

Helps for the Teacher: Samuel

My goal in this overview of Samuel's call in I Samuel 1-3 is to show the key verse, the theme, and the overall structure that I would use if I were teaching it.

Let's get started.

The key verse to the larger section is **I Samuel 2:30, "Those who honor me, I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed."**

As the story unfolds, we see main characters like Hannah, Samuel, and later Jonathan, and David who honor God and are honored. And we also see those in the book who despise God, like Eli and Hophni and Phineas, and later Saul, and even Goliath—who have tragic ends.

If we narrow the focus to just today's lesson the key verse is **I Samuel 3:10 "Samuel! Samuel!" and Samuel said, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."**

It highlights the **underlying theme** that unfolds in the story details:

God is speaking—are His people listening? Specifically...are His leaders listening?

I've divided the lesson into only 2 sections. Notice, there is a contrast going on between Eli's sons and Samuel.

The story begins with

- **Set Apart Sons**

- A. Within the first 3 verses we are introduced to Hophni and Phineas and we discover they are priests to the Lord at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. Special attention is made in chapter 2 of both the privilege and responsibility they have to officiate at God's Tabernacle because they are Aaron's descendants. They have been **set apart** for their job.
- B. Then the story shifts to describe how Samuel is **set apart** to God by his mother Hannah, who is barren and makes a vow to God that if He will give her a son, she will give his whole life back to the Lord. And God's answer to her deep, soulful cry is: a baby! A special, set apart baby!

The second section is:

- **God Communicates**

We learn from the passage that "a word from the Lord was rare in those days" yet **4x in the passage, God sent correction and warnings to Hophni and Phineas, and 4x God called to Samuel.** First the correction to Hophni and Phineas comes through a worshipper telling them, "Hey, what you are doing is not right!" And then their father, Eli, says, "Now boys, what I hear going on isn't good!"—even though Eli does not stop them, and he even is participating with them. The story then switches to Samuel—just with a few verses—and we find out that that he is being blessed. A man of God is sent with the plain consequences of what is coming if Eli's sons do not repent. With one little verse, it switches back to Samuel saying he is growing up in stature, but also in favor with God and men. It's almost as if woven throughout the evil of Eli's sons, we see little Samuel in the background growing up and being prepared by God, until finally at around the age of 10-12, God calls his name four times and through this boy, gives the final message to Eli and his sons, letting them know that their time is up. Why? Because they didn't listen and take heed to God's message.

Here are some useful facts to have as you study the passage:

First, the story opens up with the Tabernacle in Shiloh. Shiloh was a small town in the territory of Ephraim and it was set up there by Joshua about 300-400 years earlier. It seems to have become a semi-permanent structure by this time in history.

Second, Samuel was going to be a Nazirite from conception. There are some similarities to another Nazirite: Samson—and you remember that they were likely contemporaries.

Both their mothers were barren.

In Samson's case, God was the One who initiated Samson's Nazirite life. In Samuel's case, it was Hannah's vow of dedication.

Samson's life focused on military deliverance from the Philistines. Samuel's life focused on spiritual deliverance, which addressed the cause of the Philistine oppression.

Samson's life is cut short because his vow is broken. Samuel is faithful to his vow his entire life.

Third, Hannah's song in chapter 2 gives an indication that her cry for a son was initiated not only out of the deep sorrow of her barrenness, but also out of her grief over the corrupt and immoral conditions at the Tabernacle: "God, do something! Do it through a son You will give me."

Fourth, Samuel was likely about 3 years old when he went to live with Eli and his family at the Tabernacle. What a step of faith for Hannah to know God would protect her son from the evil around him. She continued to stay involved in his life and his purpose, and we see that by the fact that she made a priestly tunic for him each year.

Fifth, Samuel's life most parallels the life and ministry of John the Baptist:

They were given to barren women.

They were asked for in God's house of worship.

They were set apart from conception for God's prophetic ministry.

Samuel anointed King David and John the Baptist baptized Jesus, the Son of David—God's Anointed Messiah.

All Israel knew that Samuel was a prophet of God and everyone knew John was a prophet.

Finally, this is one of the biggest pivotal lessons in the Old Testament history. God's appointed priesthood has become corrupt and WON'T LISTEN to His repeated corrections. A major change is happening in which the corrupt spiritual leaders will be removed and new leadership will usher in God's righteous King. Samuel's life ends the rule of the Judges and introduces the Kings and Prophets. These events will play out again with the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC and 70 AD.

Now, your 5- 10- and 15-year-olds may not understand all these connections, but as a teacher, you need to realize the significance this lesson plays in all of Scripture, even though you will be teaching it in its basic form:

There are impacting consequences of 1.) hearing God's Word, especially His correction and then 2.) acting on it.

As you prepare this lesson to teach, take a minute to ask yourself how much you are listening to God's Word. How do you respond when He corrects you? And finally, if God were to speak your name for a particular task, would you be immediately available to act on His instructions?

Many blessings as you teach God's Word!