

October 18

Scriptures: Read 1 Samuel 3 & 4

Key Verse: “The Lord... called..., and Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears’.”
(1 Samuel 3:10)

Overview

Because of the corruption of the priesthood and widespread apostasy in that dark period of Israel’s history, “the word of the Lord was rare in those days” (3:1). How could God speak through those priests who did not honour Him nor know Him (2:12)? Their service in the tabernacle was meaningless and soon to be ended (4:18). Yet God was raising up Samuel to fill the gap and to be a much needed strong spiritual leader for the people of Israel.

Tradition says Samuel was but twelve years old when, for the first time, God spoke to Him in an audible voice. Jesus was also twelve years old when He amazed the teachers of the law in Jerusalem. We must not look down upon children, for they are often more spiritually receptive than adults. When God called Samuel, it must have been near dawn, since the oil to burn the lamp (“Menorah”, Exodus 25:31-35) throughout the night had almost gone out (3:3). Samuel, probably drowsy from being awakened, did not recognize that it was a divine voice, but with Eli’s perception and wise instruction, he was ready if God was to call him a fourth time. The believer must not be spiritually sleeping, but always ready, discerning, and listening for the voice of the Lord. Like Samuel, we must answer “Speak, for Your servant hears” (3:10).

Listening to and hearing from God is the main ingredient for communication with Him. Did He not create us with two ears and only one mouth? Eli recognized that God had chosen Samuel, and yet this did not arouse jealousy but rather respect for Samuel. Eli humbly accepted as truth the words God had spoken to Samuel, even though they, like the message delivered through the unnamed prophet (chapter 2), were against him and his sons (3:18). It must have been hard for Eli to hear that he was to blame because “he did not restrain them” (3:13), and that no amount of sacrifice could make atonement for them because the judgment of God in rejecting their priesthood had already been firmly decided (3:14).

Word of Samuel’s communication with God spread from the most northern tip (Dan) to the most southern part of Israel (Beersheba; 3:20). It must have made all Israel glad to finally have, after such a long period, a true prophet of God among them, and they all accepted Samuel’s leadership as divinely appointed.

At that time, Israel was at war with the Philistines: a strong people occupying much territory around the Mediterranean coast and probably immigrants from Crete (or Caphtor; Amos 9:7; Deuteronomy 2:23; Jeremiah 47:4-5). Their defeat of Israel and especially the loss of the ark of God was the terrible news that God said would tingle the ears of everyone who heard it (3:11). By this defeat, God was not only judging Israel but fulfilling the prophecy spoken about Hophni and Phinehas’ deaths on the same day (2:34). Because he had been forewarned, the news of the death of his sons did not affect Eli as much as the report of the stolen ark. The shock and horror of hearing of the capture of the sacred ark was so great that it caused his death.

Out of a superstitious belief, the Israelites sent for the ark without first enquiring of the Lord. They were encouraged, thinking that having the ark would mean God would be with them to give them victory. They did not understand it was merely a symbol of God's presence; and so Israel continued to suffer defeat because they had put their faith in the external form of their religion rather than God's supernatural power. Their defeat and the loss of the ark caused all Israel to clearly see that, because of their sin, God's glory had departed ("Ichabod"). Truly our Lord will only make His habitation where there is holiness.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You said, "My sheep know My voice." Please speak to us in any way You choose — audibly, as You did to Samuel, or even by that "still small voice", as You did later to Elijah. Thank you, Lord, for Your written voice, Your Holy Word by which we can confirm and understand more fully what You are saying to us.