

This chapter gives us one of the most well known stories of scripture—the battle between David and Goliath. I think the most confusing thing in this chapter is the fact that David has to identify himself to Saul in the end even though he had been appointed as his armor bearer and had been playing music to soothe him when he was troubled by the evil spirit.

1Samuel 17:1 ¶ Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which *belongeth* to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephesdammim.

1Samuel 17:2 And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines.

1Samuel 17:3 And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and *there was* a valley between them.

As the chapter opens, the Philistine and Israeli armies are at war with one another. The Philistines are encamped at the foot a mountain in the territory of Judah between Shochoh (about 14 miles west of Bethlehem) and Azekah (about 3 miles northwest of Shochoh) in Ephesdammim. The Israelites are encamped to the east at the foot of a mountain across from them separated by the valley of Elah, an area that was south of Jerusalem.

1Samuel 17:4 And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height *was* six cubits and a span.

1Samuel 17:5 And *he had* an helmet of brass upon his head, and he *was* armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat *was* five thousand shekels of brass.

1Samuel 17:6 And *he had* greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders.

1Samuel 17:7 And the staff of his spear *was* like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head *weighed* six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him.

The Philistines had a great champion, Goliath of Gath, a giant of a man. He stood well over nine feet tall. He wore a brass helmet and a coat of mail made of brass that weighed about 120 pounds. From his shins to his insteps his legs were covered with armor made of brass, and he carried on his back a spear made of brass that had a spearhead made of iron and weighed 15 pounds. When he went to battle, his shield-bearer went ahead of him. Though we aren't told so at this point, the narrative will reveal that he was also armed with a sword.

JFB tells us a bit more about the armor: "The Philistine helmet had the appearance of a row of feathers set in a tiara, or metal band, to which were attached scales of the same material, for the defense of the neck and the sides of the face [OSBORN]. a **coat of mail** — a kind of corslet, quilted with leather or plates of metal, reaching only to the chest, and supported by shoulder straps, leaving the shoulders and arms at full liberty."

"corslet" = Webster: "Armor for the body, as, the body breastplate and backpiece taken together"

1Samuel 17:8 And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set *your* battle in array? *am* not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.

1Samuel 17:9 If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us.

1Samuel 17:10 And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.

1Samuel 17:11 When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

Goliath stood in defiance of the armies of Israel and challenged them to send a man to act as their champion and fight him to determine the outcome. His taunt was directed to Saul specifically. Remember, Saul stood head and shoulders over every other man in Israel. Goliath promised that if their champion killed him, the Philistines would become servants of the Israelites. If, however, he killed their champion, the Israelites would become servants of the Philistines.

“defy” = to pull off...to expose (as by stripping)...to carp at, i.e. defame

Saul repeated his challenge and urged the armies of Israel to send forth a champion to fight him. His purpose was to expose and shame the troops of Israel who were unable to send out a worthy opponent.

When Saul and the troops of Israel heard the words of Goliath, they were discouraged and very afraid.

I liked Guzik’s application: “In any contest, it’s always useful to *demoralize* your opponent and strike *fear* in their heart. First, it may keep you from ever going to battle with them because they are so afraid. Second, if it does come to battle they will fight with fear and apprehension and so with your words, you’ve done a lot to win the battle before it even begins. This is a significant strategy of the devil against believers.”

1Samuel 17:12 ¶ Now David *was* the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehemjudah, whose name *was* Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men *for* an old man in the days of Saul.

1Samuel 17:13 And the three eldest sons of Jesse went *and* followed Saul to the battle: and the names of his three sons that went to the battle *were* Eliab the firstborn, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.

1Samuel 17:14 And David *was* the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul.

As learned in the previous chapter, it is noted that David was the youngest of eight sons of Jesse the Ephrathite of Bethlehemjudah. Point is made that Jesse was an old man at this time. His three oldest sons in order were Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah; and they served in the military under Saul.

1Samuel 17:15 But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

It is noted that David went back and forth as needed to serve Saul and tend his father's sheep in Bethlehem.

1Samuel 17:16 And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days.

1Samuel 17:17 And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched *corn*, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren;

1Samuel 17:18 And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of *their* thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge.

Goliath came out to issue his challenge to the Israelites every morning and evening for forty days. One morning Jesse told David to take some food to his brothers—an ephah (about a bushel) of dry corn and ten loaves of bread. He also sent ten cheeses to the captain of their company. He told David to find out how his brothers were faring and to bring back something that testified to their safety.

1Samuel 17:19 Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, *were* in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

1Samuel 17:20 And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle.

1Samuel 17:21 For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army.

Saul and his armies, including David's brothers, were in the valley of Elah at war with the Philistines. David got up early the next morning and left the sheep in the care of another shepherd. He packed up the provisions from his father and took them to the Israelite camp in search of his brothers as his father had commanded. The troops were shouting their war cry and getting ready to go out to battle. Both sides were in formation against each another.

1Samuel 17:22 And David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren.

1Samuel 17:23 And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard *them*.

1Samuel 17:24 And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid.

David left all the supplies he was carrying with the supply officer and ran to find his brothers among the troops. As he was talking to them, Goliath came forward to present his challenge yet again. David heard what he said and saw the men of Israel running away from him in fear.

1Samuel 17:25 And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, *that* the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.

1Samuel 17:26 And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who *is* this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

1Samuel 17:27 And the people answered him after this manner, saying, So shall it be done to the man that killeth him.

The men of Israel talked among each other about Goliath's challenge, and David listened. They mentioned that King Saul would make the man who killed Goliath very wealthy and give him his daughter as wife. Not only that, his family would be "free in Israel"—exempt from service and taxes (from the Hebrew for "free").

David couldn't believe what he had heard and asked for confirmation from the men that were near him. He questioned who this Philistine was that thought he could defy the armies of the living God. The answer from the men near him affirmed what he had heard.

1Samuel 17:28 And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.

1Samuel 17:29 And David said, What have I now done? *Is there* not a cause?

1Samuel 17:30 And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner.

David's oldest brother Eliab heard what David had said and became very angry. He asked David why he had come and who was watching the sheep. He accused him of pride and having a wicked heart for abandoning his duties to come and see the battle. David basically declared that he had done nothing wrong; he had only asked a question. He then proceeded to verify the information with yet another group of soldiers; and they again affirmed what he had overheard.

1Samuel 17:31 ¶ And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed *them* before Saul: and he sent for him.

1Samuel 17:32 And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

1Samuel 17:33 And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou *art but* a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.

Someone had heard what David said and informed Saul, so he sent for David. David boldly told the king that no man of Israel should be afraid of Goliath. He would personally go fight the Philistine. Saul argued that David wasn't fit to

fight such a giant; he was just a young man; Goliath, however, had been a man of war since his youth.

1Samuel 17:34 And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:

1Samuel 17:35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered *it* out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught *him* by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

1Samuel 17:36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

1Samuel 17:37 David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

David argued that while he was taking care of his father's sheep, both a lion and a bear had attacked the sheep. David had rescued the lamb and delivered it from the mouth of the animal. He had caught the lion by its mane and killed it. He had single handedly killed both the lion and the bear, and could do the same to "this uncircumcised Philistine"—a term of great disrespect. David was confident because this man was ridiculing the armies of the living God; and in doing that, he was ridiculing God.

David was not saying that he expected to go against Goliath in his own strength; his confidence was in the fact that he would confront the enemy in God's strength.

David assured Saul that just as surely as the LORD had delivered him from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, He would deliver him from the hand of Goliath. Cowardly Saul, told David to go to it. He at least had the decency to ask God's blessing upon him.

1Samuel 17:38 And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail.

1Samuel 17:39 And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved *it*. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved *them*. And David put them off him.

1Samuel 17:40 ¶ And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling *was* in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.

Saul insisted on giving David his armor, his helmet of brass and coat of mail, to wear. This again tells me that David had to be older. Saul was head and shoulders taller than all the men in Israel, yet he tried to get David to wear his armor.

When David put on his sword and tried to walk, he quickly determined that he couldn't go out in something he was not used to wearing. It would hinder rather

than help him, so he took it all off. David took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones out of the brook to put in his shepherd's bag. Then he set out to face the Philistine with sling in hand.

Adam Clarke provides some insight on the use of a sling: "It is composed of two strings and a leathern strap; the strap is in the middle, and is the place where the stone or bullet lies. The string on the right end of the strap is firmly fastened to the hand; that on the left is held between the thumb and middle joint of the forefinger. It is then whirled two or three times round the head; and when discharged, the finger and thumb let go their hold of the left end string. The velocity and force of the sling are in proportion to the distance of the strap, where the bullet lies, from the shoulder joint....it requires much practice to hit the mark; but when once this dexterity is acquired, the sling is nearly as fatal as the musket or bow...."

1Samuel 17:41 And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield *went* before him.

1Samuel 17:42 And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he *disdained* him: for he was *but* a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance.

1Samuel 17:43 And the Philistine said unto David, *Am* I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

1Samuel 17:44 And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.

Goliath came out and approached David with his shield bearer in front of him. He then started to ridicule David because he was just a young, good-looking boy. Goliath then accused David of insulting him by coming to face him armed only with a staff, so he cursed David in the name of his false gods. Goliath then threatened David and told him that he would feed his flesh to the vultures and the beasts of the field.

Goliath expected David to turn tail and run in fear, I am sure.

1Samuel 17:45 Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

1Samuel 17:46 This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

1Samuel 17:47 And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle *is* the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands.

David wasn't fazed. He boldly told Goliath that though he came against David with sword, spear and shield, he came against Goliath in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, the God whom he had ridiculed. David boldly declared that the LORD would empower him to kill Goliath and cut off his head. It was Goliath's body that would feed the vultures and wild beasts that

day. Everyone who saw it would know that there is a God in Israel who doesn't need to use sword and spear. This battle belonged to the LORD, and He would deliver Goliath into the hands of Israel.

David was doing what Saul should have done, acting in bold faith as Saul should have acted as God's appointed king.

1Samuel 17:48 ¶ And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.

1Samuel 17:49 And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang *it*, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

1Samuel 17:50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but *there was* no sword in the hand of David.

1Samuel 17:51 Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.

When Goliath began to advance toward him, David ran to meet him. He took one of the stones from his bag and fired it with his sling. The stone hit Goliath in the forehead, and he fell face down upon the earth. His stone had found the one vulnerable spot in Goliath's armor. David had no sword, so he stood upon Goliath and took his sword and used it to cut off his head. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they began a hasty retreat.

The God of Israel had proven to be mightier than Dagon and their other false gods.

1Samuel 17:52 And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until thou come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron.

1Samuel 17:53 And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled their tents.

The men of Israel responded with a loud war cry and pursued the enemy all the way to the gates of Ekron. Wounded Philistines lay on the ground all along the way to Gath and on to Ekron. The Israelites eventually returned to camp, stopping to spoil the tents of Philistine camp as they did so.

1Samuel 17:54 And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent.

David took possession of Goliath's armor as his spoils of victory and put them in his own tent (probably where he stayed when he was playing music for Saul), but took the head of Goliath to Jerusalem. I am assuming that is where Saul had

positioned himself.

1Samuel 17:55 And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son *is* this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell.

1Samuel 17:56 And the king said, Enquire thou whose son the stripling *is*.

1Samuel 17:57 And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.

1Samuel 17:58 And Saul said to him, Whose son *art* thou, *thou* young man? And David answered, I *am* the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.

When Saul saw how David confronted Goliath and killed him, he asked Abner, the commander of his armies, who David's father was. Abner did not know, so Saul told him to find out.

When David returned, Abner took him in to see Saul. David presented Saul the head of Goliath. According to JFB: "The heads of slain enemies are always regarded in the East as the most welcome tokens of victory."

Saul asked David who his father was, and David told him.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, this is the most confusing part of the chapter. In the previous chapter we are told that Saul sought Jesse's permission for David to serve him. His servant had identified David's father when telling him that he knew about David's ability as a musician. Saul had even appointed David as his armor bear (but maybe he had more than one). Maybe David hadn't been in his company long enough for him to be well acquainted with him yet. Some commentators surmise that when David played for Saul, he was behind some sort of curtain where he couldn't be seen.