

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 449

1 Samuel 3

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Episode Summary

1 Samuel 3 marks the call of Samuel to be a prophet. As such it furthers the demise of the house of Eli, a demise that will reach its climax in Chapter 4. In this episode of the podcast we take a look at some of the features of 1 Samuel 3, particularly in regard to its theophany, Samuel's status as the "prophet like unto Moses," and an interesting text-critical issue.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 449: 1 Samuel 3. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike. What's going on?

MH: Oh, not a whole lot, just more of the same old stuff.

TS: How do you feel after losing to me in Fantasy?

MH: [laughs] I feel like I can still make the playoffs.

TS: Yes, yes, that's true.

MH: That's when it will matter the most.

TS: Okay, that's true. I think I play your brother this week. So it's the clash of the Titans. Me and him are top dogs, if you will.

MH: He's getting killed in some of his other leagues.

TS: Yeah.

MH: But he's doing well in ours. I just want to play you at full strength. I was not at full strength because of the bye weeks. So I just want to make the playoffs.

TS: Yeah. Always excuses. I understand. [Mike laughs] Alright, well, we're going to do the entire chapter 3 today of 1 Samuel.

MH: Yeah, 1 Samuel 3. And this will be somewhat familiar to the people who have read *Unseen Realm*, but there's more to the chapter, obviously, than the theophany (the Lord's appearance to Samuel), but we'll hit that too. For those who haven't read *Unseen Realm*, it will be an introduction, I guess, or something along those lines that they may not have ever heard of before.

TS: It's going to be awesome.

MH: Yeah, let's jump in and just start with reading the passage and so everybody has it sort of fresh in their mind. So I'm reading ESV.

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

²At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. ³The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

⁴Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he [Eli] said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down.

⁶And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." ¹¹Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. ¹²On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he

knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

¹⁵ Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶ But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." ¹⁷ And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told 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 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

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So again, the chapter isn't very long, but it's certainly eventful. Just to start out, what's it about? It should be pretty apparent what it's about. We obviously get the continuance of the rejection of Eli's household, and the chapter shows Samuel to be Yahweh's true prophet—one like unto Moses, with whom God spoke face to face. And that's going to be a key idea we will hit a little bit later on.

The chapter also establishes Samuel's prophetic credentials. And that is important for the fact that it will be Samuel who will anoint Israel's kings, culminating with David. So it establishes Samuel as a prophet. That is really the purpose of the chapter. If you remember from last time the quote from Harry Hoffner. He had this to say:

If Eli and his sons vividly illustrate the degradation of the priesthood, the fact that Samuel's voice broke a long silence in the prophetic ministry (1 Samuel 3:1) shows that Israel was starving for the guidance of the living God – the God who had liberated it from Egyptian slavery and planted it in the land promised to Abraham. That new, faithful leadership would emerge in Hannah's son Samuel.

A couple of macro-observations—again, big picture stuff...

First, literary structure and presentation. Chisholm has a few notes here to note just about the structure of the passage that are worth pointing out. He writes:

Here the story displays a four-paneled structure. As is typical in such accounts, there is repetition yet also significant variation, especially in the final panel. In the

first two panels (verses 4-6), the Lord calls to Samuel, who goes to Eli, thinking his master has called him. Eli tells him to go back to sleep. To make sure that the reader does not wrongly conclude that Samuel is spiritually dull, the narrator points out that Samuel has never personally encountered the Lord and is inexperienced in such matters (verse 7). In the third panel Eli realizes that the Lord is calling Samuel and gives him instructions on how to respond if he is summoned again (verses 8-9). In the fourth panel the Lord approaches and calls Samuel, who responds as instructed (verse 10). The Lord then delivers a prophetic revelation to Samuel (verses 11-14). Through its structure and progression the story draws attention to the shift in authority in Samuel's life. Initially he goes to Eli, but then, as instructed by Eli, he speaks to the Lord, calling himself the Lord's servant. Now Samuel is the Lord's spokesman, whose prophetic word has authority even over Eli. By the end of the chapter, "all Israel from Dan to Beersheba" (verse 20) recognizes Samuel, not Eli, as the Lord's chosen servant through whom he reveals his word to Israel. From this time forward, Samuel, not Eli, will lead Israel.

Secondly, there is Samuel's status as "the prophet like unto Moses." This is shown by observing several passages outside 1 Samuel 3. For instance, Deuteronomy 5:4. We read that:

**⁴The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain,
out of the midst of the fire,**

So this is a reference to the event at Sinai under Moses. Deuteronomy 18:15 says:

**¹⁵"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you,
from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—"**

Verse 18 of the same chapter says:

**¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I
will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command
him.**

Deuteronomy 34:10 is another one:

**¹⁰And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom
the LORD knew face to face,**

So that is significant because Deuteronomy 34 is the end of Moses' life and it tells us that while Joshua took over leadership of the people, he was not the direct fulfillment of the prophet like unto Moses. We're still waiting for that at the end of Deuteronomy 34. Psalm 99:6-7 say this:

⁶ **Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel also was among those who called upon his name.
They called to the LORD, and he answered them.**

⁷ **In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them;
they kept his testimonies
and the statute that he gave them.**

Again, we're going to come back to that verse as well. Then finally Jeremiah 15:1:

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Then the LORD said to me, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go!"

So much later in Israel's history, there's a reference back to Samuel standing before the Lord. Again, that's the key idea of what we'll return to shortly here. So Samuel is, in fact, the first named prophet since Moses and he's going to fit this role of "the prophet like unto Moses." Leithart observes a literary parallel here as well. He writes:

The Lord called "Samuel, Samuel," as He called Moses' name twice, and Samuel answered him, "Here I am," which was also Moses' answer (Exodus 3:4).

So if you look back at the burning bush incident, Moses gets his name called twice and he answers, "Here I am," and the same thing happens with Samuel. So it connects that observation in Exodus 3:4. It connects here to 1 Samuel 3 and it connects the two individuals—the two figures—Moses and Samuel in this way. So it telegraphs, again, Samuel is going to be the real fulfillment in this (of course, ultimately until eschatologically, Jesus is).

The third macro-observation: calling the name of Samuel twice (1 Samuel 3:10). So the same observation, "Samuel! Samuel!" But there's more to it. Of this duplication, Harry Hoffner writes as follows:

Yahweh called Samuel's name twice – "Samuel! Samuel!" – just as he had done in 1 Samuel 3:4 [MH: so he does in 3:10]. He likewise repeated the names of Abraham (Genesis 22:11), Jacob (Genesis 46:2), and Moses (Exodus 3:4) when he called them. Only one other time in the Hebrew Bible does God call to someone

with a twofold use of his name, and that is in the rhetorical prophetic address in Isaiah 29:1: “Ariel! Ariel!” In the Isaiah passage, the address introduces the pronouncement of coming judgment, just as it does here (1 Samuel 3:11-14). In neither case does Yahweh announce it directly to the targets of his judgment (Jerusalem and the house of Eli respectively), but rather through a prophet (Isaiah and here Samuel). This will be Samuel’s first prophetic mission of confrontation with words of judgment from Yahweh. It will be a foretaste of how difficult his subsequent ones will be in dealing with Saul.

Then a few interesting nuggets from the passage that are a little more focused in the passage itself.

In 1 Samuel 3:3, there is the theme of Eli’s blindness that seems to be more than just a passing note. So we read in 1 Samuel 3:2:

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

So the blindness seems to play off Eli’s spiritual blindness once again. Eli could not tell the difference earlier between pious Hannah and the real sons of Belial—his own sons, Hophni and Phinehas. He mistook Hannah’s silent prayer with moving lips as drunkenness, showing that he lacked spiritual insight. But darkness of blindness seems extended as well in these two verses to the lampstand of God in the Tabernacle. 1 Samuel 3:3 says that “it had not yet gone out,” which suggests that it was being allowed to go out on a nightly basis, but the Torah regulations for it said that it was never supposed to be allowed to go out. That comes from Leviticus 24:1-4, which reads:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly. ³ Outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall arrange it from evening to morning before the LORD regularly. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. ⁴ He shall arrange the lamps on the lampstand of pure gold before the LORD regularly.

In addition, as Leithart notes:

The text seems to say that Samuel was in the tabernacle when the Lord called him (verse 3) and even in the Most Holy Place, and some children’s books picture Samuel with a sleeping bag on the floor of the tabernacle. This could not be the case. Since Samuel was not a priest, he could not enter the Holy Place, much less

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the Most Holy Place. Literally, 1 Samuel 3:3 must mean that Samuel was sleeping in the tabernacle precincts (somewhere), not in the tabernacle proper. Yet the hyperbolic phrasing is important. Samuel was a 'son' of Eli, but more importantly a son of Yahweh, and so he was pictured as dwelling in his Father's house.

The second nugget: the theophanic reading of the "Word of the Lord" in 1 Samuel 3. And this is what I do in *Unseen Realm*. So if you have read that and remember it, pardon. I'm just going to give a rough overview. But if you want more details about the Word of the Lord, you need to read *Unseen Realm*.

So we tend to think in many cases that the Word of the Lord refers to some auditory voice, like a voice in the head, and there are contexts where that is certainly the case. But what I'm suggesting here (and I think that we have good reason to suggest it) is that the Word of the Lord is a visual appearance, not just something auditory. Remember in verse 1:

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

So it's referred to as a vision right off the bat. So what we have here is the "Word of the Lord" and this isn't the only passage. Elsewhere the "Word of the Lord" will be a visual appearance of Yahweh. And in some cases, it will actually be a tactile experience—for instance, in Jeremiah 1. So what I do in *Unseen Realm* is go through these passages and show this to be the case because this is the backdrop to Jesus being the Word of the Lord. "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God." And the Word in verse 14 in John chapter 1 "was made flesh and dwelt among us." So we can understand what is going on and the impact of those verses a little bit better if we see in passages like this one—1 Samuel 3—that God actually appears in human form to Samuel in this episode. This is a visual appearance. So let me read verses 4-10 again and then at the end of the chapter there are various clues to this.

⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he [Samuel] went and lay down.

⁶ And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

So there's another verb of visual recognition—"revealed."

⁸ And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

You skip to the end of the chapter and we get this:

¹⁹ And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by [MH: or as] the word of the LORD.

So again, we get this language of appearance. Now if you look at that and you look back at a passage like Psalm 99:6 (we read this passage a few minutes ago) connecting Samuel and Moses as the prophets... But if you read Psalm 99:6-7, you get this:

**⁶ Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel also was among those who called upon his name.
They called to the LORD, and he answered them.**

How? Listen to verse 7:

**⁷ In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them;
they kept his testimonies
and the statute that he gave them.**

So the passage says that the Lord appeared in the pillar of the cloud (which is very familiar from the Torah) to Moses and Aaron, but he also did this with Samuel. There is a visual manifestation in the pillar of the cloud to Samuel. If you go to Jeremiah 1:9, we get this. In fact, we're going to read the whole thing here. We'll go back to verse 1 to pick up the context in Jeremiah.

The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin,² to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah...

20:00 So on and so forth, and he gives his chronology. Verse 4:

**⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,
⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”
⁶ Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” ⁷ But the LORD said to me,
“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’;
for to all to whom I send you, you shall go,
and whatever I command you, you shall speak.
⁸ Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
declares the LORD.”**

And here’s verse 9:

⁹ Then the LORD [MH: and it’s the divine name!] put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me,

So in Jeremiah 1, the Word of the Lord has hands. This is a visual manifestation of God as the Word of the Lord, God in human form. And what we’re suggesting is that this is what is going on with the episode in Samuel because Samuel appears “before the Lord.” The Lord appears to Samuel in the cloud and then you get this language of visual appearance here. So there’s good precedent for taking it this way and commentators have understood this. McCarter in his Anchor Bible Commentary and Tsumura in his commentary and others note that the experience was visionary, not only auditory. And it has to be, in light of the “stood” vocabulary. If there was no visual representation, how could a standing posture for the word of the Lord be discerned? The short answer is, “It couldn’t.” If it was invisible, you wouldn’t use a word like “stood” because you couldn’t see anything. But here, Samuel *can* see something, and it’s God in human form—well before the time of the New Testament and using a descriptive phrase like “the Word of the Lord” to label it. Again, this provides some impact for what John is describing in John chapter 1 in the New Testament of Jesus—Jesus as the Word of the Lord of the Old Testament.

The third nugget here is the emendation of the scribe in 1 Samuel 3:13. Now this is a little hard to explain because I can't give you a visual, but in 1 Samuel 3:13... Let me read this. Let's see here... Let's go back up to verse 12. God is speaking. He is giving Samuel this information about Eli.

¹² On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, [MH: and here's the key line] because his sons were blaspheming God,

Now there are other texts like the traditional Hebrew texts that do not read "because his sons were blaspheming God." It reads "because his sons were blaspheming themselves." Okay, which makes no sense. You can't... Blasphemy is a term that is associated with an object of holiness being defiled, being threatened. Obviously Hophni and Phinehas are not objects of holiness (anything but) in the chapter. So it makes no sense to have them blaspheming themselves.

So you have to ask, "Well, what's the difference?" What's going on here textually that some translations have "blaspheming themselves" and others (I would say most) have because they were "blaspheming God." The difference in the text is this: the Masoretic Text or traditional text has "his sons were blaspheming themselves," which is in Hebrew three consonants—להם (*lamed-heh-mem*). You can get those three consonants if you... Again, you just have to picture this in your head. Those three consonants are also present in this group of consonants—אלוהים (*aleph-lamed-vav-heh-mem*), which spells *elohim*.

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So somewhere along the line, a scribe reading the Hebrew text that his sons were blaspheming *elohim*... Apparently, the scribe didn't want God to be blasphemed and was offended by the thought, and so he erased some of the letters in *Elohim* so that it read, "because his sons were blaspheming themselves" with the letters that were left behind. This is what is known in Old Testament textual criticism as one of the *tiqqun soferim*—the emendations of the scribes where scribes deliberately changed the text of the Hebrew Bible. There are 18 of these that textual critics have sort of ferreted out that are very good instances where the text was changed because the scribe is trying to protect God from something or the scribe is trying to make something a little less indelicate than what the original Hebrew texts have (maybe something sexual in orientation or something like that). The scribes will at times do this to make the text more comfortable to be read out loud. And so this is one of the cases that all of your books on textual criticism point out because once you see it, it is kind of obvious.

Fourth nugget: the word to Eli. This is verses 11-14. This serves as well to validate Samuel's status as a Levite and a prophet. Leithart has a few comments here that are worth reading because they capture it well. He writes:

The Lord's word to Samuel was substantially the same as His message through the "man of God," (back in chapter 2) but the repetition provided a testimony of two witnesses against Eli's house. As 1 Samuel 2:25 indicates, Hophni and Phinehas had already passed the point of no return. The prophetic word only hardened them further and sealed the doom of Shiloh. The judgment against Shiloh was worse than anything that Israel had experienced since entering the land. As bad as the period of judges has been, this is worse. Shiloh had not been devastated before, the priests had not all died, the lamp had not gone out. Soon it would be "lights out." The abominations of the sons of Eli were bringing desolation to the house of the Lord and the priesthood. Samuel's actions in the morning after his prophetic call, however, gave reason for hope. Samuel waited until the morning before approaching Eli (verse 15). The announcement of judgment was given at the beginning of a new day because it announced the coming day of the Lord, the day that Hannah hoped for, when the nobles would be cast down and the needy exalted. Samuel also opened the doors of the house of the Lord, a symbolic act with a number of dimensions. Samuel was the replacement for Hophni and Phinehas, who had lain with the women who served at the doorway, and also for Eli, who was introduced into the story standing in the doorway. Neither Eli nor his sons guarded the doorway faithfully, but the fact that Samuel opened the door indicates that he was destined to become the faithful gatekeeper.

That's the end of Leithart's selection. It's a good place for us to stop here, too, because Samuel has now replaced (or he's on the verge of replacing) Hophni, Phinehas, and Eli. They're going to die in the next chapter in fulfillment of the word of the Lord that was given to Samuel earlier through the anonymous man of God.

So the next time, we're going to pick up with 1 Samuel 4 when the glory departs from Shiloh. The Ark of the Covenant gets captured, Hophni and Phinehas and Eli die. But we'll hit all that next time and more because there's a lot in 1 Samuel 4 that leads us up to some really startling things in 1 Samuel 5. If I can give my recommendation now, when we hit 1 Samuel 5, you're not going to want to have kids in the room. Anyway, they ask you too many questions about the subject matter. But we're approaching what happens to the Ark and what happens to Dagon thereafter and the Philistines in chapters 4 and 5. So next time we'll hit chapter 4.

TS: Alright, Mike, and I cannot stress enough. If you want more or want to go deeper, you've got to read the *Unseen Realm*.

MH: Yeah, that's why it exists.

TS: Yeah, absolutely, 100%, and there's just no way... I mean, it would be... I don't know how long of a podcast it would be to cover that book. I mean, you've

got documentaries, which is great. We want to bring that up and remind everybody that Faithlife has released a lot of your videos on their YouTube channel.

MH: Yeah.

TS: So I highly recommend you go catch those because they're fantastic.

MH: Yeah, that's a recent decision. You can go up to YouTube and watch the *Supernatural* film—the movie. It's narrated by Corbin Bernsen and there are also videos of me going through material on angels and demons. They also put up the Aliens and Demons thing as well. So they put up four or five things that I'm in for free viewing. So it's a good deal.

TS: Alright, Mike, well we're looking forward to the next two chapters of 1 Samuel. With that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.