

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a

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1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a

Verse 3:1

¹ The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

- Eli, Israel's High Priest, and his family were under God's judgment (see chapter 2). Under his misguided leadership, the people of Israel were not being fed by God's word. So, each man did what seemed right in his own eyes. Since the priests and the people were not listening for or following the word of the Lord, God did not speak! It was a dark time in Israel's history.

Verses 2-5

² One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am."⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

- Eli was physically weak. He was old and blind.
- The "lamp of God" was the golden lampstand described in Exodus 25:31-40. According to the Ceremonial Law, Leviticus 24:1-4, this was to be an eternal flame tended by the priests. In Eli's day, the flame was allowed to go out in the early morning hours and was tended by Samuel, a boy who was not of the priestly family. It was, apparently, common practice to allow the flame to go out.
- Eli was sleeping! He was physically sleeping, but his lax attitude towards the things of God is clearly illustrated here. He was spiritually sleeping, too.

- Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle. In his sleep, he heard a voice calling him and, thinking it was Eli who called him, Samuel went to Eli and asked him why he called. Eli told Samuel that he had not summoned him and instructed the boy to go back to sleep.
- Notice that Samuel’s response, “here I AM,” contains the divine name given by God to Moses (see Exodus 3). While Samuel goes to Eli, without knowing what he is doing, he responds to God. He is willing to serve God, but was unenlightened as to who is calling for him.

Verses 6-9

⁶ Again the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

“My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.”

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸ A third time the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

- The scene is repeated twice more. Samuel is awakened by a voice which he thinks is Eli’s.
- Samuel is not aware of who calls him, because he does not yet know YHWH or YHWH’s word.
- The third time this happens, Eli realizes that YHWH is calling Samuel. He instructs Samuel to respond to YHWH saying, “Speak, Lord for your servant is listening.” Samuel goes back to bed as instructed.

Verses 10-14

¹⁰ The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

¹¹ And the LORD said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. ¹² At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³ For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to

restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering'.

- A fourth time YHWH spoke to Samuel. This time Samuel answered as he had been told to do by Eli. This time YHWH told Samuel that His judgment (see 2:27-36) was about to fall on Eli's house.

Verses 15-18

¹⁵ Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, ¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son."

Samuel answered, "Here I am."

¹⁷ "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."

- Having heard YHWH's message for Eli, Samuel lay down in his bed until morning. The text does not say that he slept. In the morning, the boy, Samuel, opened the Tabernacle. Again, he who is a boy and not of the priestly family, is doing the work of the priests. Samuel is reluctant to share the message he has received from YHWH with Eli.
- Eli summons Samuel and demands that Samuel share the message he has received from YHWH. Note that Eli knows who was calling Samuel. He is not spiritually dead.
- Samuel told Eli what God had said. And Eli's response is, "OK." His reaction is not repentance. He simply accepts it and lets things remain as they are. He is unwilling to act according to his office and has no regard for the word of the Lord.

Verses 19-4:1a

¹⁹ The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

4 And Samuel's word came to all Israel.

- There has been a shift. Samuel is in God's favor and functions as a prophet. He tells Israel the word of the Lord. The Lord has moved away from Eli and speaks to Samuel.

- Samuel's message reached all of Israel. He is God's man. The hand of God is upon him.

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