

David's Heroes

Second Samuel 21:15-22 and First Chronicles 20:4-8

DIG: To whom were these four Philistines related? Who was Rapha? What was decided about David after the first conflict? The books of Samuel show us clearly that it is not mere size or strength that really counts in the warfare between the forces of God and those of Satan. What other illustrations of this can you think of in the Bible?

REFLECT: What battles have you recently fought for your King? What battles do you anticipate in the coming week? Who do you regard as your "spiritual heroes" who have kept their light burning for YHVH and have shared that light with you? What promises of ADONAI have been important to you throughout your life as a believer?

The last four chapters of Second Samuel serve as an appendix to David's career. These events occurred earlier in the king's life but are presented here to show the other kinds of problems David had to face - famine and plague (Chapters 21 and 24) - the men David relied on to fight his battles (Chapter 23), and how the king learned to praise God through his trials (Chapter 22 and Psalm 22).

Parallel to the narrative of David's mighty men (Second Samuel 23:8-39; First Chronicles 11:10-47), this account summarizes four notable battles that David and his men fought against the Philistines. The first and last verses of the unit refer to David and his men and thus serve to frame the whole. Verse 22 observes that the four slain Philistine champions were descendants of Rapha, the ancestor of one distinctive group of giants, the last of their lineage, called the Rephaim. Their deaths reinforced the reliability of God's ancient promise: On the day YHVH made a covenant with Abram, God said: To your descendants I give this Land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites (Genesis 15:18-21).

As the aged David reflected back on his life, he fondly remembered four battles and the four Jewish heroes that killed four Philistine giants. As David was only a youth when he slew Goliath (First Samuel 17:45-58), these four Philistine giants from Goliath's hometown of Gath could not be Goliath's brothers, but his sons. Therefore, some people have made a wrong interpretation when they beyond the words of scripture into their own invention and say that David picked up five smooth stones, one for Goliath and four others for his four brothers.

In the first conflict, once again there was a battle between Isra'el's age-old enemy, the Philistines, and Isra'el after the fall of Rapha but before the Absalom revolt. David went down from the heights of Zion to the Philistine foothills and plains with his men to fight against the Philistines. But the king became exhausted. And **Ishbi-Benob, one of the descendants of Rapha**, whose bronze spearhead weighed three hundred shekels (about seven-and-a-half pounds) and who was armed with some sort of a new sword, said he would kill David. But **Abishai son of Zeruiah**, David's nephew, came to his defense; he struck the Philistine down and killed him. Then, sensing that the king had just experienced a close shave, David's men swore to him, saying: **Never again will you go out with us to battle (Second Samuel 21:15-17)**. David's age had caught up with him and he could no longer fight as he did when he was younger. **The king's troops didn't want him going to battle anymore so that the ever-burning lamp in the Tabernacle of Isra'el will not be extinguished**, because it was a symbol of wellbeing and righteousness (**Proverbs 13:9, 20:20, 24:20**). David is described as the source of the blessings and prosperity of the people, and the life of the people was bound up in their king. In one sense David was Isra'el.

The second contest against the Philistines, which took place at **Gob**, or another name for **Gezer**, which is located just east of the Philistine plain twenty miles west-northwest of Yerushalayim. There, Isra'el won the battle because **Sibbecai the Hushathite**, known elsewhere in the Second Order of the Thirty (see Ej - **David's Mighty Men**), killed **Sippai, one of the descendants of Rephaites**. And the Philistines were subjugated in part by the death of Sippai (**Second Samuel 21:18; First Chronicles 20:4**).

The third battle with the Philistines was again at **Gob/Gezer**. This time the Israelite hero **Elhanan son of Jair the Bethlehemite** killed **Lahmi**, a fellow countryman (Hebrew: *ach* meaning *fellow, countryman, fellow countryman, kinsman or relative*) of **Goliath the Gittite**, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod (**2 Samuel 21:19; First Chron. 20:5**). The Bible states that the giant Elhanan slew was the brother of Goliath of Gath, but any brother of the Goliath that David slew would be well past fighting age. So this could not be the brother of Goliath that David slew.

In the fourth encounter, which took place at Gath in enemy territory, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot - twenty-four in all. The genetic strains that produced gigantism must also have caused this malformation. He also was **a descendent from Rapha**. When he taunted Isra'el (as Goliath had done many years earlier), **Y'honatan son of Shimeah** (named, of course, for David's dear friend), David's nephew, killed Mr. Six-Digits (**Second Samuel 21:20-21; First Chronicles 20:6-7**). With this giant's death, the terror caused by the Philistine giants came to an end.

These **four Philistines** were descendants of **Rapha** (literally *the ghost*) in **Gath**, the hometown of **Goliath** whom **David** slew long ago. **Goliath's sons fell at the hands of David and his men** (**Second Samuel 21:22; First Chronicles 20:8**). Their demise was another installment of what is to come, another assurance of what will be, another picture-along-the-way of how it will be at the last - **all your enemies will be silenced** (**Isaiah 54:17**).