

THE WORD OF THE LORD WAS PRECIOUS IN THOSE DAYS

1 SAMUEL 3:1 – 5:12

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~ Some people have a ceremony, sacrament or ritual they honestly believe is true worship when, in fact, it is rank idolatry. My estimation is that for most self-professing believers, the very act of going to church is a sin for them. Some are looking to be seen singing a song; others seek religious methods to solve some problem – generally one created by sin. Most go in pride to show the world what a precious gem God was lucky enough to collect in them. Their theology is typically, “God couldn’t run this universe without me.” There’s very little truly trusting the Lord Jesus Christ going on. There’s even less genuine Bible study; and negligible support for the sound doctrine of the apostles being furthered to a lost and dying world by a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led man. Well, our Spiritual Safari has been somewhat slow getting off the ground in this new book of the Bible; but this is a critical section of Scripture we are in. This report contains the call of Samuel, and it is all important to understand....

III

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.

~ In our last report, we saw the word “child” doesn’t mean Samuel was a pre-teen, or even a teenager. Josephus tells us Samuel was twelve years old at this time. I think Samuel was older than that. Solomon was a grown man when he said, “.... I am but a little child” in his prayer to God. Solomon had just been made king when he made that statement. Jeremiah made a similar declaration, saying to God that he couldn’t speak because he was yet a little child. I’m sure both of these men were speaking of their spiritual maturity as opposed to the physical level of maturation. Remember, a Levite could become a priest at age twenty-five, but could not serve in the tabernacle until age thirty – and here is Samuel ministering to old man Eli – so, that should give us some ideas of his age.

When verse one says the Word of the Lord was “precious” – that means it was a very scarce commodity! God was not revealing Himself at this particular time. You may remember the Book of Judges closed with the verse, “... every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” Well, when every man is doing that, God has no reason to reveal Himself. However, at the time we are studying, God moved in and called Samuel as His prophet. I believe said movement hinged solely on the faith of one woman, too, by the way - Hannah. Without Hannah, my feeling is God was prepared to give Israel up as far as revelation was concerned. God is moving his messengers from the positions of judges and priests to the office of the prophet in this section of Scripture; and the prophet also becomes the spokesman of God to the king. God never spoke directly to the kings of Israel and Judah; it was always through His chosen prophet....

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;

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;

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.

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.

~ It was the duty of the high priest to keep the lamp burning continually in the tabernacle, and old man Eli has let it go out completely. In that darkness, Samuel thinks he is dreaming when he is called on by the Lord; and the Lord will call Samuel four times. It’s important to note that these first two calls were Samuel’s call to salvation. The last two calls are calls to service. So, what we see at this time is that Samuel is being called to salvation. I believe Samuel had reached the age of accountability and I believe God is making Samuel responsible.

So, the logical question is: what is the age of accountability? We saw in the Book of Numbers that the Israelite male was called to war at age twenty. The Levites didn't begin their priestly service until age twenty-five – and the priests could only serve in the tabernacle after age thirty. Of course, Moses didn't begin to deliver Israel until he was forty! So, we have no idea how old Samuel was when he was called. My suggestion may be right, and it may be wrong.

Numbers 14:29 Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me ~

Obviously, those under twenty years old were not held responsible. Is twenty the age of accountability? I don't know. I think it's much higher than most people probably think it is, though. I think Samuel was likely in his late twenties. Another question is: would God have called Samuel a fifth and sixth – or fiftieth - time? Again, I don't really know; but – I do believe there is an appointed time in our lives when we are to be forced to make a final decision. Someone has said, *"... there is a time, I know not when, a place I know not where, which marks the destiny of men to Heaven, or despair. How long might men continue on in sin? How long shall God forbear? Where does hope end; and where begins the confines of despair? One answer from those skies is sent; ye who from which God departs; while it is called today repent and harden not your hearts."* Apparently, there can come a day when a person's state of being is no longer capable of turning to God. That's frightful.

The chaplain at the prison where Herman Gering was sentenced to death performed a very long interview with Gering; and published a paper entitled **'The Necessity of Preparing Oneself to Meet God.'** During the course of the interview, Gering ridiculed certain Bible truths and utterly refused to accept the fact that Christ died for sinners. That was a conscious denial of the power of the Blood! When confronted about meeting his little daughter in Heaven he replied, *"... she believes in her manner – and I believe in mine!"* Less than an hour later, Gering had committed suicide. Gering's last words to the chaplain were, *"... death is death."* I think God

probably calls many times to some people, but this demonstrates a point arrives in our lives and we are forced to make a decision about God. After continued rejection, it can become impossible to accept and trust the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior....

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

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.

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.

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

~ God called Saul of Tarsus only once to both salvation and service; so, each calling will be different for different people. Proverbs twenty-nine verse one says, "... he, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." I do not believe there is an unpardonable sin because it is impossible to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Jesus is not on earth as a human man today; there is no sin we can commit today that we cannot receive forgiveness for tomorrow. God never withdraws His grace – that's not what I am saying – but men can resist that grace until their conscience becomes seared with a red-hot iron as Cain, Balaam, Samson, Korah and Ahab – ALL reached a day when they turned their backs on God. Felix said to Paul that he would hear him at "some convenient time;" but that time never came. Agrippa replied, "almost thou persuadest me." Well, salvation isn't "almost" – it's only altogether. Christ saved one thief on the cross so that men need not despair, but it was only one of them – and that was so men would not presume....

11 And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.

12 In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.

~ When God says something, it is the same as already having been done. We have, in the Old Testament, what is called the 'prophetic tense.' That is a past tense statement which speaks of a future event. God speaks of things that have not yet happened as if they have already happened. Well, when God says something will happen, you can just write it down – because it will come to pass....

13 For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

14 And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

15 And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.

16 Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.

17 And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.

18 And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.

19 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

~ When we entered chapter three, God revealed the truth of verse twenty; that the whole nation of Israel knew Samuel had been established to be a prophet of the Lord. Interestingly, Samuel was loyal to Eli to the very end, in spite of the revelation from God. There was never any attempt by Samuel to undermine Eli. Samuel was faithful to tell Eli everything God had said. Now, I hope you'll read this carefully: in the service of God the man that you are under deserves your utmost loyalty. It is impossible to be loyal to God while being disloyal to God's man who is your teacher, or he who is set above you. That understanding is needed so desperately today, and it is something that is just not taught in seminary or Bible college. Frankly, the things taught to Christians and Bible students today don't seem to be helping this lost and dying world on any level – but I digress, sort of....

21 And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

~ *By the Word of the Lord, friends.* Make a note. God ALWAYS and ONLY reveals Himself by His Word, even here to Samuel. Today, God is not revealing Himself in dreams and visions – God is illuminating Himself on the pages of Scripture so that you and I and everyone else might come to know Him properly, correctly and completely. To know God this way, and to know the Lord Jesus Christ in a meaningful and Scriptural relationship that is real and personal is the very definition of life eternal.

So, that brings us to the fourth chapter of first Samuel, where we see God moving to a time when He concludes priesthood and judgeship as authority, and He begins speaking only through His prophets. We see a very low condition of the nation Israel at this particular time in their history. They haven't come very far since the days of the judges, and we will see God make good on His promises regarding the line of Eli and his sons. The sons are slain, the Ark is captured, and old man Eli suddenly drops dead! This chapter is an extremely dark picture God paints for us....

IV

1 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.

2 And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men.

3 And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.

~ This is a stark revelation of sheer pagan superstition; and demonstrates how far away from God Israel really was. It also shows their reliance on self-sufficiency; not to mention abject selfishness. Without consulting Samuel, the nation Israel went out to fight the Philistines while handling the Ark in a way that was expressly forbidden by God. They had a memory that the Ark had gone down into the Jordan River and the water opened up, so they defy the Mosaic Law and erroneously believe that the mere presence of the Ark would bring them victory. Their only thought is that there was some merit in the object. How tragically wrong they were.

That mishandling of the things of God led to bitter defeat; because God was to lead them – and Samuel was God’s appointed prophet and spokesman. They ignored both. Well, God isn’t in the box because we cannot place God in a box. They should have been looking to the Person and presence of the True and Living God. Many people in church work today believe God is in a box – or a building – and are equally as superstitious as Israel was at the time in which we are studying. Even in some very fine churches, they rely on a method whereby they make God some little package deal that can be exactly that – packaged away and taken out for use at will. Many people honestly think that method will move the Lord to solve their problems. A deceived multitude turn in the direction of rank superstition every day. Any merit we have is in Christ Jesus. Period. Full stop. If your obedience to Him is in question – don’t tell me you love Him. I don’t believe you. What matters is whether Christ is with us or not; more specifically, whether or

not we are with Him! This is all-important to the genuine child of God, my beloved; and the children of Israel simply did not realize it. Of course, the sons of Eli were merely itinerant preachers. They're going to do and say exactly what they're told to do and say by those who support them....

4 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

5 And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again.

~ These people are so worked up in emotion that they truly believe they are pleasing God when, in reality, they're in rank idolatry worshipping a box that God is not in. They aren't even close to worshipping the True and Living God according to the Mosaic System of Levitical Law. We need to be super careful in our ceremonies and rituals in the church to ask ourselves: are we worshipping the church? Are we worshipping some particular man? Are we worshipping a particular method? Are we worshipping worship tools? We need to ask ourselves if we are honestly worshipping the True and Living God. Most modern self-professing believers, tragically, are not....

6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp.

7 And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore.

8 Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.

9 Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight.

10 And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen.

11 And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

12 And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head.

13 And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out.

14 And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli.

15 Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.

~ The Philistines worshipped idols, too; and they're not only ignorant and superstitious – they're stupid! They believed the children of Israel have a superior idol. They certainly do not believe in the True and Living God – but whatever the Israelite's have must be superior. Even so, they won't accept God. A people simply cannot become much more confused than that. They also think God is in that box! So, they have their own rally and they come against Israel; and Israel loses this battle, as we read here. We also learn that, although Eli was a sorry father and failed as a priest with many faults, he was still God's high priest who had a concern for the things of God. I think this is why God waited so long in Eli's life to judge him....

16 And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son?

17 And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.

18 And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

~ Some people say Eli was the last of the judges; but I feel Samuel was the last of the judges and also the first prophet. Either way, Eli was certainly a high priest. When Eli was told about the death of both sons, naturally, it broke his heart. It is, however, important to note that Eli maintained his composure when news about the deaths of his sons arrived; but when they told Eli the Ark had been captured, that was too much - he fell over and died. We are told that Eli was a fat man, and I think he probably had a heart attack first, and then fell down and broke his neck. Well, our safari was a little rough with Eli, but it seems he was God's man – even with his problems. This brings Samuel to the forefront as God's spokesman in a very definite way....

19 And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her.

20 And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it.

21 And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband.

22 And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

V

~ Moving on, we see the captured Ark brought to the house of Dagon, the Philistine god. They thought they had something good on their hands, but every time they brought it somewhere, their idols would fall over and break! The only thing left of Dagon was a stump and this, to me, reveals that God has a real sense of humor. I also think it means that all idols fall down and submit to the True and Living God! I think this Godly humor totally annoyed the Philistines; even though it didn't accomplish much. They definitely found out there was no merit in having possession of that Ark....

1 And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod.

2 When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.

3 And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.

4 And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.

5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

6 But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

7 And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.

8 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither.

9 And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts.

10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.

11 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

12 And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods: and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

~ Our safari ends with the Philistines 'passing the buck' as they move the Ark around - and finally send it back to Israel altogether. They captured the Ark only to discover they didn't want it very much – not at all, in fact. In the next leg of our expedition, we'll see the Philistines place the Ark on a cart to return it. Nothing happened to the Philistines for touching the Ark because they didn't know any better. As we said, they're simply totally and completely ignorant. God doesn't hold them responsible for handling the Ark improperly! In contrast, Israel knew better, and we will see what happens when Israel handles the Ark against the commands of the Mosaic Law. One Israelite man will simply touch the Ark and drop dead post haste as a result.

See, friends, we will be judged by the light we have; and our handling of it. Many people are not living up to the light that they have been given. Therefore, being judged by the light we have just doesn't happen to mean we are saved at all. In fact, it can mean that we are totally lost and in abject darkness. That should sober you up, my beloved. God said that the Gentiles who have not the law will be judged without the law. It still means they're lost. They will still receive judgment. What an incredible picture we have before us ~