

# David Kills Goliath

## First Samuel 17: 17-58

**DIG:** How would you describe the sibling rivalry between David and Eli'av? What might be the root cause of that jealousy? How did David seek to persuade Sha'ul to let him fight Goliath? Where does David find the confidence to face Goliath? Why did David take five smooth stones with him? How does David's attitude compare with Sha'ul's? What is the end result of David's boldness for Goliath? For the men of Isra'el and Y'hudah? For the Philistines? For David himself?

**REFLECT:** What's holding you back from taking the "bull by the horns" (or Goliath by the sling)? What do you fear might happen if you turned and faced the enemy who taunts you and defiles God? Having imagined that, re-write the end result with ADONAI on your side. Where have you seen God's name ridiculed or blasphemed? What could you have done to set the record straight? David's oldest brother thought he was conceited (17:28). How can you tell the difference between conceit and faith? What evidence of faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did David demonstrate in this chapter? As you look at your own life, how does this story affect you?

**1025 BC**

**David's Arrival at the Camp:** Now Jesse said to his son David, who may have been about 15 at that time, "Hurry to the camp and take these five bushels of roasted grain and ten loaves of bread to your brothers. Also bring these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. Find out if your brothers are well, and bring back some token from them so I can know that they are safe. They are with Sha'ul and all the men of Isra'el in the Elah Valley, fighting against the Philistines" (First Samuel 17:17-19).

Early in the morning David left the flock in the care of a shepherd, loaded up, and set out, just as his father had directed. David's obedience saved the nation. He reached the camp just as the army was going out to their battle positions and shouting the war cry. Isra'el and the Philistines had set up their battle lines facing each other across the Elah Valley. David left the roasted grain, loaves of bread and cheeses with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle line and asked his brothers if they were well. As providence would have it, just as he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his battle line and shouted his usual defiance - and David heard it (First Samuel 17:20-23). David arrived at the very moment when the Spirit-less Sha'ul and his dispirited army were at their lowest point.

Their defeatist attitude proved **Isra'el** to be devoid of faith in **their God**. **Goliath's** challenge was really a test of their confidence in **YHVH**. It was as if **Goliath** was saying, "Am I not a pagan, **God-hating Philistine**? Then why won't any of you men of 'the living **God**,' come and fight me? You must not really believe in **Him** at all! In fact, you must believe that a nine-foot warrior is actually stronger than your 'living **God**' when it comes to a real battle."

This is the kind of test the world still delights to pose for believers, often with **Goliath-like** mockery. "We know what you teach, but let's see how you do when faced with real-life sensual temptation, or an opportunity to get rich by cheating. Let's see the look on your **God-praising** face when you receive a terrifying medical diagnosis or your stock portfolio crashes! Let's see how you respond when given an opportunity to cheat on an important college exam!" Behind **Goliath** was the same devil that wages spiritual warfare today. The issue is always the same, "Do you really trust a loving **God** of power and grace?"

Perceiving this spiritual dynamic helps us to understand **David's** shocking reaction to the sight before **him**. This may have been the first time that **he** had ever heard anyone blaspheme the name of **ADONAI**. How humiliated **David** must have been when **he** saw all the **Israelites** run away in great fear (**First Samuel 17:24**).<sup>37</sup>

Now while the king would not risk his own neck and fight the formidable **Philistine**, he was willing to richly reward anyone who would. The **Israelites** had been saying to each other, "Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy **Isra'el**. Whoever kills him, the king will give a rich reward; he'll also give him his daughter in marriage and exempt his father's family from all military service and taxes in **Isra'el**." Thinking of his family, **David** asked for some clarification and verification of what **he** had just heard to make sure that it was just not a rumor. So **he** said to the men standing with him, "What reward will be given to the one who kills this **Philistine** and removes this disgrace from **Isra'el**? Who is this uncircumcised **Philistine** that he should defy the armies of the living **God**?" They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, "This is what will be done for the one who kills **Goliath**" (**First Samuel 17:25-27**).

Despite the reward, the only reason **David** did what he was about to do was for the glory of **YHVH**. **David** came to the contest in the name of **ADONAI-Tzva'ot**, and he wanted **Goliath**, the **Philistine** army, and all the **Gentile** nations to know that the true and living **God** was the **God** of **Abraham**, **Isaac** and **Jacob**.

When Eli'av, David's oldest brother heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness?" "I know how conceited you (but David was humble) are and how wicked your heart is (but this is a young man after God's own heart); you came down only to watch the battle." Just as Joseph's older brothers reacted with jealous hatred to his dreams of sovereignty over them (see the commentary on **Genesis 12 - Joseph's Dreams**), so also David's older brother misunderstood and angrily questioned David's motives for coming down to the battlefield. David's response to Eli'av was respectful but firm. "Now what have I done?" answered David. "I only asked a question." He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. Then David's contempt for Goliath was overheard and reported to Sha'ul, and the king sent for him (First Samuel 17:28-31).

**David prepared before the battle:** Finally David came to Sha'ul, being summoned because the king had heard of David's bold, defiant question (17:26). Undaunted by his brothers rebuke, David said to Sha'ul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." It had been a long time since Sha'ul had such a brave volunteer, but his initial response was to dismiss David: You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; but you are just an inexperienced youth (Hebrew: *naur*) and Goliath has been a warrior from his youth" (First Samuel 17:32-33).

But David said to Sha'ul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by the hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defiled the armies of the living God. Then David said: ADONAI, who rescued me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will rescue me from the paw of this Philistine! Up until now no one else in the story has named the name of ADONAI. The others were cowards, because they had abandoned their only source of courage. Finally Sha'ul agreed and said to David, "Go, may the LORD be with you" (First Samuel 17:34-37). It was though David had given the king the courage and faith to speak again of YHVH.<sup>38</sup>

As a rule, the soldiers will reflect the spirit of their leader. And that was the problem, for the Ruach HaKodesh had departed from Sha'ul and he was left to his own limited resources.<sup>39</sup> When Y'honatan attacked the Philistine outpost (First Samuel 14:1-23), Sha'ul was merely a spectator, and his bad decisions almost cost them the victory. Here, once again, Sha'ul simply watched as David defeated the enemy single-handedly. Unfortunately, this would be Sha'ul's pattern of leadership to the tragic end of his life.<sup>40</sup>

Sha'ul still didn't get it. He tried to dress David in his own armor – he put a bronze helmet on his head and gave him a coat of armor to wear. Isra'el had yearned to have a king like the Gentile nations (First Samuel 8:5). So God gave them Sha'ul, and he was preparing David for battle just like the Gentile giant. David buckled the king's sword on his armor and tried to walk around, but it was too heavy and he wasn't used to such equipment. Then David said to Sha'ul, "I can't move wearing these things, because I'm not used to them." So David took them off (First Samuel 17:38-39). David refused to be like Sha'ul, or like the Gentile nations, or like the Philistine.

Then David took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag (1 Sam 17:40a). Why five smooth stones? David was merely being prepared. ADONAI had not promised that he would kill Goliath with the first stone. And what if the Philistines had attacked? How would he defend himself? Five would be just right. Such was David's alternative to conventional modes of self-defense.

And with his leather sling in his hand, approached the Philistine (First Samuel 17:40b). This was not a kid with a toy on the battlefield. It took an extraordinary amount of skill and practice, but in an experienced hand, the sling was a devastating weapon. Shepherds could whip their slingshots six to seven times per second before hitting their target. An experienced slinger could kill or seriously injure a target 200 yards away with accuracy. The Benjamites had seven hundred slingers, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss (Judges 20:16). They could hit birds in flight. The stones released from their slingshots had the impact of firing a .45 caliber handgun. David was a master marksman . . . a sharpshooter, if you will.<sup>41</sup>

As Sha'ul watched David going out to meet Goliath, he said to Abner, commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is that young lad (Hebrew: *naar*)?" Notice that Sha'ul didn't ask who David was. The king could hardly forget the red headed youth (see First Samuel 16:12, from the Hebrew word *adam*, meaning *to be red*, the same as Esau in Genesis 25:25) that had been his court musician, but apparently had forgotten the name of David's father. He needed that information in order to reward the family for the victory (see 17:25b above).<sup>42</sup> Abner replied, "As surely as you live, your majesty, I don't know." The king said, "Find out whose son this young lad is" (First Samuel 17:55-56).

**David prevailed in the battle:** Meanwhile, Goliath, with his limited eyesight and double vision (see Ak - **Goliath Mocks Isra'el**), had his shield bearer in front of him to guide him. As he came closer to David he was finally able to see him. The Philistine looked David up and down and had nothing but scorn for what he saw – a boy with ruddy cheeks, red hair and good looks. Shepherds carried a staff that they held at the center. It was used

not only for support in climbing hills, but also for the purpose of beating bushes and low brushwood in which the flocks stray, and where snakes and other reptiles could be found. It would also be used for correcting the shepherd dogs and making them obey.<sup>43</sup> Enraged, Goliath said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" David had only one staff. Goliath saw two. And the Philistine cursed David by his Philistine gods, saying: Come here to me and I'll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals (First Samuel 17:41-44 CJB). Why didn't Goliath go to David? He couldn't. He was a statue. The giant's supposed greatest strength, his height and size, was his greatest weakness. On top of that, he could hardly see. What happened next was historic.

**David preserved God's name:** David was undaunted and said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the God of the armies of Isra'el, whom you have defiled (see Af - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh). This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole Gentile world will know that there is a God in Isra'el. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that ADONAI saves; for the battle is Ha'Shem's and He will give all of you into our hands (First Samuel 17:45-47). Just as David was confident that he would be victorious over Goliath, he was also confident that Isra'el would be victorious over the Philistines.

The talking was over. As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David, taking the offensive rather quickly, ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him powered by courage and strength. What could Goliath do? He was carrying over a hundred pounds of armor. He was prepared for a battle at close range where he could stand, immobile, warding off blows with his armor and delivering a mighty thrust of his javelin. He watched David approach, first with scorn, then with surprise, and then with anger. He seemed oblivious to what was happening or the danger he was in.<sup>44</sup>

While still running, David reached into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead (Hebrew: *metsch*), his only point of vulnerability, and the giant fell face down on the ground. In boxing terms, it was a technical knockout with 5 seconds in the first round. The stone had stunned the giant, and now the sword must kill him. He took hold of the Philistine's heavy sword with both hands and drew it from the sheath. After killing him, David cut off his head with the sword. Thus David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down Goliath and killed him. (First Samuel 17:48-51a). He was too big, too slow, and too blurry eyed to comprehend the way the tables had been turned until it was too late.

When the Philistines saw that their hero (Hebrew: *gibor* meaning a mighty one) had been decapitated with his own sword, they turned and ran. Then the men of Yisra'el and Y'hudah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron. When the Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines, they plundered their camp (First Samuel 17:51b-53). YHVH is the hero of this story.

As soon as David returned from killing Goliath, Abner took him and brought him before Sha'ul, with David still holding the Philistine's head. "Whose son are you, young man?" Sha'ul asked him. David replied: I am the son of your servant Jesse of Beit-Lechem (1 Sam 17:57-58). Now the king knew whose family to reward for David's victory.

David took Goliath's head and brought it to Yerushalayim, which at the time was a city controlled by the Jebusites, would have been quite happy to see Goliath's head. And as grisly as it was, it would also remind the Jebusites that David's God was very powerful indeed. He put the Philistine's weapons in his own tent on the battlefield (First Samuel 17:54). Later, Goliath's sword will show up with the Jewish priests in Nov (see Av - [David at Nov](#)), so David must have dedicated it to the LORD by giving it to the priests.

It has been said that there are people who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who don't know what happened. David had insight into Isra'el's plight and knew what was happening. He realized that it wasn't a physical conflict between two armies, but a spiritual battle between truth and error, faith and superstition, the true and living God and dead, lifeless idols. David's faith lifted the war to a much higher plane, just as Rabbi Sha'ul did with the church at Ephesus: **Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).**<sup>45</sup>