

There's A New Seer In Town

1 Samuel 3:1-4:1 June 14, 2026

In the 1980s, IBM was not only the most valuable tech company, it was the most valuable *company* in the world.¹ It had 80% of the market and employed hundreds of thousands of people. But by 1993, Big Blue was dying. In the fourth quarter of that year - usually their strongest - they posted a \$5 billion *loss*. It was the largest corporate loss in United States history.²

John Akers was chairman and CEO at IBM from 1985 to 1993. He's since been labeled one of the worst CEOs of all time.³ In those eight years, IBM lost three quarters of its market value.⁴ CNBC writes that his indecision paralyzed the company. But he insisted that he would not resign.

The powers that be forced him out. But who could right the ship? The board turned to an outsider named Lou Gerstner. Lou saw that IBM's focus had become totally *internal*. They no longer considered customers. Instead, little groups within the company would "jealousy guard [their] own privileges."⁵ Lou started changing things from the inside out. A year later, they had almost \$400 million in profits. Five years later, the stock price was 12 times what it had been in 1993. And Lou has been labeled one of the *greatest* CEOs of all time.⁶

There are parallels in that story and our text. God, by His providence, brought little Samuel - an outsider - into the Tabernacle. God was providing someone He could use to right the ship.

Israel was in *bad* shape. There was no unity. There was no spiritual power. Everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. This is *not* how things should have been. How do you go from the strength we see in Joshua to the weakness of these opening chapters of Samuel? The answer is *Judges*. As people turned from obeying God, as they turned from the word of God, they became weaker and weaker, and the nation drifted closer and closer to disaster. But just as the last flicker of hope seems ready to burn out, God intervenes with power, with grace, with deliverance.

There's one thing Lou Gerstner said that is the *opposite* of what we'll see today. When he began as CEO he said, "The last thing IBM needs right now is a *vision*."⁷ That was *exactly* what Israel needed.

1 Samuel 3:1 - 1 The boy Samuel served the LORD in Eli's presence. In those days the word of the LORD was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread.

This is *not* a good sign. God loves to reveal. He is a God Who speaks. He is a God Who calls and communicates. But His people, by and large, had little interest in listening.

¹ <https://thechipletter.substack.com/p/how-big-was-ibm>

² <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-01-20-fi-1540-story.html>

³ <https://www.cnbc.com/2009/04/30/Portfolios-Worst-American-CEOs-of-All-Time.html>

⁴ <https://www.the-independent.com/news/business/ibm-fires-akers-and-slashes-dividend-1481080.html>

⁵ <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/podcast/knowledge-at-wharton-podcast/lou-gerstners-turnaround-tales-at-ibm/>

⁶ <https://www.cnbc.com/2009/04/24/Portfolios-Best-American-CEOs-of-All-Time.html>

⁷ Louis Gerstner, Jr. *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?*

The Proverbs warn us: "Without revelation, people run wild, but one who follows divine instruction will be happy."⁸ "Revelation" there is the same word used here in verse 1.

In those days, there's no Moses to lead them. There's no Joshua. They *have* a judge - but it's Eli.⁹ And he's demonstrated that he cannot lead with integrity or in the power of God.

Are we being led by God? Am I hearing from God? I don't mean a miraculous vision, but is God's Word speaking to you? Directing your steps? Filling your heart with strength and joy and resolve? That's what He *wants* to do. If we have ears to hear, we can hear what He has to say.

1 Samuel 3:2-3 - ² One day Eli, whose eyesight was failing, was lying in his usual place. ³ Before the lamp of God had gone out, Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was located.

Let our author paint the image for you. Eli's eyes are dim. The night is dark and the menorah is almost out of oil. There's no movement in the Tabernacle. It's not just a physical setting, it illustrates the spiritual reality of Israel at the time. This is a dark night before a *new* dawn.

Samuel is shown *close* to the Ark. He might not actually be sleeping in the Holy of Holies - that would be surprising - but he's near the presence of God while Eli is further away in his usual place.

The text highlights the weakness of Eli's eyes. In the next chapter we'll see he's gone totally blind. But that is a clue for us. When Moses is described in *his* old age, we're told, "Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his eyes were not weak."¹⁰

Eli is no Moses. But the people *need* a Moses. They need a servant leader who will speak the word of God to them. And that's why God brought Samuel to the Tabernacle.

God can do whatever He wants. He can speak a word and make anything happen He wants to happen. But that's *not* what He usually does. What He wants to do is use *human* lives to do His work as He draws us to Himself, fills us with His power and truth, and sends us to be His hands and feet.

1 Samuel 3:4-9 - ⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel, and he answered, "Here I am." ⁵ He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "I didn't call," Eli replied. "Go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. ⁶ Once again the LORD called, "Samuel!" Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am; you called me." "I didn't call, my son," he replied. "Go back and lie down." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, because the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ Once again, for the third time, the LORD called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli understood that the LORD was

⁸ Proverbs 29:18

⁹ 1 Samuel 4:18

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 34:7

calling the boy. 9 He told Samuel, "Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.' " So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Samuel *did not yet know* the Lord. That is, he didn't know God *personally*. He didn't have his own relationship with God. Now here's why that's significant: Samuel had *extremely* Godly parents. Samuel was in a position and proximity that was *closer* to God than any other Hebrew at the time. But having believing parents doesn't make you a believer. Sitting in church every Sunday doesn't make you a Christian. Saving faith has to be personal. Not cultural or familial. Not that you do certain religious habits. *You* must be born again *personally*. *You* must *know* God.

How do we *know* God? Samuel didn't know God because the word of God had not been revealed to him. God reveals Himself through His word. Jesus said He came in the volume of the Book. We're told man does not live on bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The Bible is the God-breathed revelation of Who He is and *how* we can know Him. It washes us. It lights up our path. Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, you really are My disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."¹¹

Now let's notice some things about the tender kindness of our Lord. First, Samuel did not know the Lord, but *God knew him!* He saw Samuel. He called him by name. Second, notice the Lord's patience. He was willing to call out four times as little Samuel was slowly introduced to this God he hadn't met before. God treats him patiently and gently. Third, God is, frankly, a bit playful here. He sees how it's going. He sees Eli can't figure it out at first. But it's almost like when you first play hide and seek with your toddler. We see God getting closer and more obvious as the scene plays out.

You may not know God, but He knows you. And He is calling you by name to respond to Him, to be rescued from sin and death. To receive salvation and have your life transformed forever. If you want to answer that call, do what Samuel did. Simply pray a response from the quiet of your heart: God, I hear You, I believe You, I want to serve You. And God will continue to reveal Himself to you.

1 Samuel 3:10 - 10 The LORD came, stood there, and called as before, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel responded, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

First He calls, then He calls by name, now He calls Samuel's name twice and is *standing there* in the room! This is a Theophany, which is an appearance of Jesus Christ on earth before His incarnation.

But notice how God calls his name twice in a row. Samuel, Samuel! We sense an urgency. It highlights how focused the Lord is on *this* boy's life. We read it and think, "Wow! What a wonderful thing Samuel got to experience." But you know, even though most of us won't have this kind of *visitation*, our Lord has the same kind of attention and intention for us.

God did this double-name calling many times in the Bible. Moses, Moses. Jacob, Jacob. Abraham, Abraham. Simon, Simon. Martha, Martha. Saul, Saul. Each time because God wanted these

¹¹ John 8:31-32

individuals to understand His love and care for them and the life He was calling them into. God calls to you. Speaking from His word and by His Spirit to instruct, to encourage, to direct, to correct, to bring you closer to Him so that He can accomplish more for you. Are we listening?

1 Samuel 3:11-15 - ¹¹ The LORD said to Samuel, "I am about to do something in Israel that will cause everyone who hears about it to shudder. ¹² On that day I will carry out against Eli everything I said about his family, from beginning to end. ¹³ I told him that I am going to judge his family forever because of the iniquity he knows about: his sons are cursing God, and he has not stopped them. ¹⁴ Therefore, I have sworn to Eli's family: The iniquity of Eli's family will never be wiped out by either sacrifice or offering." ¹⁵ Samuel lay down until the morning; then he opened the doors of the LORD's house. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision,

That's a rough message for a kid to have to hear. You know, the Lord loves us and is patient and He is gentle, but at the same time, serving Him can be difficult. Sometimes we have to say hard things, do hard things. He'll empower us to do it, but it's not always easy.

By the time Lou Gerstner was done at IBM, things were great. Growth and profits and all that. But it wasn't without difficulty. At first he had to lay off 35,000 people.¹² That's a hard call to make.

Why did God feel the need to send this message to Samuel since Eli already knew all of this? God even references how He had already said it - which He did through a different prophet in the last passage. So why load up Samuel's little shoulders with such a heavy burden?

At least two reasons. First, God intended to establish Samuel as a prophet. He wanted everyone in Israel to know that when Samuel spoke the word of God, it was authentic and authoritative. So God is giving Samuel an opportunity here to begin that role as a prophet.

But second, God is giving Samuel an opportunity to obey his calling. God was calling Samuel to be an important part of what He was doing for Israel. Samuel was going to have to say some weighty and difficult things as kings are anointed, rejected, and judged. *Was he willing to do what God asked him to do?* Sometimes we don't do what God asks us to do, right? Consider Jonah. Called to prophesy to Nineveh. He didn't want to do it. And so, this is also a chance for Samuel to *choose* to obey God, even though it was hard and even though he didn't want to tell Eli because he *loved* Eli.

Up in verse 6, Eli called Samuel "my son." It was a term of endearment.¹³ Eli was essentially Samuel's adoptive father. So, would Samuel honor God or Eli more?

1 Samuel 3:16-18 - ¹⁶ but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." "Here I am," answered Samuel. ¹⁷ "What was the message he gave you?" Eli asked. "Don't hide it from me. May God punish you and do so severely if you hide anything from me that he told you." ¹⁸ So Samuel

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/money/Lou-Gerstner>

¹³ Robert Alter *The David Story*

told him everything and did not hide anything from him. Eli responded, “He is the LORD. Let him do what he thinks is good.”

It’s sad that Eli held Samuel to a higher standard than he did his own sons. But that lines up with what we’ve seen of poor Eli this whole time. He’s losing his spiritual vision. He’s a paralyzed leader. And here, he simply resigns himself to the message. He doesn’t tear his clothes. He doesn’t repent. He doesn’t plead for God’s mercy. When he realized God was calling out to Samuel, he didn’t bother getting out of bed to go witness it himself! When a person gives up on spirituality like that, when a person allows their relationship with God to be *that* cold and *that* dormant and *that* disinterested, God eventually sets that person aside and works in the lives of those who *will* follow Him and honor Him. And, thankfully, Samuel was faithful to serve, faithful to deliver the message, faithful to do what Eli wouldn’t and that’s put God first, even when it was scary.

1 Samuel 3:19-4:1a - ¹⁹ Samuel grew. The LORD was with him, and he fulfilled everything Samuel prophesied., ²⁰ All Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a confirmed prophet of the LORD. ²¹ The LORD continued to appear in Shiloh, because there he revealed himself to Samuel by his word. ^{4v1} And Samuel’s words came to all Israel.

Lou Gerstner didn’t *only* help IBM make money. He was also worked to better public education. For his efforts and contributions, in 2001 he was a made a Knight of the British Empire.

Samuel was being raised up to serve God. He was the first named prophet since Moses and he would be Israel’s last judge. Because God wanted people to understand a new day was dawning in the spiritual and political history of Israel, He made sure everyone from the northern border to the southern border knew he was a *legitimate* prophet.

There are people out there today who claim to be prophets or who prophesy what God is about to do. A while back, a prominent church had a fellow who was running for governor come on stage and prophesy that the greatest revival ever is about to break out and that one of the prophetic proofs of that was that he would win the California governor’s race. He didn’t even make the ballot.

A prophet isn’t a prophet because they *say* so. They’re a prophet if they’re confirmed by the work of God. Now, Samuel *did* prophesy and he was called to a unique, dramatic work. But that should not discourage us as if we’re unimportant in God’s plan. The truth is, the term used for Samuel here which is translated as “prophet” originally meant “one called to duty by God.”¹⁴ It’s not only about telling the future. It’s about hearing God’s word and proclaiming it. You know, Abraham is called a prophet. And Aaron. And David. People we don’t really categorize with Elijah and Ezekiel.

But all of us are called to live a life with the Lord, as Samuel lived, a life submitted to and saturated with the word of God, like Samuel’s was. And to be used to proclaim God’s word like Samuel did.

¹⁴ P. Kyle McCarter 1 Samuel: A New Translation With Introduction And Commentary

God is still calling people by name. His word still goes out to light up a world that is growing darker and darker. If we have ears to hear, let's hear what the Lord has to say and respond to it, act upon it, live lives according to it. Continuing in the Word and being set free by God's truth.

Lou Gerstner wrote this about his time at IBM: *"Changing the attitude and behavior of thousands of people is very, very hard to accomplish. You can't simply give a couple of speeches or write a new credo for the company and declare that a new culture has taken hold. You can't mandate it, can't engineer it. What you can do is create the conditions for transformation."*¹⁵

God sends out the call. He has revealed His word. It is alive. It does not return void. He has provided the power necessary for transformation. But it happens when we answer. When we have ears to hear. When we acknowledge He is King and He is Master and we say, "Speak, Lord, your servants are listening." Remembering that He has called us into a life, into a position, into opportunities to proclaim His word, accomplish His work, light up the dark as He shines through us.

¹⁵ <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/podcast/knowledge-at-wharton-podcast/lou-gerstners-turnaround-ales-at-ibm/>