

When the LORD spoke to Samuel, he perceived it as an audible voice and mistook it for Eli calling for him. Samuel's experience gives us an indication of how the LORD spoke to the prophets in the Old Testament. However, the Holy Spirit had not yet been given as a permanent infilling at that time and now the LORD speaks to us differently today, primarily through the Bible and through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

1 And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; *there was no open vision.*

“And the child [lad; youth] Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli” – In contrast to Eli's sons who were committing evil acts as priests, Samuel was faithfully serving the LORD under Eli's supervision. The Hebrew word for “child” seems to refer to a young teenager.

“And the word of the LORD was precious [valuable; rare] in those days” – Elsewhere in scripture, when the LORD spoke to a prophet, it was usually described using the terminology “the word of the LORD” that would “come to” the prophet (such as in **Jer. 1:4** “Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying...”). This verse is speaking of a time in Israel's history when the LORD was rarely speaking through prophets. This would make occasions when the LORD did speak very valuable and precious.

“there was no open [to spread; distribute] vision” – The word that did come to the prophets in those days were typically not for public consumption but were private messages individuals. It may be that the LORD did this so that Israel would pay special attention to Samuel and the word of the LORD that came through him.

2 And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, *that he could not see;*

“And it came to pass at that time” – Verse 1 sets the context of verse 2 and the verses that follow. Samuel is still young and under the supervision of Eli at a time when it was rare for the LORD to speak to His people.

“when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see” – Due to his age, Eli's vision had deteriorated to the point that he preferred going to bed early once it got too dark for him to see.

3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down *to sleep;*

“And ere [before] the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was” – The golden lampstand, which stood in the Holy Place in the tabernacle/temple, was filled with olive oil in the evening so that it would burn all night (Ex. 30:8; 27:20-21). The hour seems to be sometime before dawn before the lampstand had run out of fuel.

“and Samuel was laid down to sleep” – Samuel was in his bed, apparently asleep or dozing.

4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here *am I*. 5 And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here *am I*; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.

“That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I” – Samuel is awakened by the voice of the LORD. He immediately answers as a faithful and humble servant, which says something about Samuel's character.

“And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me” – Either the voice was audible or else Samuel perceived it as an audible voice since he mistook it for the voice of Eli. He thinks Eli is calling for him and runs to Eli's bedside to see what he needs.

“And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down” – Eli denies calling for Samuel and sends him back to bed so they can both go back to sleep. It is still dark and so Eli obviously would like to go back to sleep.

6 And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here *am I*; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again.

The LORD calls to Samuel a second time and, like before, Samuel is convinced that it is Eli that is calling for him. We aren't told how long after Samuel had returned to bed that the LORD calls him again. Perhaps Samuel was just beginning to drift off to sleep when the LORD called again. Eli again denies calling for Samuel and sends him back to bed.

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.

“Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD” – Obviously Samuel knew Who the LORD was, having spent his whole life in service to the LORD in the tabernacle, loving and worshiping Him. However, he was not familiar with the LORD speaking to him directly since each time the LORD spoke, Samuel mistook it for Eli calling for him. Samuel did not yet know how to recognize the voice of the LORD.

“neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him” – Samuel will spend the rest of his life as a prophet of God, but he had not yet had “the word of the LORD” revealed to him up to this point. Throughout the Bible the “word of the LORD” would come to a prophet (the LORD would be speaking to him) and then he would either write this word down or go proclaim it to those to whom it was intended. The experience of hearing the word of the LORD was a new one for Samuel.

8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.

Samuel believing he heard someone calling his name once or maybe even twice could have been his imagination, a dream, or his ears playing tricks, but after the third time Eli began to realize what was happening. No one else was in the house and Eli certainly was not the one calling Samuel's name. Eli obviously had not heard the voice, so the only explanation left was that it was the LORD Who was calling to Samuel.

9 Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Eli sends Samuel back to bed, but this time with instructions. The Hebrew word for "heareth" implies listening with the intent to obey what is said. If the LORD chooses to speak yet again, Samuel is to respond as a humble servant that is ready to listen and obey what is spoken to him.

10 And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

"And the LORD came, and stood" – Apparently the previous times the LORD had only manifested Himself as a voice. The LORD knew that Samuel was young and unfamiliar with the experience of hearing the word of the LORD, so the previous three times may have been intended to cause Samuel to get instruction from Eli. Now on this fourth time the LORD Himself stands in the same room with Samuel and speaks to him, knowing that Samuel is ready to listen.

"and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel" – It seems that previously the LORD called Samuel's name once each occasion, but now calls it twice.

"Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth" – Samuel follows Eli's instructions and states that he is ready to listen and obey whatever the LORD says.

Verses 11-21: The LORD describes the judgment He will bring upon Eli's family because of the sins of Eli's sons and the fact that Eli had done nothing to restrain them from their evil. The LORD had already revealed this judgment to Eli (1 Sam. 2:27-36). Samuel cannot go back to sleep and when morning comes he gets up and begins his duties in the house of the LORD. He is afraid to tell Eli what the LORD had said, but when Eli demands to know, Samuel tells him everything. Eli accepts what Samuel tells him as being genuinely from the LORD, likely because Samuel did not know anything about the LORD's judgment on Eli's house before this. What Samuel told him merely confirmed that it came from the LORD and that the LORD would use Samuel as a prophet. The people of Israel began to recognize that Samuel was a prophet of God because everything that the LORD spoke through Samuel came true.