

The call of Samuel.

Samuel's mother, Hannah, was childless, but she made an oath to the Lord that if He would give her a son, she would bring him to the tabernacle in Shiloh to serve the Lord there his whole life. The Lord answered her prayer and Samuel was born.

Hannah took him to the tabernacle when he was still very young, but he was not afraid because his mother had taught him that the Lord would always be with him, even if she was not there with him. Each year when his parents, Elkanah and Hannah, went to visit the tabernacle, his mother brought him a new robe and then Eli, the priest of God, blessed them.

Eli had grown old and blind and that is why he was very glad Samuel was there to help him with the service in the tabernacle. It was a very busy place, because all of Israel brought their sacrifices to the Lord and Eli had to oversee that everything was done according to the law of the Lord.

Samuel obeyed Eli in everything he commanded him to do. In the mornings, he had to open the doors so that the people could come in. He made sure that all the lamps were full of oil and burning, as there were no windows in the tabernacle to allow light to come in from outside. Then he had to polish all the gold, silver and copper things until they shone. Growing bigger, his duties became increasingly more important as Eli entrusted more and more to him.

Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas — one with prowling eyes and the other with a crooked grin — also served as priests, but they did wrong in the eyes of the Lord, because they were audacious and selfish. When the Israelites brought their sacrifices, these two priests always took for themselves the best part of the sacrifice, which was supposed to belong to the Lord. Sometimes they used violence to do it. That was a big sin, because they did not respect the sacrifice of the Lord and they caused the Israelites to not respect the Lord's sacrifice either.

Eli rebuked his sons softly in his own way and not according to the law of the Lord, but they were so stubborn that they did not want to listen. Although he tried to teach them to do the right thing, he considered his sons more important than God. That is why God had decided to bring judgment upon them.

In the evenings, when all their work was completed, while the sweet smell of incense still hung in the air, Eli enjoyed telling Samuel about all the commandments and laws, the feasts, and all the different sacrifices. Eli said the prayers of the people rose up to God like the smoke of the sacrifices, with a lovely fragrance. Yet, Samuel enjoyed hearing about God's miracles the most: About Moses who heard the voice of God himself and led the Israelites out of Egypt. About the Red Sea parting, the water from the rock, the manna and much more.

On Mount Sinai, God spoke to Moses like with a friend and told him how to build the tabernacle, how to offer the sacrifices and how to obey his commands and laws. Samuel wondered why God's voice had been so quiet in Shiloh for so long. Eli did not hear God's voice and neither did Hophni and Phinehas. Samuel wished he could hear the voice of God, but he thought he probably was too little and too young, and most likely still had a lot to learn.

One night while Samuel was sleeping, he heard a voice calling him, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel immediately answered and said, "Here I am!" He rose and walked over to Eli and said to him, "Here I am, for you called me."

Half asleep, Eli told him, "I did not call you. Lie down again." So he lay down.

Then the Lord called Samuel again, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel went to Eli again, "Here I am, for you called me," but again Eli, who was a bit more awake now, told him that he did not call and that Samuel could lie down and sleep on.

As soon as Samuel lay down to doze off, he heard the voice again, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel thought, "This time Eli must really need me," and he went to him and said, "Here I am, for you called me."

This time Eli was wide awake and realized that it must have been the Lord Who was calling Samuel. He told Samuel, "It wasn't me calling you, but lie down again and if you hear the voice again, tell Him, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

Samuel went back to lie down at his place and the voice called again, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel answered, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

The Lord told Samuel, "Behold, the thing I am going to do will make people's ears tingle from shock, for I am going to judge and punish Eli's evil sons for all the wrong things they have done. I am also going to punish Eli, because he did not rebuke his sons sternly." Samuel listened with wide eyes but lay till the morning. He was quite afraid to tell Eli about the bad news, because Eli was like a dad to him.

After Samuel had opened the doors, Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son, what is the message the Lord has given you? Don't you dare hide something from me; otherwise the Lord will punish you." Then Samuel told Eli everything and he held nothing back. Afterwards Eli said, "He is the Lord, let Him do what seems good to Him."

Because Samuel was faithful to share the word of the Lord with Eli just like it was, the Lord entrusted more and more messages — both good and bad — to Samuel to tell the people, and ALL of his words came to pass. Samuel grew up and everybody knew that the Lord was with him, and they were very glad that God spoke again to his people in Shiloh.