



Introduction

Many children's leaders have found the style of storytelling that has been developed within Godly Play to be a very helpful and effective way of opening up the Bible with children. When using this technique, remember to tell the story slowly, focusing on the objects and on the story itself, not on the children who are listening. When you have finished telling the story, leave a short space and then use the wondering questions written out for you at the end of the piece.

Preparation

The story of how God called young Samuel in the shrine at Shiloh is found in 1 Samuel 3, with the background about Hannah and also Eli and his sons in the preceding two chapters.

Samuel is the last of the judges and his life marks the transition to the period of the kings for the people of God. He was a remarkable man and the fact that God spoke to him while he was so young and indeed gave him such a serious message for the adult world around him, is a strong reminder, if ever we need one, that God can and does speak powerfully to and through the children in our groups today.

For this presentation you will need the following items, choosing or making 3-D objects that are both simple and attractive:

- a large piece of red felt as a base cloth;
- a pin board in two sections, about 30cm by 60 cm. Cover the floor of the smaller half with gold card (this is the inner courtyard) and mark an entrance to this with black tape;
- also use this tape to mark out some rooms on one side of the larger section (the outer courtyard), in one of which Eli will sleep; similarly mark the main entrance to the shrine;
- you will need a block of wood painted gold to represent the Ark and a smaller, plain block to be the altar, located outside the main door to the shrine;
- finally obtain wooden figures for Hannah, Eli, young Samuel and Eli's two sons;
- a small bundle of cloth can represent Samuel's new clothes brought by Hannah each year.

For the figures you might like to consider some of the ELC doll families, suitably re-clothed in longer robes.

Development

1 *Lay out the red base cloth and then place on it centrally the pin board with the shrine outline.*

The time of the Judges was nearly at an end. The Temple in Jerusalem had not yet been built. The Ark was in the Shrine of the Lord at Shiloh.

Hold the Ark in your hand for a moment; then place it against the back wall of the inner courtyard.



Eli the priest served there with his two sons.

Place Eli by the main door and the sons beside the altar outside the main door.

2 One day, Eli was sitting by the door of the Shrine.

A woman came in. Her name was Hannah.

Bring Hannah into the outer courtyard of the Shrine.

She was crying. She had come to Shiloh with her husband to worship God. Hannah prayed in her heart: 'Oh God I am so unhappy. Please give me a son. If you do, I will give him to you.'

Eli thought at first Hannah had been drinking. But when he realised she was sad, he blessed her.

Cup your hand over Hannah.

Hannah stopped crying and went home with her husband.

Move Hannah to the edge of the base cloth to your right.

3 God remembered Hannah and answered her prayer. She did have a baby. She called him Samuel.

Place Samuel next to Hannah.

Hannah remembered her promise to God. When Samuel was three years old, she took him to the Shrine at Shiloh.

Bring Hannah and Samuel to a point just outside the main entrance to the Shrine.

'Do you remember me? I stood here and prayed for a son. God has answered my prayer. So now I give my son to God.'

Move Samuel to Eli. Kiss your finger and then touch the kiss onto Samuel's head. Turn Hannah round and move her back to the edge of the backcloth. Move Eli with Samuel behind him into the outer courtyard.

4 So Samuel served in the Shrine. Every morning he opened the inner courtyard doors and did a priest's work. Every night he slept by the Ark.

Move Samuel to the entrance doors of the inner courtyard. Move Eli to the outer courtyard.

And every year, as he grew too big for his clothes, his mother brought him a new robe.

Touch Hannah and lay a small bundle of clothed in one of the rooms in the Shrine.

5 Eli's two sons were priests too but they were greedy and bullying.



Touch the sons.

Eli warned his sons to start doing what God wanted, but they did not listen. But Samuel grew, and was loved by God and by the people.

6 *Lie Samuel by the Ark and Eli also asleep in the courtyard room.*

One night, Samuel heard a voice. 'Samuel!'

As you say his name, bring your hand down in a cupping gesture around Samuel. Then move Samuel to Eli.

He ran to Eli. 'Here I am. You called me.'
'I didn't call; go back and lie down.'

Move Samuel back and lie him down again.

Again, Samuel heard a voice. 'Samuel!'

Repeat the actions but don't rush them.

Again Samuel ran to Eli. 'Here I am; you called me.'
'I didn't call. Go back and lie down.'

Repeat the actions

'Samuel!'

Repeat the actions

'Here I am; you called me.'

The third time, Eli realised it was God. 'Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'

Bring Samuel back to lie by the Ark.

'Samuel!'

Repeat the action and then cup your hand, palm down, over Samuel as if in blessing. Keep your hand there.

'Speak Lord, your servant is listening.'

God came so close to Samuel and Samuel came so close to God that Samuel heard what God said to him.

7 He lay by the Ark until morning, and then opened the inner Shrine doors.



Move Samuel to the doors and Eli to mid-courtyard.

But he was afraid to tell Eli what God had said. Eli called him: 'Samuel, my son.'

'Here I am.'

'Tell me everything God said. Don't hide anything from me.'

So Samuel told Eli that God would bring Eli's family to an end.

Take away the sons. Touch Eli.

'He is the Lord. Let him do what is good in his eyes.'

Move Samuel back to the Ark.

From that time on, God was with Samuel as he grew up, and Samuel let none of God's words fall to the ground. Everyone recognised Samuel as a prophet. And God continued to appear at Shiloh and spoke to Samuel there.

Cup Samuel in your hand.

I wonder what you like best about this story?

I wonder what is most important in this story?

I wonder where you are in this story or which part of the story is especially about you?

I wonder who had the most difficult time of it in this story?

I wonder who you feel most sympathy for?

I wonder who had most to let go of?

I wonder who felt most rewarded?

I wonder how Samuel felt when he heard God's voice?

I wonder when you have heard God calling you?

I wonder how Samuel felt when he was given a message like that?

I wonder why God chose to give that message to Samuel, not to Eli?

I wonder if God has ever given a tough job to you?

I wonder if God has ever spoken to you through the children you care for?

I wonder how Eli felt when God spoke to Samuel?

I wonder how Samuel made sure that none of God's words fell to the ground?