

God Speaks Judgment and Calls Samuel

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the movie, *Jaws*, while three men are on a boat hunting for a great white shark that had killed numerous swimmers, the character of Sheriff Brody accidentally unties a rope that had been holding in place some scuba tanks of compressed air. As one tank rolls across the deck of the boat, the character who is the scuba diver catches the tank and says: You cannot mess around with these because they can blow up! Then, of course, at the very end of the movie, after Sheriff Brody managed to lodge all those tanks into the mouth of the shark, he is able to shoot the tank with his rifle and, sure enough, it blows up and finally kills the shark. The little hint about how a scuba tank can explode earlier in the movie is called *foreshadowing*, and it is used a lot in novels and movies. A little detail gets dropped in once or twice as a preview of the bigger role it will play later. Well, we get some good foreshadowing in 1 Samuel 2, and today on *Groundwork*, we will dig into that, as well as the compelling third chapter. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the second program—number 2—of our planned seven-part series on 1 Samuel. We saw in the first episode, that we began with a focus on the woman Hannah, and on her fervent prayers over and over to God that she might conceive a child after many years of struggling with infertility. She even promises to God that if he gave her a child, she would dedicate him to the Lord's service; and we also saw that God heard her prayers, gave her a son whom she named Samuel... a name that means God hears... and, true to her vow to God, after Samuel is weaned, she brings him to God's temple, at a place called Shiloh, and entrusts the little boy's care there to the priest Eli. And we will see this in just a minute, too, God continued to hear Hannah, ultimately giving her three more sons and two daughters as well.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is a beautiful story of how God heard the prayer of a lady who brought her pain to God in worship and did not take her pain and minimize it and take it away from God; and what is interesting to me, Scott, is that God, in his infinite wisdom, found a way to use that prayer, and answer that prayer in some way bless the entire nation of Israel through this Samuel character who we are going to unpack in the rest of this book, which is the book is named after. It is really crazy how God can do those things with small prayers, and so, not to sweat the small stuff.

So, as we pick up this story now here in 1 Samuel 2, we find out in a hurry that things in Israel at that time are still in a spiritual disaster place. So, if you listen to it, it is coming from 1 Samuel 2:

¹²Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord. ¹³Now it was the practice of the priests that, whenever any of the people offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand while the meat was being boiled ¹⁴and would plunge the fork into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot. Whatever the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh. ¹⁵But even before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, "Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw." ¹⁶If the person said to him, "Let the fat be burned first, and then take whatever you want," the servant would answer, "No, hand it over now; if you don't, I'll take it by force." ¹⁷This sin of the young men

was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So clearly, Darrell, this was spiritual corruption of the highest level in Israel's religious establishment. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were scoundrels indeed, exactly as the text describes them. They were running the temple for their own profit and pleasure; and old Eli, whatever he might have been like in his younger days, he seems now, in old age, to kind of been reduced to kind of a milk toast sort of a person. All Eli seems capable of doing when it came to his wild sons was kind of wringing his hands and shaking his head and weakly asking them: Please do not do that anymore. He seems kind of pathetic and vapid, truthfully; but it is just part of what was a really sorry picture and a sorry situation at that time.

Then, in the midst of all this, we get these verses in Chapter 2. Now we are up to verse 18:

But Samuel was ministering before the Lord—a boy wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. ²⁰Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, "May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord." Then they would go home. (Then, as we already said:) ²¹And the Lord was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we have this contrast happening. You have Hophni and Phinehas, who were doing exactly what not to do. One thing that the Lord does not play around about is worship, and these are Eli's sons. They are supposed to be priests...they are supposed to be leading by example. They are not, and then the contrast of Samuel, who is ministering before the Lord, we see that this is one of the foreshadowing moments that you talked about in the opening, Scott, that we see there is some bad stuff happening with Eli's sons, but then there is this glint of hope with Samuel, and there is more to come, but it keeps happening in contrast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; but, Samuel...but Samuel...indeed, foreshadowing...in the midst of all that darkness generated by Eli's rotten sons, here is maybe a bit of a bright spot; and we see it for just a moment, and then we get this.

DARRELL DELANEY

In verse 22 it says: Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ²³So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours..." ^{25b}His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the Lord's will to put them to death. Well, there is another bad part there, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Bad; sad; and yet, what does the author give us in the very next verse, up to verse 26: And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with (all the) people.

So, there it is again; darkness—bright spot; darkness—bright spot; and it is a bright spot that foreshadows maybe the coming of a better day, right? I mean, it is very clever how the author structured this text. He just keeps plopping Samuel into the story as a way to say: But wait; this is bad...but wait; this is bad...but wait... It is pretty clever; however, as the chapter closes out, we do end up going kind of back to a dark spot.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: ²⁷Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "This is what the Lord says: 'Did I not clearly reveal myself to your ancestor's family when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh?' ²⁸I chose your ancestor out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in my presence. I also gave your ancestor's family all the food offerings presented by the Israelites. ²⁹Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?' ³⁰Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares... ³⁴Your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will... both die on the same

day.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Boom! Mic drop moment for this prophet. So, yes; we, happily enough, have seen the foreshadowings, but Samuel...in Samuel there is something good coming, maybe; but in the meanwhile, there is something really, really bad happening, and God sees this as a corruption at the highest level. This prophet reminds Eli what the laws of Israel are; things that we can read about in Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy; and these two sons, who are false priests, who are wicked, wicked men, are just making a mockery of all of that; and God is going to have to do something with it; and here, we find out what. The house of Eli will fall.

So, clearly, we could us some longer-term hope in the situation; again, we keep getting some foreshadowing of that with the name of Samuel, but is it really a foreshadowing of something good? Thankfully, the answer is yes; and we will begin to see that when we arrive in 1 Samuel 3, which we will do in just a moment; so, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So again, Darrell, we have had some foreshadowing going on where the boy Samuel is concerned, but now we come to this story. It is a story well known to many of us. It is God's call of Samuel in Chapter 3, and here we go, verse 1: The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. ²One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he (Samuel) went and lay down.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, there are a few things happening in this verse, Scott. I know one of the things that is important is that when the author sets this book up, or at least this chapter, he says: The word of the Lord was rare in those days, and there were not many visions. So, the fact that the Lord would intervene in this way could be surprising to those who were not hearing him very often, or even expecting to hear him very often. So, it really is a very interesting setup to what God is about to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God seems to have gone a bit quiet in Israel; yet, you have the feeling it is about to change. But for now, the word of the Lord was rare; not many visions. But then, we are also told that the lamp of God in the temple had not yet gone out. Now, okay, truth be told, that could be included here as no more than a temporal indication as to what time of the night...

DARRELL DELANEY

That is what I was thinking.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; but in a symbolic way, we could also see this as a sign that although the word of the Lord was rare, God was not gone from Israel...not yet, right? Despite all the corruption of Eli's sons that we saw in the previous part of this program, still the lamp of God's presence flickered and burned on.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, God is calling to Samuel and it sounds like a natural voice. I mean, Samuel really thinks it is Eli in the next room calling him, because it sounds like me calling your name, Scott, and then you come in the room and say: What did you call me for? But that is how the voice comes to Samuel, but Eli gets a clue after

the second...maybe the third time...he actually gets a clue that maybe God is calling the boy, so he's got to help him understand.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But not at first. Eli just figures he was hearing things...he was dreaming. He sends him back to bed, and as you just said, it happens a second time; and by now, Eli is probably getting kind of irked; this little kid, at his age, he shouldn't have to be raising a kid, for Pete's sake. He needs his sleep. The middle of the night: I haven't called you; and then, right, it happens a third time, and now finally, a little lightbulb goes off in Eli's brain, even though they did not have lightbulbs back then, but you know what I mean. Hey, maybe it is the Lord calling Samuel; but you know, when you work in the temple of the Lord—the Lord God of Israel—and I like the little inclusion line: Oh, by the way, the ark of God was there, which is symbolizing of God's presence. Here a priest...don't you think it might occur to you a little sooner than it did that maybe it is actually God calling? I mean, hello! It is the temple—the ark of God is there; but maybe that is just testament, Darrell, to how rare the word of the Lord was. Even Eli could not have recognized God anymore when God's voice came.

DARRELL DELANEY

It also could be kind of a study to think about how it says in the beginning that Eli's eyesight was going dim? And that could be a metaphor for his spiritual eyesight as well, especially when he was unable to get his sons into account; and then he is getting older, so it could be kind of a double meaning that he wasn't able to discern the voice of the Lord until the third or fourth time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But finally, like I said, he does; so, we are in verse 8 here: ^{8b}Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." ¹¹And the Lord said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel¹⁴ that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. ¹²At that time, I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. ¹⁴Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'" ¹⁵Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, ¹⁶but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "Here I am." ¹⁷"What is it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." ¹⁸So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes."

DARRELL DELANEY

So, after Eli lets him know what to say when he hears the voice again, it is interesting that God calls him twice. It is really powerful; and so, he says: Speak Lord, for your servant is listening. And he gets, not this happy word...not this encouraging word...you would think that God would say: I love you; or I am here for good news. No; he has a rebuke to deliver and it is crazy how, even at 12 years old, he has the truth from God of a big responsibility of what he heard.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And even though he is a little kid, he knows this is not the kind of vision that you just lay on the old man casually, right? As you just said, he is a little kid, but the message that God gives him is not some G-rated movie from Disney or something. It is heavy...it is a heavy message...it is a dark message...it is a judgmental message and vision. So, he hesitates to tell Eli, but Eli senses it and all but orders Samuel to cough it up; you know, what did God tell you?! And Darrell, as we saw earlier in this series, it is nothing Eli had not heard before. We saw earlier that a prophet had come to him and predicted these things. While I guess that if Eli had hoped that that prophet had it wrong, now he knows: No, he didn't, because this little

boy has heard the same thing directly from God. There will be no escaping judgment for the house of Eli or his wicked sons.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and then Eli, he kind of resigns to it. He says: Yep, he is the Lord. Whatever he said, let's just go and ahead and submit to that. He had an opportunity to get his sons into account. He had an opportunity to rebuke his sons and correct them, but he didn't take that. But then, he is looking at this young boy, and maybe he had a glimpse of hope because of the way Samuel is hearing the Lord and responding to the Lord; but in that situation, it is hard to say.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; although, you have to say: The word of the Lord is rare, and now when God finally does speak, he doesn't speak to the priest—he doesn't speak to Eli anymore. God is done with that; but he is speaking, and he is speaking to this little kid, whose name means God hears; and now Samuel hears because God is speaking. He may look into the eyes of this innocent kid and maybe, maybe, maybe he saw a little bit of hope beyond his priesthood...beyond the shenanigans of his wicked sons, like you said, Darrell. The text does not tell us that; but certainly, if Eli looked at Samuel and saw the hope of the future in a way he could never see looking at his sons, then he was right about that.

In just a moment, we are going to see that there was reason for hope, and as we round out 1 Samuel 3, we will see that, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, let's dig right back into...we have been in 1 Samuel 3, and that is where that well-known call story of Samuel in the middle of the night happens we just read about; and then we also saw that, at Eli's urging, Samuel doesn't hold back; he reveals to old Eli God's message of judgment; and then we read this in 1 Samuel 3:19.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground.²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.²¹The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, wow! Quite the turnaround here, Darrell. Chapter 3 of 1 Samuel is only twenty-one verses long, but look where we have come in twenty-one verses. We have gone from the word of the Lord being rare...not many visions. We have gone from the lamp of God *not yet* having gone out; we go from there to Samuel's growing up only to become a frequent receiver of words from the Lord God. So, what had been rare soon became common; and because of Samuel's close connection to the God of Israel, nice phrase: None of *his* words fell to the ground either.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that phrase. I also love the phrase earlier in the chapter, where it says: the boy grew in wisdom and stature, earning favor with God and with people; which is also said about Jesus, if you fast-forward to 12 years old, with Jesus the same thing is said about the Lord...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, it is really powerful how Samuel has such an intimate connection with God that the words that he spoke... I love that; they don't fall to the ground. Like, everything that he says is going to happen. It happens because he is so in tune and in communion with the Lord; and that means that because of that, Samuel could be put right up there with the most prominent figures of Israel, like Moses and Aaron and Joshua, David, Elijah, because he was that prophet and priest and a prominent figure because God used him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; it also reminds me of Isaiah 55... basically, Isaiah 55 says *my* (God's) words do not fall to the ground; my words do not return to me void or empty. God sends forth his word and it achieves something... it does something... and now we are kind of told that that was true of Samuel. He had such a close connection to God that his words almost became like the divine word itself. They returned with having achieved something.

So, despite the brokenness of Israel at the time, God was quietly at work behind the scenes. While Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas were out making unholy spectacles of themselves, God was attentively listening to the prayers of a broken-hearted woman first, as we saw in the previous program. She just wanted to have a child; and as God answered Hannah's pleas, and as we saw in the previous episode in this series, he brought to the world someone who would, indeed, be pivotal for Israel going forward; and of course, Darrell, we have five more episodes to go in this seven-part series after this one, so we are going to see how kind of that all works out in the balance of 1 Samuel.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is beautiful how God will take a small thing that seems obscure and insignificant and turn it on its head and bring it to bring glory out and bless many people. I mean, Paul picks this up in the New Testament, where he says: Look, you are not like of noble birth; you are not of circumstances that made you amazing either, but God used the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one could boast, and he would get the glory. That recurring pattern happens in the families in the Old Testament and in the New Testament and in our personal lives as well. So, it is really powerful to see God doing that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, as we close out this second program of this seven-part series on 1 Samuel, what are some takeaways that we and all those listening can kind of think about? You and I are preachers, Darrell, so we do tend to have three points at the end... three takeaways... and we have three again today. I think our first takeaway is: Never count God out. As 1 Samuel opens, God appears to be almost absent. He is just not speaking much; his word is rare; his top representative in Israel was Eli, who had been rendered pretty sad and weak by old age and through the out-of-control actions of his two sons. You would think, Darrell, if people looked at Eli and thought: well, if that is our best and closest connection to God these days, we are doomed; but God was up to something after all. So, the first takeaway: Never count God out.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, never count God out is the first point. The second point is don't limit God in your mind. Don't decide that, in the abstract, that if God is opened up to anything in your life right now, it has to conform to your expectations of what God has to do and what it has to look like. God is not going to do that. Do not restrict God to the obvious, and don't listen for God's voice to speak to you only through the people you deem to be the most likely candidates to bring you the word, because we do not know if Eli was even looking for messages from God anymore, but if he had, he probably would not have looked to a 12-year-old kid who was in his temple at that time. He probably would not have looked to him. You never know who God will use or what will become God's vessel or avenue by which to guide you along the way that he has mapped out for you in your life. So, don't limit God in your mind.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; exactly; I think one of the things that we realize in reading scripture, Darrell, is that if you are a follower of God... and we see this in the ministry of Jesus... be prepared to be surprised—be prepared to be

surprised. So, first takeaway: 1) Don't count God out. 2) Don't limit God in your mind, and 3) Don't get too distracted by the people who seem large and in charge, even while being corrupt and terrible people who do awful things. I don't know about you, Darrell, but there are times in this world when it seems like all the wrong people are getting away with murder.

Sometimes in the Psalms, claims are made of the righteous always prosper while evil people always suffer setbacks; but, a lot of the time, when I read the daily news headlines, I see very nearly the opposite picture; and after a while, you start to worry there is no justice; there is no reckoning; there is no balancing out of the cosmic books; there are no good things coming to the right people and the wrong people getting their just desserts; it doesn't happen; but I think we would do well to recall the famous words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that the arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice. So, Darrell, I think we have to have confidence in that, even more now because we saw how the most unjust act ever committed...the murder of God's Son, Jesus...paradoxically led to the greatest reversal of all times.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is beautiful to see that God has a through line in history no matter how dark it gets in this world; so, let's admit, it does get dark sometimes. Just as it was in Samuel's early years as a child, even there, there is a light that shines in the darkness and the darkness has not yet put it out, and we can give thanks to the Lord for that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue our story of 1 Samuel in Chapters 4-6, when Israel battled the Philistines, who then captured the Ark of the Covenant, a symbol of God's holy presence.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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Printed on July 2, 2026