

A BOY WHO WAS GIVEN TO GOD

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THERE was a very good Hebrew woman who loved God and wanted to serve him, but she was sorrowful because she had no children. Her name was Hannah. Her husband's name was Elkanah. They lived in a town called Ramathaim-zophim. That is a big name for a small town, and you will probably have quite a hard time learning to pronounce it properly. Every year Elkanah and his wife Hannah journeyed to a place called Shiloh to offer a sacrifice to God. That is where the tabernacle and the priests of Israel were then located, and the sacrifices were brought to the priests.

While in Shiloh one year, Hannah felt so very badly because she had no children that she prayed specially to God about it. The high priest's name was Eli. He saw Hannah praying, and when he learned what she was praying for, he told her that God would answer her prayer and that she would be given a son. Hannah was so thankful and so happy that she promised when God gave her a son she would give the child back to God to be used in his service. After a while God gave Hannah the son Eli had promised, and she named him Samuel. While Samuel was still a little boy his mother took him to Shiloh and gave him to Eli the priest to be used in the service of God, as she had promised. God was well pleased with this.

When Hannah went back to her home she left Samuel with Eli. Eli was now an old man, and there were many ways in which the boy Samuel could help him to do God's work. When the priests of Israel were serving God in the tabernacle they wore white linen garments, so Samuel was provided with white clothes. In that way, you see, he didn't look out of place. His mother came to see him every year, and each year she brought him a new white coat. Samuel was growing, and each year he needed a larger coat, and his good mother kept him supplied.

Samuel was very faithful in working for Eli, the priest. He even slept near the priest's bedroom so he would be able to give him any help he might need during the night. Samuel was really a very good boy! One night, while Samuel was still a very young man, after he and Eli had retired, he heard a voice calling, "Samuel, Samuel." The boy answered, "Here am I." He thought, of course, that Eli needed help and was calling him. So he ran to Eli's bedside to find out what he could do for the priest, but Eli told him that he had not called.



Samuel was rather puzzled, but went back to bed. He had been in bed only a little while and again he heard the call, “Samuel, Samuel.” Samuel jumped up again and hurried to Eli’s bedside saying, “Here am I.” But the priest had not called. Samuel must have been more perplexed than ever. He may have said to himself, “What is this? Am I dreaming?” He went back to bed, but only to have the same experience the third time.

When Samuel came to Eli the third time, the priest decided it must be that God was speaking to the boy, so he told him to go back to bed and if he heard his name called again, to answer, saying, “Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.” Samuel went back to bed as Eli suggested, and sure enough he heard the voice calling, “Samuel, Samuel.” This time, instead of hurrying to the bedside of Eli, Samuel replied, “Speak; for thy servant heareth.” And sure enough, God did have a message for his young servant.

Eli loved God and wanted to serve him faithfully, but he had two sons who were wicked. Their father told them that they were doing wrong and causing others to do wrong when they came to the tabernacle, but they kept on doing sinful things. Eli should have punished them and kept them from doing so much wrong, but he failed to do so. Perhaps he didn't like to punish his own boys. But the time came when God decided that he would have to put a stop to the wrongdoing. He told Samuel that Eli and his two wicked sons would die, and that he would raise up a new priest, one who would serve him faithfully.

That was a very important message for God to give to such a young servant, but Samuel told Eli about it the next morning, and Eli received it very kindly, saying that he was willing that God should do whatever was best. Matters turned out just as God had told Samuel, and when the people learned about it they, too, were sure that there was a prophet of God among them. From that very time Samuel was loved and obeyed by the people of Israel, for they knew that God was with him.

Samuel served the children of Israel very faithfully for many years. After awhile he had two sons of his own, and strangely enough, when they grew up to be men they sinned against God just as Eli's sons had done. Wouldn't you think that boys having such a good father would grow up to love God and to serve him faithfully? But Samuel's boys did not. The people loved Samuel so much that they trusted his boys. But when they found out about their wickedness in leading the Israelites into doing wrong they felt very badly about it and complained to Samuel.

By this time more than four hundred years had passed since Joshua, the successor of Moses, died. During all that time there had been no one who really ruled and guided the people, as Moses and Joshua had done. They had what were called "judges." These judges advised the Israelites how to get along, and sometimes they served as leaders of Israel's army in defeating their enemies. Gideon, who defeated the Midianites with only three hundred soldiers, was one

of Israel's judges. Samuel was also a judge in Israel, in addition to being a prophet. Samuel was the last of Israel's judges.

Now this is why Samuel was the last judge. When his sons became so very wicked, the people not only complained to Samuel, but they demanded that they be given a king to rule over them to take the place of Samuel. They knew that God loved Samuel, and that unless Samuel appointed a king, the king wouldn't get along very well; so they asked Samuel to select someone to rule over them as king. They intimated to the prophet that they were tired of being ruled by judges; and besides, they said they wanted to be like other nations. They wanted to be ruled by a king.

Poor Samuel! He felt very badly about this. But God comforted him and told him that, after all, the Israelites were not rejecting him. "They are rejecting me," God said to Samuel. You see, under the judges, God was the real Ruler of the people because the judges merely represented God.

However, God told Samuel to appoint a king to rule over the Israelites. "But before you do it," God said to Samuel, "make it plain to the people that they will have a great deal of trouble." "Tell them," he said, "that their kings will probably oppress them and get them into much more trouble than they had under the judges."

Samuel gave this message to the people, but they still insisted that they wanted a king to rule over them. Of course, kings are all right if they are good kings. The Bible tells us about one very good King. I wonder if any of you can think of his name before I tell you.

Well, that very good King the Bible tells us about is King Jesus. King Jesus will rule over this whole earth for a thousand years. During all that time there will be no war. No one will be hungry or without clothes. Everybody will learn to love God and serve him. And best of all, the people who have died will be brought back to life during the time when Jesus is King. Isn't that wonderful?

Yes, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel—all people will be brought back to life when Jesus is King. It will be wonderful to see Samuel, won't it? Aren't there a lot of questions you would like to ask him?

Well, I am getting off the subject, but I did want to tell you about the wonderful King Jesus, and all the things he will do for the people. However, when Samuel found out that the children of Israel were determined to have a king to rule over them, he asked God to help him select a man who would be a good king. God did help Samuel, and an Israelite by the name of Saul was chosen to be the first king. Saul was a very large man, and the people were greatly pleased to have him as their king, and they shouted, “God save the king.”

QUESTIONS

- Who was Samuel, and why did his mother give him to the priest when he was a child?
- Who was Eli, and what did God reveal to Samuel concerning him?
- Who was the first king of Israel, and what were Israel’s rulers called before that time?