

Goliath Mocks Isra'el

First Samuel 17: 1-16

DIG: What does Goliath's armor and weaponry reveal about him? What is a possible explanation for his extraordinary height? What other problems would it cause? Why didn't the Philistines and the Israelites charge each other? What motivated David to fight Goliath? What's at stake for the victor? For the loser?

REFLECT: Is your attitude more like Sha'ul's or David's? Are there any areas in your life that you have tried to throw off your shackles and have your own way with God? Finances? Relationships? Career? How can that attitude be changed? How can David's actions of faith, godliness and courage be a model in your walk with ADONAI?

1025 BC

The Challenge of Goliath: Now the Philistines gathered their troops for war and assembled in the Elah Valley in Judah (First Samuel 17:1a). At the heart of ancient Palestine is the region known as the Shephelah, a series of ridges and valleys connecting the Judean Mountains to the east with the wide, flat expanse of the Mediterranean plain. It is an area of breathtaking beauty, home to vineyards and wheat fields and forests of sycamore and terebinth. But it was also of great strategic importance.

Over the centuries, numerous battles have been fought for control of the region because the valleys rising from the Mediterranean plain offer those on the coast a clear path to the cities of Hebron, **Beit-Lechem**, and **Yerushalayim**, in the **Judaeen** highlands. **The Elah Valley** was the most important valley in Aijalon, in the north; but the most storied is **Elah**. It was where Saladin faced off against the knights of the Crusades in the twelfth century. **The Elah Valley** played a central role in the Maccabean wars with Syria more than a thousand years before that, and most famously, during the days of TaNaKh, it was where the fledgling kingdom of **Isra'el** squared off against the armies of **the Philistines**.

The Philistines pitched their camp on the southern ridge **between Sokoh and Azekah** in **Ephes Dammim** (meaning *the boundary of blood*, for all the battles that had been fought there). **Sha'ul and the men of Isra'el set up their camp** along the northern ridge **of the Elah Valley**, and **drew up their battle line opposite the Philistines**. The two armies looked at each other across a deep and narrow gorge cut out by a stream running down the middle

of the valley. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites the other (First Samuel 17:1b-3). Neither army dared to move. To attack meant descending down the ridge and then making a suicidal climb up to the enemy's position on the other side.³⁴

Finally, the Philistines had enough. A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. The word **champion** means *a challenger, a representative, or the man of the between*. In those days it was common for two armies to choose two representatives to fight each other. Whichever man won the individual battle, also won for his nation, the battle between the two armies. The Philistines sent Goliath out as their representative. In the Israelite camp, no one moved. Who could win against such a terrifying opponent?

Goliath was nine feet, nine inches tall. But he probably had a very serious medical condition. He looked and sounded like someone suffering from what is called acromegaly. A disease caused by a benign tumor of the pituitary gland. The tumor causes an overproduction of the human growth hormone, which would explain Goliath's extraordinary size. And furthermore, one of the common side effects of acromegaly is a vision problem. The pituitary tumors can grow to the point where they compress the nerves leading to the eyes, resulting in severely restricted eyesight and double vision.³⁵

Not only was his height imposing, but his armor was also intimidating. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he wore a coat of scale armor of bronze, fashioned from several hundred small bronze plates that resembled fish scales, weighing one hundred and twenty-five pounds, very advanced military equipment. He had bronze armor protecting his legs and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His shaft of his javelin was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed twenty pounds. Because he could not see very well, his shield-bearer went ahead of him and guided him to the spot where he would stand (First Samuel 17:4-7). The Hebrew word for shield here is not *magm*, which means a small shield, but is *tzinah*, which is a large shield that would protect the whole body.

The only thing that matched Goliath's size was his bluster. He stood and shouted to the armies of Isra'el, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? There is no need for two whole armies to fight. Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Sha'ul, so choose a man for yourselves, and have him come down to me. If he can fight me and kill me, we'll be your slaves; but if I beat him and kill him, you will become slaves and serve us. Then the Philistine taunted and mocked the Israelites, "This day I defy the armies of Isra'el. Give me a man and let us fight each other!" Having thrown down the gauntlet, the Philistine challenger had no takers at first.

Before **Goliath**, there was **King Sha'ul**. That is, before going out to fight the giant, David had to overcome his own lethargic and unbelieving king. **Sha'ul**, after all, was **Isra'el's Goliath**: the tall and impressive champion, the one whose prowess would gain the nation victory. But the taller **Philistine** had bested **Sha'ul**, and now he was cowering in fear.³⁶ **When Sha'ul and all Isra'el heard the Philistine's words, they were shaken and terrified (1 Sam 17:8-11)**. This sets the stage for **David's** heroic act.

Rabbinic tradition teaches that Orpah (see the commentary on **Ruth An - Your People Will Be My People and Your God My God**) **was the mother of Goliath**. In the **Aggadah**, it gives her real name was **Harafu** and that when she returned to **Mo'av** she was given a new husband, the **Philistine king of Gath**, resulting in a shrewd political alliance between **Eglon King of Mo'av and the Philistines**. In those days there were still giants living in **Mo'av**, but most of them had moved to **Philistia**. **Rabbinic tradition also teaches that Orpah became the wife of one of those giants and the mother of Goliath**. Naomi's other daughter-in-law, **Ruth**, chose the harder path of leaving her homeland of **Mo'av** to follow the **God of Isra'el**. **Ruth gave birth to David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22)**. Even when the path is hard, it is better to follow the **God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**.

The Family of David: While the giant's physical features are highlighted to impress us, it is **David's covenant lineage** that sets him apart: **Now David was the son of an Ephrathite Judah named Jesse**. It is clear from **Genesis 35:19, Ruth 4:11 and Micah 5:2**, that **Ephrath(ah)** was another name for **Beit-Lechem** in **Judah** (opposed to **Beit-Lechem** in **Zebulun - Joshua 19:10**). **Jesse had eight sons**, and in the time of **Sha'ul** he was very old - the years had taken their toll. **Jesse's three oldest sons**, loyal warriors, had followed **Sha'ul** into battle. The firstborn was **Eli'av**; the second was **Avinadav**; and the third was **Shammah**. **David** may have been fifteen years old, and the youngest. **The three oldest followed Sha'ul**, but **David went back and forth from Sha'ul to tend his father's sheep at Beit-Lechem (First Samuel 17:12-15)**.

For forty days the **Philistine** came forward every morning and evening and took his stand (Hebrew: *yatsar*), denouncing the armies of **Isra'el (First Samuel 17:16)**. The Bible uses the number **forty** for a definite period of testing. We can think of **Isra'el's forty years** in the wilderness (**Numbers 32:13**), and **Yeshua's forty days** of temptation (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Bj - Jesus is Tempted in the Wilderness**). Therefore, **David's arrival** occurred at the exact point when **Isra'el's army** had completely failed the challenge set before them by **Goliath**.

The psalter agreed with the Ruach when he wrote: **Why do the Gentile nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? Why do they even bother? The kings of the earth take their stand (Hebrew: *yatsar*) against ADONAI and against His anointed, saying: Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.** The kingdoms of this earth are by nature opposed to the rule of YHVH and His Messiah. However, **the One enthroned in heaven, laughs; ADONAI scoffs at them. He rebukes them in His anger and terrifies them in His wrath,** mocking the feeble attempts of anyone to overthrow Him, saying: But as for **Me, I** (in the emphatic position) **have set My King on Tziyon, My holy mountain (Psalm 2:1-6).** After the earlier bombast, **God** has the final say, not only with **the kings of the earth,** but also with **the Philistine giant.**