

THE CALL OF GOD TO SAMUEL AND HIS FIRST PROPHETIC MESSAGE: A LESSON ON GOD’S CALL TO SERVICE 1 SAMUEL 03:01–10

Introduction

People hurt and suffer all over the world today. Needs abound at every turn. Some people are hungry and thirsty, with little or no food or water. Other people are sick, diseased or injured due to some accident. Still others are uneducated or untrained and unable to earn an adequate living. Some people are emotionally or mentally disturbed, depressed, discouraged, consumed with guilt or grief, broken-hearted or gripped by anxiety and stress. There are others who are bankrupt or in financial trouble. And still others who are lonely and empty, lacking satisfaction, fulfillment, purpose, meaning or significance in life. Many are lost, having little or no contact with God. They are without God in this world, sensing that God is far off in space, unable to be reached and unwilling to truly help when they are suffering and in pain.

This is the condition of so many persons throughout society, some within every community of the world, your community and my community.

But note this wonderful truth: God issues a call to believers, a call for us to arise and go forth to meet the needs of the world. When that call comes — when God speaks to our hearts and says, “You are to arise and go forth” — we must respond; we must arise and go forth to help meet the desperate needs of this world.

The call of God is the wonderful subject of this passage of Scripture. God calls men and women, boys and girls to step forth and serve in ministering to the needs of people. In the present passage, a young boy is called to serve God, the young boy Samuel. This is: *The Call of God to Samuel and His First Prophetic Message: A Lesson on God’s Call to Service*, 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a.

- I. The need for God’s call (vv. 1-2).
- II. The call of God and the need to respond to God’s call (vv. 3-10).
- III. The message of God’s call: Judgment (vv. 11-18).
- IV. The proof of God’s call (vv. 3:19-4:1).

I. 1 Samuel 03:01–02 *The Need for God’s Call*

There was a desperate need for God to call someone to step forth and lead His dear people. Just why is clearly stated in the three reasons spelled out by the Scripture and outline:

1. Samuel was still young and tender-hearted (v. 1). Ever since childhood Samuel had been faithfully serving the LORD, assisting and learning from Eli, the High Priest. Now Samuel was no longer a small child (2:21, 26). He was a young man, a vigorous
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youth ready to enter manhood. Thus, it was time for God to issue a call to Samuel for service, time for a very special relationship to be established between God and Samuel. Samuel was hereafter to know the LORD personally and intimately. The young man was now to be set apart by God, set apart to begin his own ministry among God's people.

2. A prophet was desperately needed, for God's Word and visions were rare during the period of the judges (v. 1). As the last verse of the great *Book of Judges* says:

Jud 21:25 *In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.*

Samuel was born during the days of the judges, and during those days there was no ruler. There was a terrible vacuum of leadership. No person seemed to have the moral character or the willingness to step forth and lead God's people in the ways of righteousness and justice. Every person did whatever seemed right in his own eyes, doing what he wanted when he wanted. There was no moral leader in Israel, not even among the priests — no leader who was obeying God's commandments and whose heart was full of mercy and justice. And the Israelites were not willing to acknowledge any king or ruler; either human or divine. Wickedness ran rampant, with every person forsaking God and doing his own thing. The most horrible evils imaginable were being committed by the people of that day:

=> adultery	=> brutality	=> child and spousal abuse
=> gang rape	=> savagery	=> terrorist attacks
=> homosexuality	=> kidnapping	=> rebellion
=> sexual perversion	=> mob violence	=> war
=> murder	=> drunkenness	

Vile, shameful and wicked behaviour was a constant threat to the people of Samuel's day. A cesspool of evil permeated society, infecting most families and influencing practically every person.

This was the reason there was no prophet in Israel, the reason God's Word was so rare in those days. There were very few committed and faithful persons. Few believed and obeyed God. Few loved and followed after God. For this reason, there was no person available for God to call and set apart to be a prophet among His people. Not until now, not until Hannah's renewed commitment and prayer, not until the birth of her son Samuel. But now, there was a young man who loved the LORD and who was following after the LORD, serving Him wholeheartedly. A young man whose mother had set him apart and given him to the service of the LORD, the young man Samuel. The word of the LORD had been rare because of the wickedness and lawlessness of the people. But now because of Samuel's faith and total commitment to the LORD, the Word of God could be proclaimed anew to the people.

3. A replacement was desperately needed for Eli. Eli was weak and almost blind (v. 2). Physically, he could barely see and move about to carry on his ministry. And tragically, for years he had been spiritually blind. He had condoned the wicked behaviour of his sons who were the two major priests serving with him at the Tabernacle of the LORD; and he apparently had participated to some degree in their wickedness (see notes, 1 Sam 2:12-36). Because of Eli's spiritual carnality and weak physical condition (he was aged and soon to die), it was time for God to issue the call for a replacement. That call was to be issued to Samuel.

Thought 1. Prophets are needed today, men and women who will take the Word of God to the world. Wickedness, immorality and lawlessness are running rampant throughout society, contaminating and influencing almost every human being. If the truth of God's Holy Word, His commandments, have ever needed to be proclaimed, it is today. His Word must be proclaimed to a lost and dying world.

Who will step forth and become a prophet for God? What man? What woman? What boy? What girl? Who will step forth, believing and totally committing his or her life to Christ? Who will hear the call of God and become a prophet, a dynamic witness to a needy, lost and dying world?

Mat 28:19-20 *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Mark 16:15 *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."*

John 4:35-36 *"Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest."*

Acts 5:20-21 *"Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin — the full assembly of the elders of Israel — and sent to the jail for the apostles.*

Acts 18:9-10 *One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."*

Acts 22:14-15 *Then he said: "The God of our fathers has chosen you [Paul], to know his will, and see the Righteous One, and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard."*

2 Tim 2:2 *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

Titus 2:15 *These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.*

Isa 43:10 *“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.”*

II. 1 Samuel 03:03–10 The Call of God and the Need to Respond to God's Call

There was the call of God and the need to hear and respond to God's call. A graphic description of Samuel's encounter with the LORD is given in these verses:

1. God's call came to Samuel at night, came after he and Eli had gone to bed (v. 3). Samuel was lying down in the temple, close to the Ark of God that symbolized God's holy presence. The lamp of God, the golden lampstand that was located in the Holy Place, had not yet gone out. Apparently, Samuel slept close by the lampstand, close to the entrance that led into the Most Holy Place where the Ark of God was kept. It was sometime during the night that the call of God came to the young man Samuel.
2. The call of God was given to Samuel repeatedly, time and again (vv. 4-8). God issued His call to Samuel four different times, but Samuel misunderstood the call the first three times. He thought the voice he was hearing was that of Eli, merely a human voice. Each time Samuel ran to Eli saying, “Here am I.” But each time Eli responded that he had not called Samuel and instructed him to go back to bed.

Note why Samuel did not respond to God's call: because he did not yet know the LORD and could not discern the call of God (v. 7). He knew the written Word of the LORD, but he did not yet know the LORD personally. He did not have a personal, intimate relationship with the LORD. He did not yet know how the LORD reveals and speaks to the human heart.

3. There was a certain response demanded by God's call, a response that Samuel needed to learn (vv. 9-10). No doubt, this was the purpose for God's repeated call to the young man. After God issued His third call, it dawned upon Eli that God was perhaps issuing a call to Samuel. Consequently, Eli instructed Samuel on how to respond to God's call. He was simply to respond, “Speak, LORD, for your servant hears and is listening.” Thus when God issued His fourth call, Samuel responded exactly as he had been instructed: “Speak LORD, for your servant hears and is listening” (v. 10).

Thought 1. The call of God demands a positive response; therefore, we must never reject it. At first, we may not understand God's call, just as Samuel did not understand. But when the call is repeated time and again, we must hear and listen to the call. We must submit ourselves, surrender our lives to serve God. Too many persons have rejected God's call, turning away and refusing to serve God. As the Scripture says, many have been called, but few chosen. Many have been called...

- to accept Christ as their Saviour and LORD
- to turn away from some fleshly, carnal sin
- to rededicate their lives and live wholeheartedly for Christ
- to serve in the ministry
- to serve in missions
- to minister to the poor
- to enter a certain profession
- to prepare and secure education for a certain task
- to earn money and give sacrificially
- to witness to a certain person or group
- to write in their wills some gift of money, property or an entire estate to the cause of Christ

But when God called, they shut their ears and hardened their hearts, turning away. Almost every time a body of people gathers together, there are people present who have been called by God to make a specific decision. Yet they have refused, rejecting the call of God.

When God calls, there is a specific response demanded. The required response is straightforward and clear-cut: "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears and is listening." Or, very simply, "Here am I LORD. Send me."

Acts 13:2 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 16:9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Acts 26:14-19 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. (See also Acts 9:1-16).

Gen 12:1-4 *The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.*

Exo 3:10-11 *"So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"*

Jud 6:14-15 *The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."*

Isa 6:8 *Then I heard the voice of the LORD saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*

Jer 1:4-8 *The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." "Alas, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young." "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.*

Jona 1:1-3 *The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD. ■*