HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD

1 Samuel 3:1-14

By Chris Losey

When I went to Alaska on a remote tour with the Air Force, I was not looking forward to being away from my family for a year. The commander pulled me aside and said, "Chaplain, we allow military personnel to use the government WATTS line to make phone calls home once a week for 15 minutes but I want you to call home as often as you want. If your morale is not up you won't be much good to the others." Needless to say, I heeded the commander's words and called often.

What was it that made those calls so special, besides the fact that the government paid for them? It was that I got to hear my wife's voice! Even though I couldn't see her, just the sound of her voice meant so much. We talked about the children, our daily lives, future plans, and a few other things. We laughed and cried together. Hearing Sharon's voice was one of the main things that kept me going when it was 50 below zero outside and dark nearly 23 hours a day.

Isn't it great to hear the voice of someone you love? There is something about a person's voice that is unique. It has been said that no two voices are exactly alike. They are like finger prints. If you were blindfolded in a room and had to pick out your mother's voice from a thousand different people who spoke to you one at a time, I don't think you would have a problem doing it... We especially recognize the voices of those we love.
But today we aren’t here to talk about human voices, I want us to talk about hearing the voice of God. It is important that we as Christians learn to hear and heed God's voice. When I speak of hearing God's voice I am not referring to hearing an audible voice although I believe that God could speak that way if He chose to. I personally have never heard the audible voice of God but I am convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that God speaks to me. He still speaks to all His people. We just have to learn how to listen. I invite you to turn to 1 Samuel 3 as we explore this subject. I've entitled the message, "Listening to God's Voice." It might also be called, "How Every Christian Can Hear and Heed God's Voice.

Do you believe it is important to hear God's voice? There are many Christians today who are confused on this subject. Hopefully some of this confusion can be eliminated as we explore seven key areas:

- WHO GOD SPEAKS TO
- WHEN GOD SPEAKS
- HOW GOD SPEAKS
- WHAT GOD SAYS
- WHY GOD SPEAKS
- HOW WE SHOULD RESPOND
- WHO GOD SPEAKS TO

WHO GOD SPEAKS TO
Who does God speak to? Any ideas? Do you have to be a minister in order for God to speak to you? Perhaps a deacon? Do you have to attend some special class or seminar? No! Who did God speak to in 1 Samuel 3? He spoke to a boy. Notice the first four words of the
chapter, "Now the boy Samuel..." Isn't it exciting to know that God speaks to any age group! He speaks to men and women, boys and girls. God speaks to anyone He wants to speak to! God can speak to you and me. Listen to 1 Samuel 3:1-4

1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord before Eli. And word from the Lord was rare in those days, visions were infrequent. 2 It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well), 3 and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was, 4 that the Lord called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am."

God speaks primarily to those whose heart is right
It is interesting to note that God spoke to the boy, Samuel, and not to the priest, Eli. Wouldn't it have made more sense for Him to talk directly to Eli? Eli was not only a priest, he was the high priest. The answer to this question gives insight into who God talks to. He primarily speaks to those whose heart is right toward Him. If you remember 1 Samuel 2, Eli failed to rebuke his sons for their sin. 1 Samuel 2:22-25 states:

22 Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 23 He said to them, "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? 24 "No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the Lord's people circulating. 25 "If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can
intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the Lord desired to put them to death.

Although Eli talked to his sons about their sin, he failed to do anything about it. He chose his family over God, and God rejected him for it. Not only had Eli's physical sight grown dim, his spiritual sight was dim as well. We must be sure that we never choose a relationship with any person including our own family members over our relationship with God.

Do you remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:37-38,

37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Eli made a terrible mistake of choosing man over God. I have seen Christians do this same thing. Adults will sometimes go along with the crowd at work and do and say unethical things rather than stand up for what they know is right. Teens will do the same thing with their peers. When we choose man over God, we may find that God will not speak to us except to convict us of sin. If we don't heed these promptings of the Spirit we may find that God will stop speaking to us all together. Sin hinders the voice of God.

In contrast to Eli's hard heart, Samuel loved and served God faithfully. 1 Samuel 2:26 says, "Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men." What a beautiful statement!
Oh to be growing in favor with God. This same basic statement was said about Christ in Luke 2:52, "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." I believe that God chose to speak to Samuel because his heart was right. Notice that 1 Samuel 3:7 states, "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor had the word of the Lord yet been revealed to him." I do not think that this means Samuel was an unbeliever. It simply means that up to this point in his life he did not have a close personal relationship with God where he heard God's voice on a regular basis.

How about your heart today? Are you and I growing in favor with God and men? Notice it says God first, then men. If we are growing in favor with God, He will undoubtedly speak to us. How would you rate your heart-for-God on a scale of one to ten, one being no-hearted and ten being whole-hearted? I hope your rating would rate high! Psalm 95:7-8 has a key phrase related to how our heart condition is closely related to hearing God's voice: "...Today if you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..."

Let's now look at WHEN GOD SPEAKS

WHEN GOD SPEAKS
When does God speak? If your answer is, "Whenever He wants to," you would be right! But the passage indicates some principles regarding when God speaks. Listen again to verse one, "Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord before Eli. And word from the Lord was rare in those days, visions were infrequent."
**Sometimes infrequently**

Notice it says that in those days a word from the Lord was rare and visions were infrequent. Why do you think God spoke infrequently during those days? Sin was rampant, just like it is today, maybe even worse! Historically, the book of 1 Samuel follows the book of Judges. Do you remember the last verse of that book? It states, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

In a society where most people are doing whatever they want with no regard for God, I believe that God will speak infrequently. "When God Speaks" is closely connect to "Who God Speaks To." He primarily speaks to righteous people. When will God speak to you? Probably at a time when you are close to Him.

**Sometimes frequently**

Although God spoke infrequently during Samuel's time, I believe He wants to speak frequently to us, and will do so when we draw close to Him. If we seek Him with a whole heart, I believe He will speak to us often.

**Sometimes unexpectedly**

From the passage, we also see that God can speak unexpectedly. Samuel was not expecting God to speak. When God spoke, Samuel thought it was Eli. Verse five states, "Then he (Samuel) ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he (Eli) said, 'I did not call, lie down again.'"

Have you ever had God speak to you unexpectedly? I have. Many times I have been at a retreat listening to a speaker who shared
something from God’s Word that touched my heart and made me realize that I needed to make some changes in my life. The speaker did not say, "When you get back from the retreat I want you to do these things." But the Spirit used what the man said to speak to my heart.

If you love God, undoubtedly the Lord has spoken to you like that. Perhaps you were in a Bible study or here in church and something was said that God used to speak to your heart. Maybe God is saying to you right now, "It has been a long time since you heard My voice. It is time to give a certain area of your life over to My control."

I don't know what God is saying to you through the various ministries of our church or your time alone with Him, but if He speaks to you in the quietness of your spirit, don't harden your heart, do what He says. The point is, God speaks to us unexpectedly at times.

**Sometimes expectedly**

But by the same token, God speaks expectedly, too. There are times when we seek Him that we are expecting an answer. It has been said that Jeremiah 33:3 is God's phone number. It says, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know." God says that He will show us great and mighty things if we call out to Him. I hope that all of us have those times when we call out to God expecting Him to move in our spirits and give us peace, encouragement, joy, or whatever we need at that moment. I love Jeremiah 29:11-13 which says,

11 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. 12 'Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me,
and I will listen to you. 13 'You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

When we seek God with all of our heart, we can expect to hear from Him. Hearing from God is somewhat like using a telephone. There are times when we call hoping to talk to a friend. If they answer, we are not surprised. We called them. But there are other times when we are at home minding our own business and the phone rings and it is someone quite unexpected.

**When there are minimal distractions**

In addition, God often speaks when there are minimal distractions. Notice in verses 1 Samuel 3:2-4 that both Eli and Samuel were lying down and it was quiet.

> 2 It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well),
> 3 and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was, 4 that the Lord called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am."

Have you ever been in a room on the phone talking to someone when other folks came in the room and started talking making it difficult to hear? It is hard to listen when other conversations or the TV or stereo are blaring. That's one reason I like cell and cordless phones. You can leave the room and find a quiet place to talk and listen.

I believe it is hard for us to hear the voice of God when we are up to our ears in other distractions. Although God can speak to us at any time, it is important to get alone with Him. One of the prime times I feel God speaks to me is when I am quiet before Him in study and prayer away
from the distractions of the world. Because we sometimes fail to get alone with God, we fail to hear His “still, small voice.”

I really like Mark 1:35 which talks about Jesus, "And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there." Jesus heard best from the Father when He was in those lonely, quiet places. Do you have such a place? That easy chair in the living room where you go when everyone else is still asleep. Or your car when everyone else is eating lunch in the office. Or that bench in the backyard where all you hear is the wind whispering in the trees. It is so important to have that quiet place. When Jesus disciples tried to find Him it says in Mark chapter one that they had to hunt for him. How easy is it for people to find you when you get alone with God?

When will God speak to us? If we rebel against Him, He may speak infrequently. There are times He will speak unexpectedly. But He will most likely speak when we seek Him and are free from distractions.

Let’s now move on to HOW GOD SPEAKS.

HOW GOD SPEAKS
How does God speak to us? Again, we can learn much from this passage. First, He speaks personally.

Personally
Notice that God calls Samuel by name. The first time God called Samuel in verse four we are not told what God said. It simply states "that the Lord called Samuel," but notice verse verses six and ten. Verse six states, "And the Lord called yet again, 'Samuel'"...Verse ten
states, "Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!..." God did not say, "Hey you, or listen up worm." Instead He called Samuel by name, "Samuel, Samuel."

Oh, the great love of God that He would call out to us personally. Doesn't it make you feel good to know that God cares for you that much? Most people like to be called by name. I feel that personal touch when a person says, "Chris, it is good to see you today." There is something about hearing our names spoken. It is personal and caring and makes us feel good. That's why it is a blessing to others to call them by name. If you are in the check-out line of a store, and the clerk is wearing a nametag, if you use their name it often elicits a very positive response.

In the book of John chapter ten, Jesus talks about the shepherd who knows each member of his flock by name. He then goes on to state that He is the Good Shepherd. He knows and calls each of us by name.

Repeatedly

God not only speaks personally, He speaks repeatedly. Notice that God spoke three times to Samuel before Eli finally figured out what was going on. God does not just speak one time and then say, "Well, He didn't hear me the first time, so I will not speak again." Sometimes we are hard of hearing or don't realize Who it is who is talking to us. How many times has God convicted you to break a particular habit, or start a certain discipline, or serve in a specific ministry and you didn't listen? Has He spoken to your heart repeatedly? If He has, don't harden your heart. Maybe God has prompted you several times to come forward for prayer or to become a Christian, or to follow Him in baptism. Have you listened and obeyed, or have you hardened your heart and
resisted? If God has spoken to you repeatedly, don't resist, do what He says.

**Patiently**
Not only does God speak personally and repeatedly, He speaks patiently. He knows that we are a stiff-necked people and sometimes hard of hearing. His repeated calls to Samuel showed His great patience. Could you imagine if God decided to no longer exercise His patience with us? If He said, "I am going to prompt people one time. If they don't listen to me, I'm going to judge them on the spot." I could just picture a person watching TV when a sleezy show comes on. God prompts them to change the channel or turn it off but they disregard the prompting... zap, the person is gone! Or the person laying in bed in the morning who feels God's prompting to do a quiet-time but decides to roll over and go back to sleep... poof, they're gone. Or the person at a friend's house for dinner is offered seconds on pie but feels God's prompting to decline. They disregard the prompting and reach for that second piece of pie...zap, they vanish. If God started responding to our hard-heartedness like that, people would undoubtedly respond differently to Him. Although there are times that God judges us for our failure to respond, for the most part He has great patience. Let us not miss His blessing by being stubborn. Instead, let us regard His personal, repeated and patient promptings with great respect and obedience.

Regarding how God speaks to us, it is important that we see the different ways that God has spoken in the past and how He speaks to us today. In the Old Testament He spoke several different ways.
Through voice and vision

In this passage it appears that God spoke through an audible voice in a vision. Verses four, six, eight and ten indicate God called with an audible voice:

4 that the Lord called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am." ... 6 The Lord called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again." ... 8 So the Lord called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli discerned that the Lord was calling the boy. ... 10 Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."

In verse fifteen the text says that "Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli."

There are other places in Scripture where God spoke with an audible voice in a vision. Genesis 15:1 says, "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision saying, 'Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.'"

I personally have never had a vision, nor have I heard the audible voice of God. I know there are people who say they have had these experiences. God can still speak through visions and audible voice today, but I do not believe this is the normal way He speaks to His people now that we have His Word, the Bible. God can do whatever He pleases as long as it is in line with His character and Word.
All of us have undoubtedly heard stories about people who say that God told them to do something bizarre like kill their family or co-workers. We can be sure that these folks are mistaken. God would never tell anyone to do something contrary to the clear teaching of His Word. If people hear a voice that tells them to do anything that goes against Scripture, they can be sure that the voice is not God's. Instead they may be the voice of a demon.

_Through dreams_

God also spoke through dreams. When we think of dreams in Scripture we often think of Joseph in Genesis 37. There God gave him the dream that his brothers would bow down to him, and his brothers hated him for it. Genesis 37:5-8 states,

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^5\text{Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.}^6\text{He said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had; }^7\text{for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."}^8\text{Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.}
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In the New Testament in Matthew 1:20 God spoke through an angel to another Joseph in a dream and told him to take Mary as his wife because what was conceived in her womb was of the Holy Spirit.

Does God speak through dreams today? Undoubtedly. One of the primary ways He is speaking through dreams is in the Muslim world. There are many stories of God coming to Muslims in dreams and
revealing to them that Jesus is the true way of salvation. Professor Ray Tallman from Golden Gate Seminary shared some of these stories with me that had come to his attention. Jamie Lewis our missionary has shared similar stories that he has heard about.

Does God speak to Christians through dreams today. Undoubtedly He does, but again He never shares anything that is contrary to the clear teaching of His Word.

**Through angels**

God also spoke through angels. In Genesis 16:6-9, the angel of the Lord spoke to Hagar. Listen to the story:

> 6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence. 7 Now the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8 He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." 9 Then the angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority."

Can you think of other instances when God spoke through an angel? The angel of the Lord spoke from the burning bush to Moses in Exodus 2:3,4. An angel spoke to Balaam in Numbers 22:35. The angel of the Lord spoke to all of the sons of Israel in Judges 2:1-4.

Does God speak through angels today? Undoubtedly, but again, they would never tell us to do something contrary to God’s Word. Don’t
forget what it says in 2 Corinthians 11:14, "...for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."

**Through prophets**

In the Old Testament God spoke through the major and minor prophets like Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea and Jonah. In the New Testament he also spoke through prophets like Agabus. In the New Testament in Acts 11:27-28 it states,

> 27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.

Prophets often told of coming judgment or some other event. Hebrews 1:1 states, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways..." The prophets were God's messengers and gave the people whatever message God told them to give.

**Through signs and wonders**

In the book of Exodus, God spoke to Pharoah not only through Moses, but also through signs and wonders. It took a lot to get Pharoah's attention. God also spoke to the Jews by providing manna and quail. Through His provision, God was saying, "I care about you and will provide for you." In Numbers chapter 16, God caused an earthquake that swallowed up Korah and other rebellious people. He was saying in essence, "I reject you." God spoke to Gideon through a fleece. He was saying, "I will save Israel by your hand, Gideon."
Through Urim and Thummim
The high priest had two instruments called the Urim and Thummim. We are not sure exactly what they were but they were used to get a word from the Lord. 1 Samuel 28:6 states, "When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets."

Through lots
Do you remember in the book of Acts that the disciples desired to replace Judas? In Acts 1:24-26 states,

24 And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." 25 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

What was this drawing or casting of lots? One commentator says, "Probably the two names were written on stones placed in a container. When the stones were shaken out of the container, the first stone to fall out was considered the Lord's choice." The Bible Knowledge Commentary, by Walvord and Zuck, Victor Books, 1983, pg 357.

Proverbs 16:33 states, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

Should we cast or draw lots today to determine God's will? I believe there are other more appropriate ways. Notice in Acts that before the disciples drew lots, they prayed.
Through God’s Son
In New Testament times, God spoke through Christ. Listen to Hebrews 1:1-2,

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

When Jesus walked the earth, as God’s Son, He literally spoke the Word of God. Every teaching, every parable was straight from the Father. Today we have much of what Jesus said, recorded in the pages of the New Testament. This brings us to the two primary ways God speaks to us today: through His Word (the Bible), and the Holy Spirit.

Through the Bible and the Holy Spirit
I believe these two means of hearing God's voice are essentially all a Christian needs. The Bible contains Christ's teaching, and the teachings of men inspired by God: the prophets, Moses, David, Paul, Luke... When you read the words of Scripture it is like having God speak directly to you. I don't need to hear in a dream to: be kind, forgiving, patient, generous, holy, humble, etc. God's has put all of these instructions in the Bible. I don't need God speak to me in a vision and tell me to serve Him or give financially to His work. All of these things are clearly taught in His Word. Young people who are Christians don't need an angel to appear to them and say, "You need to marry a Christian." The Bible makes it clear that we are not to be joined together with unbelievers. I don't need to cast lots to see if I should attend church regularly. The Bible says that I should.
Christians today have a tremendous advantage over Christians who lived during Bible times. We have the Old and New Testaments, clearly written, easy to understand. We can look in the Bible to find many of the things that God wants to tell us. Today, God can speak to us through His Word, the Bible which is the infallible, inerrant Word of God. I believe that 90% of God's will for every believer is found in the Bible. It doesn't tell me whom to marry or where to go to school, but it does give me the principles by which I can make godly decisions in those and countless other areas. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states,

> 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

In addition to His word, God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has the Spirit of God living inside him (Eph 1:13,14). The Spirit can prompt us to do or not to do certain things. For example, after hearing a sermon on forgiveness you may feel prompted to go to a certain person and ask their forgiveness. During a morning time of prayer you may feel prompted to call or write someone. During the day, a particular person may come to mind. This may be the Spirit prompting you to pray for them. As you pray about a particular decision and seek wise counsel you may feel great peace. This may be the Spirit of God prompting you to follow through with what you plan to do.

Part of my own quiet-time is asking God to prompt me through the Holy Spirit and show me things that He wants me to do that day. Often I find He brings to mind things that I have forgotten and things that I know I would not remember on my own. I believe this should be one of the prayers of every Christian to say, "Lord, show me at any time during
the day if you want me to do something or not do something, and I will obey."

I asked one person this week how they feel that the Spirit of God talks to them. They said they often feel God speaking to them when they read Scripture. They read a particular truth and the Spirit will prompt them how they can put the truth into practice. We need to be open constantly to the promptings of the Spirit. I believe the closer a person draws to God that the more he will be in tune with God's Spirit.

The Spirit often works through one's conscience, too. A person's conscience is that God-given, internal mechanism that helps them determine right from wrong. Every person has a conscience but unfortunately many folks have seared theirs through sin, so that sin bothers them very little. For Christians, however, it is different. The Holy Spirit heightens their consciences. He takes the truth of God's Word and uses it to convict them of right and wrong.

The two ways that God speaks to His people today; the Bible and the Spirit, are closely connected. The Spirit uses the Word. The more of God's Word we know, the more the Spirit can pull from our memory to prompt us. As one person said, "I can't sin anymore without the Spirit bringing ten Bible verses to mind." Maybe that is one reason why some folks don't spend much time in Scripture. They are afraid that the Spirit will use it to clean up their lives. That is exactly what He wants to do, to make us fit for the Master's use.

The way God speaks to us through the Word and His Spirit is somewhat analogous to a computer. Our lives would be the computer with our minds comprising the internal hardware: hard drive, motherboard,
modem, etc. Putting the Word of God into our lives is like placing software on the hard drive. The software makes it possible to do things like word processing, spreadsheets, databases, or desktop publishing. But even these are useless without what? Power to run them. The Spirit is the power that flows through our internal workings making it possible to utilize the software. That is why it is so important to spend time in God's Word and prayer so that God's Spirit can prompt us.

WHAT GOD SAYS
What does God say when He speaks to us? What has he said to you? In the case of Samuel, God gave some disturbing news. He gave a message of judgment.

- A message of judgment
1 Samuel 3:11-14 states,

11 The Lord said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 "In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 "For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. 14 "Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

This is a sobering message. God was letting Samuel know that He (God) was going to destroy the house of Eli. This undoubtedly came as a great shock to Samuel who loved Eli and had been raised by him. In 1 Samuel 3:6, Eli referred to Samuel as his son.
Sometimes God will bring us a message of judgment. Perhaps you have felt in your own life that God prompted you of coming judgment. I have heard people say that they felt something bad was going to happen before it happened. It is possible that such a message is from God. If you are struggling with a particular sin and God has convicted you about it and you have ignored Him, it is possible that He may try a bigger hammer. But God gives many other messages besides judgment.

- **A message of warning**
  He gave Adam and Eve a message or warning. He told them not to eat of a certain tree in the garden. I know that I have felt warning messages from God to get out of a certain place or to stay away from certain people who would be a bad influence. In seminary I remember being particularly busy one week. One evening I had a ton of homework and a church basketball game. I felt God saying, "Stay home, there will be other games. You have more important things to do tonight." In my stubbornness I said in my heart, "No, I deserve to go. I have been working hard and I need a break." I went to the game and about one minute into it I severely sprained my ankle. I wish I had listened to the Spirit's promptings.

God loves us and will warn us when we are in dangerous territory. Perhaps as a teenager you find yourself in with the wrong crowd and you sense God warning you to get out of there. Obey Him. We are to flee the sins of our youth. I imagine in the case of Eli, God had warned him but he would not listen. God then went the next step to judgment.
• **A message of blessing**

God gave Abram a message of blessing in Genesis 15:1-4. He told Abram not to fear because He would be his shield. God also told Abram that He would bless him with a son. How awesome to get such a word of blessing from the Lord.

There are so many places in Scripture that promise blessing for those who seek after God. When we read these passages, God is speaking directly to us that if we seek Him, He will bless us. Recently, I have been particularly aware of the book of Proverbs. Over and over God says that those who seek after wisdom, discretion, and understanding will be blessed. I see those verses written directly to me. I want God's blessing in my life and I imagine you do too!

• **A message of comfort**

God gave Hagar a message of comfort in Genesis 16. He told her that He would greatly multiply her descendants even though she had been rejected by Sarai. I have talked to people who said that they have felt God bring them a message of great comfort in the Psalms and other places. When we read and meditate on such things as Jesus words, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," we should feel comforted. Have you ever needed a message of comfort? Most of us have.

God can give us any message He wants: judgment, warning, blessing, comfort, encouragement, conviction of sin, conviction to get saved, conviction to serve in a particular ministry. It really is up to Him.

**WHY GOD SPEAKS**

God speaks to us because:
• He loves us
Often we speak to people because we love them, and God’s love for us is greater than that of any human.

• He is getting ready to do something
In Samuel's case God wanted him to have this information about Eli. It would prepare Samuel for Eli’s death, let Eli know that his ministry was over, and show Samuel the total importance of listening and obeying God.

HOW WE SHOULD RESPOND
• Eagerly! Samuel got out of bed and ran to Eli. Are we willing to get out of bed if God prompts us in the morning?
• Reverently - Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening or is it, Oh, Lord, not you again....
• Obediently, Notice Eli did not say, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening and will obey!"

Final Thoughts
Is God speaking to you today? The best way to hear Him is to spend time in the Word, prayer, worship and fellowship. God desires to speak to His children. Whose voice are we listening to? That of those around us or the voice of God? I hope it is the latter!