3

3:1

The author of 1 Samuel wanted to make it clear that the events surrounding Samuel's prophetic call were extraordinary. That "there was no open [frequent] vision" implies that the Lord's people were not following the covenant path. Because of this, the Lord would call Samuel to become His spokesperson.

3:2-9

The Lord called to Samuel three times in the night before Samuel understood and answered. This motif of speaking three times was repeated on other occasions when the Lord wanted to open communication with His people. In 3 Nephi 11, Jesus spoke three times to the remaining Nephites before they were able to understand him. Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith three times in one night to repeat the message the Lord had for him.

It is significant that the narrator mentioned that Samuel "did not yet know the LORD." Samuel had proven his loyalty and determination by serving in the tabernacle, but he was still a young man. Eli, who had been condemned for disobedience, still held the authority of the high priest, so he was the one who came to understand that the Lord was speaking to Samuel and who instructed the youth to respond to the Lord.

3:10

Samuel's name means "heard of God" or "God hears." A play on Samuel's name runs throughout the story but is especially accentuated here: God heard Hannah's prayer to give her a son, and that son (Samuel)

now hears God. Furthermore, there is the powerful contrast that Eli, who is blind, teaches the young prophet how to hear God.

3:11–14

The Lord told Samuel that the chain of authority had been broken because of Eli’s disobedience and because of the sins of Eli’s sons. Through Samuel, the Lord would “do a thing in Israel,” meaning that He would speak to Israel through a new order of prophets starting with Samuel. Eli’s household and the power of the priests would decrease.

3:18

After Samuel told Eli what the Lord had said, Eli’s simple response demonstrated his acceptance of his fate.

3:19–20

Just as Samuel’s mother, Hannah, lifted up her words and heart to the Lord and gave thanks for sending her a son, now the narrator lets us know that the Lord’s promise to Hannah and to Samuel would also be lifted up so that God’s people would hear. Samuel became the established prophet.

Although several individuals before Samuel were called by the Hebrew word *navi* (“prophet”)—for example, Abraham, Moses, and Miriam—it was with Samuel that the biblical prophetic tradition started. Jewish tradition also considers Samuel to be the first prophet. See, for example, Peter’s speech in Acts 3:24: “Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days” (New King James Version).

3:21

The repetitive phrase “the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD” simply means that the Lord spoke to His people through His prophet.

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