

The Calling of Samuel

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on 1 Samuel

Samuel receives one of the few audible calls from God recorded in the Bible. It is interesting to note that Samuel's call was not a call to a type of work or ministry. Samuel had already been serving in the house of the Lord since he was two or three years old. The choice of this occupation had been made for him by his mother.

Samuel's audible call from God was to a specific task, namely to tell Eli that God has decided to punish him and his sons, who are soon to be removed as God's priests. After fulfilling this calling, Samuel continues to serve under Eli until he is recognized as a prophet in his own right and he succeeds Eli after Eli's death.

Unlike Eli's sons, Samuel becomes the leader of God's people, not because of self-serving ambition or a sense of entitlement, but because God had given him a vision and the gifts and skills to lead people to carry out that vision.

The story of Eli's sons demonstrates the perils of inherited authority. Inherited authority is inherently dangerous for two reasons. The first is that there is no guarantee that descendants of even the greatest leader will be competent and faithful. The second is that being born to power is often a corrupting influence itself, resulting all too often either in complaisance or—as the case of Eli's sons—entitlement.

Family businesses and political dynasties in today's world face these challenges. The founder of the business or polity may have brought great good into the world, but if the heirs view it as a means for personal gain, those whom they are meant to serve suffer harm. For blessing to continue through multiple generations, successors need to stay faithful to the founder's original calling.