November 1, 2026 "The Prophet is Called" 1 Samuel 3:8-20
Lesson 1

Intro

Prophets had close relationships with the Lord and received His words directly. Therefore, they spoke in the name of God, proclaiming and interpreting God's words to whomever He directed. Usually this was to the people of Israel; at other times, it was to ungodly nations. Prophets were often attached to places of worship or royal courts. They spoke truth to power, challenging authorities on ethical grounds when they neglected God's justice or mercy. Some served only in prophetic ministry; others had political, military, or leadership roles alongside their prophetic responsibilities. Samuel was one of these second prophets, being acknowledge today as the last judge of the Judges era and the first prophet of the Prophet era.

Today's lesson picks up partway through what is sometimes called Samuel's "prophetic call narrative." Samuel was raised in the tabernacle, the tent structure that housed the ark of the covenant. His mother Hannah had promised him to God in thanks for being able to have a son after being barren. In the first part of the narrative, Samuel hears a voice call him two times, both while he was sleeping. He thinks it is the head priest Eli, who sends him back to bed. Today's text begins with the third calling of Samuel's name.

Read 1 Samuel 3:8-20

1. vs. 8: God calls Samuel a third time; Eli realizes it is God who is calling Samuel
   Repetition of a phrase or idea indicates importance; attention is called for
   Samuel has been serving in the tabernacle, but doesn't yet have a relationship with God

2. vs. 9: Eli is an experience priest, so he instructs Samuel on what to do
   He is to return to bed and listen for the voice to call him again
   Eli gives him the words to say in response to God's call
      "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."
   The name Samuel means "God hears" or "God asks"
   We see God asking for Samuel here

3. vs. 10: God calls to Samuel a 4th time: "Samuel! Samuel"
   This time, Samuel responds to the call with the words Eli instructed him to say
   This is an important lesson for us
   God can call, but the call is incomplete unless the person answers
   Samuel lets God know he is a servant, ready to listen
   God calling Samuel at night may enhance this response
      The day's distractions are over, and God has Samuel's full attention

4. vs. 11: God's first words to Samuel are foretelling what He is going to do
   He says everyone's ears with "tingle" with the what God will do
   Tingling ears symbolized hearing the terrible news of God's anger
   This description of tingling ears only occurs in 2 other OT sections

God speaks of bringing disaster on Judah and Jerusalem in 2 Kings 21:12
God says the Valley of Ben Hinnom will be renamed the Valley of Slaughter
(see Jeremiah 19:3)
The next verse shows the bad news that is coming

5. vs. 12: Eli's sons, also priests, have behaved wickedly, and Eli only weakly corrected them
Because they were wicked, and Eli did not stop them, God is bringing judgment
God says his actions will be "from beginning to end"
This indicates totality—God's correction will be comprehensive and full

6. vs. 13: God had previously told Eli that he would judge him and his family
The sons were guilty of thievery, adultery, and dishonoring their father
Eli corrected them, but they didn't listen to him or correct their behavior
Eli did not discipline or punish them
Both Eli and his sons are guilty of not heeding God's standards

7. vs. 14: God says that his punishment to Eli and his sons can't be changed
Even if they do sacrifices and offerings, they won't change what's coming

8. vs. 15: God has spoken vs. 11-14 to Samuel about Eli, his mentor in the priesthood
Samuel goes back to bed until morning; we wonder if he even slept any more
He begins his day by doing his usual task—opening the doors of the house of the Lord
He knows Eli will ask what God said to him, and he is afraid to tell him
This news is bad for Eli, whom Samuel is close to

9. vs. 16: However, Eli calls Samuel to him in the morning
He calls him "my son", again showing the closeness between the two of them
Samuel answers the same way he answered God—"Here I am"

10. vs. 17: Eli asks Samuel—demands—to know what God said to him the night before
He phrases it in a way that would likely bring fear
Eli calls for God to deal severely with Samuel if he doesn't tell Eli the truth
This is a test of integrity for Samuel
He doesn't want to hurt Eli, and he knows what he was told will hurt
He also wants to speak the truth

11. vs. 18: Samuel meets the test by telling Eli everything God revealed to him
This is part of accepting God's calling to tell the truth, even if it causes pain to someone
To his credit, Eli receives the words with grace, and doesn't blame Samuel
He acknowledges them as coming from God and that they are "good"
Good here means right, reasonable, and commendable

12. vs. 19: This verse now moves into Samuel's life as a prophet
God is with him, giving him guidance and support
The phrase "let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground" is unique
This is the only time in Scripture that the phrase is used
It seems to mean that people listened to Samuel as God's prophet

13. vs. 20: The phrase “From Dan to Beersheeba” basically means “from border to border”
It’s like us saying “From LA to New York”
The towns of Dan and Beersheeba are the northernmost and southernmost cities in Israel
This phrase shows that all of Israel acknowledges Samuel as God’s prophet

Application: The Old Testament prophets were called to proclaim God’s words. This means declaring it all despite the difficulty of the message. People won’t always like the message the prophet speaks. God’s justice requires righteousness, which results in negative consequences for those who refuse to obey Him. Sometimes what God says is “good” feels harsh or disappointing. The prophet’s role was often to foretell unpleasant outcomes when people refused to heed God’s warnings. This could make being a prophet difficult. They had to have a great fear of the Lord, a desire to serve Him alone, and a great love for the people to whom the message was being given. What they were doing was the essence of the greatest commandment, according to Jesus: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and Love your neighbor as yourself. This applies to us today. There is great love in being willing to obey God by proclaiming hard-to-accept truth.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for showing us Samuel’s prompt and faithful response to Your call. May we be like Samuel in having the courage to serve You obediently, even when (especially when) it is difficult. May we hear and know Your truth. And may we faithfully speak when we sense the Spirit’s prompting. In Jesus’ name, Amen.