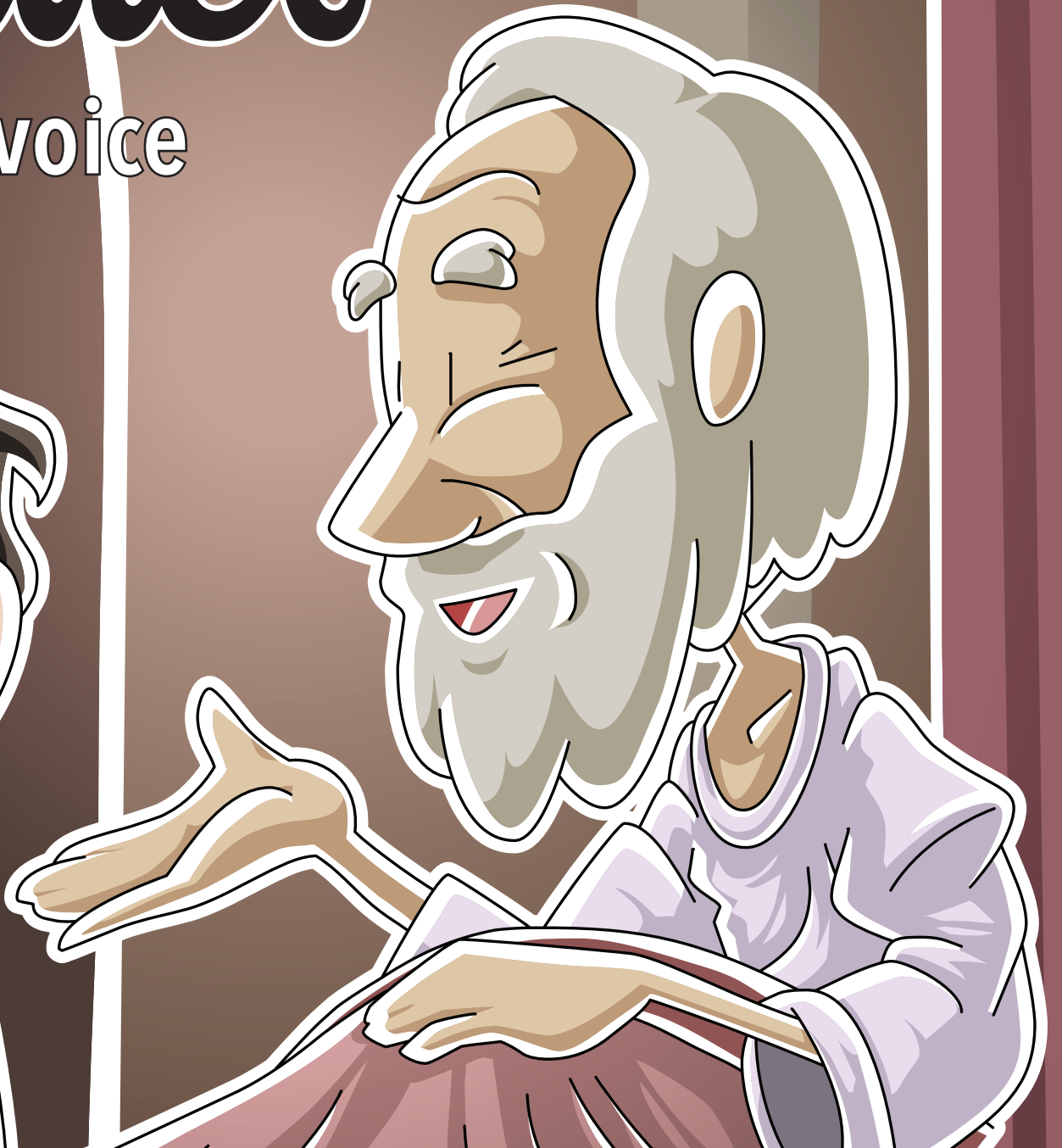


Samuel

hears a voice



Colour me!



1 Samuel 3:1-10

Samuel was the son of a couple named Elkanah and Hannah. Hannah could not have a baby for a long time but she prayed to God with all her heart and God answered her prayers. So as a sign of gratefulness to God for giving her a child, Hannah dedicated Samuel to the work of God in his temple.

Samuel served the Lord by helping Eli the priest, who was by that time almost blind. In those days, the Lord hardly ever spoke directly to people, and he did not appear to them in dreams very often. But one night, Eli was asleep in his room, and Samuel was sleeping on a mat near the sacred chest in the Lord's house. They had not been asleep very long when the Lord called out Samuel's name.

"Here I am!" Samuel answered. Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. What do you want?" "I didn't call you," Eli answered. "Go back to bed." Samuel went back. Again the Lord called out Samuel's name. Samuel got up and went to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "What do you want?" Eli told him, "Son, I didn't call you. Go back to sleep." The Lord had not spoken to Samuel before, and Samuel did not recognize the voice. When the Lord called out his name for the third time, Samuel went to Eli again and said, "Here I am. What do you want?"

Eli finally realized that it was the Lord who was speaking to Samuel. So he said, "Go back and lie down! If someone speaks to you again, answer, 'I'm listening, Lord. What do you want me to do?'" Once again Samuel went back and lay down. The Lord then stood beside Samuel and called out as he had done before, "Samuel! Samuel!" "I'm listening," Samuel answered. "What do you want me to do?"

Commentary

We all long to hear God speaking to us. Whether it comes through a Bible story, the advice of a Christian friend or a quiet voice in our head, a word from God can change everything. But sometimes God seems to be very quiet. It felt like that for Eli the priest and the people of God at the time of this story. What a surprise, then, that when God did speak, he chose to give a message to a little child!

Samuel could hear God's voice clearly, but didn't realize that it was God who was speaking. It took great humility on Eli's part to recognize that God had chosen to speak to his trainee altar boy rather than to him. God often surprises us like this and, like Eli, we need to be ready to receive a message from God, even if it comes in an unexpected way. Eli advises Samuel what to say when he next hears the voice, and so helps him to begin a life of listening to God that will change him and transform the nation.

Questions

- ▶ Why do you think God chose to speak to Samuel rather than Eli?
- ▶ How do you think God speaks to people today?
- ▶ Have you ever heard God speak to you?
- ▶ Do you think that God may be speaking to us through this story?



Visual aid

Use a transistor or digital radio and have fun together tuning into as many different stations as you can along one wave band. Just think how many unheard sounds there are, all around us in the air, once we know the way to listen in!



Activity idea

Play a listening game together. Set a timer to one minute and all agree to keep completely silent for that time. Everyone should make a mental note of all the sounds they hear. Then talk about what each of you heard. Try this again, but now make it a minute of listening prayer, starting with the words “We’re listening, Lord.” Ask everyone to notice some of the thoughts that come into their heads. What do they think God might have been saying? (Adults, be ready, like Eli, to accept that God might choose to speak to the children rather than you.)



Prayer idea

Prayer is as much about listening to God as speaking to him. Try making deliberate space for listening when you pray together today. Pause after every short prayer that you say and keep silent for about 15 seconds. Agree that each of you will do this. As the signal for the short silence, you could all say a version of Samuel’s words together: “We’re listening, Lord.”

Key verse

I’m listening, Lord. What do you want me to do? (1 Samuel 3:9).

New Testament story link

Matthew 11:25-30: Jesus tells his friends that God doesn’t always choose to speak to the people we might expect.

Colour me!

