

1 Samuel 3

Aim of Lesson

To show how Samuel readily responded to God's call, and how God punished those who chose to do wickedly.

Background study

Revise the details of the tabernacle in Exodus 36-40. Read and select material from 1 Samuel 2.

Suggested outline of lesson

Commence the lesson with a quiz on the previous story, emphasizing Hannah's faith and the way in which God answered her prayer. Ask the children whether they remember the meaning of Samuel's name, the promise Hannah made and the purpose in bringing Samuel to stay with Eli?

Using models or pictures of the tabernacle, remind the children of its design, purpose and contents, and of the clothing and work of the priests. It was their responsibility to uphold the Law and to guide the people in the right way. Only men of the tribe of Levi were priests, and the work was handed down from father to son. Eli was the High Priest and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas were also expected to become faithful priests. But they turned out to be self-willed and godless men who behaved wickedly and encouraged other people to do wrong. Eli was very displeased and ashamed about the things they did but he had given up trying to correct them; they wouldn't listen to him.

Explain the love Eli would have had for this young boy who took the place of his reprobate sons; this lad was conscientious, pious, obedient and willing to learn. Suggest some of the jobs which the young Levite may have been able to do to help Eli in caring for God's house - though he would have to wait until he was grown up to be able to carry out any of the formal duties of a Kohathite. There is a useful lesson here - children are always important, and it is always possible for children to please God, but there is also a need to respect their elders and to realise that not everything is permitted to them.

Describe Hannah's annual visit to Shiloh when she and Elkanah and all the family came to worship at the appointed meeting place. Each year she took Samuel a new and bigger coat to wear over his tunic. No doubt Samuel would be glad to see them and to hear the latest news of the family, especially the birth of a new brother or sister. He would show his mother and father where he slept and worked, and told them about the things he had to do. Year by year he took on more duties and, through Eli's careful teaching, he came to understand and to recite the Law and to appreciate the covenant which God had made with his ancestors. It had been many years since God had spoken directly to anyone. Samuel would have learned about God's communications with Abraham, Joseph, Moses and with Joshua. Samuel grew to love God and wanted to serve him well.

Describe the quietness and darkness of the night as Eli and Samuel lay asleep. When Samuel was awakened by a voice calling his name, he naturally assumed that Eli wanted him and immediately ran to his side. Using the exact words spoken, convey the persistence of Samuel and the patience and subsequent realization of Eli. Having been told by Eli how to reply if the voice called him again, Samuel would feel excited and nervously expectant as he lay down, and no doubt he rehearsed the words he was to say. With what breathless wonder, and perhaps fear, he listened to the dreadful words which God spoke to him that night. Afterwards he could not sleep again but lay wondering how he would give the message to Eli in the morning. No doubt he was relieved when it became light and he got up to open the doors of God's house.

Perhaps Eli was restless, too, and when he heard Samuel moving about he called to him and insisted on being told everything that God had said. Sadly Samuel told him all. Eli knew only too well that his sons were very wicked and that he had failed to stop their evil practices. He recognized that God's judgement was just and accepted it meekly. For his part, Samuel became a faithful and obedient judge who led the people in the right way and taught them wisely. What is more, God spoke to him many times after that first message, so that he became also a great prophet in Israel.

Relevance to the children's lives

Do we hear the voice of God speaking to us aloud today? How does God tell us what he wants us to do? God is pleased when we listen carefully to his word and then try to do what he asks. We are never too young to begin to work for God. What sort of things could we do at Sunday School, at home, at school, and how should we do them?

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, thank you for choosing Samuel to be a great leader in Israel. Help us to listen to your words and to start now to serve you in the best way we can. Amen.

Memory verse

"And the Lord came and stood forth, calling as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!'. And Samuel said 'Speak, for thy servant hears.'" (1 Samuel 3:10).