

“David and Goliath”

The fight between David and Goliath is so well-known it has been relegated to the realm of legend. In particular, it has most fame amongst children. Yet, it is very much for adults. Far from being a mere story, often called a myth, even amongst Christians, it is an actual historical account, of a time when champions went out to fight for their king. If the champion won, the losing side vowed allegiance to the victor's king. But, if the champion was beaten, the opposing army demanded the allegiance of the losing side.

At this particular time Goliath, a member of a dwindling race of giants, intimidated the Hebrew army to its very core, so that even its best men were too frightened to go against this huge adversary. All except for one young man, David. Only an armour bearer, and much derided by his brothers, David was incensed that a heathen soldier should dare to chant abuse at the children of God! He was not a seasoned soldier, but he knew, even at his tender age, that if God was for him, no-one could possibly be against him. What a model of faith he is to us today! (Note that though young, David was well experienced in fighting wild animals, alone).

So, when reading this account remember it is about toughness, courage, and faith in God. It is about how God elected David to be future king, and predestined him to beat the most formidable foe the Hebrews had known for a very long time. We must all know how to place our trust completely in God, for even in the most harrowing and seemingly impossible situations, God will bring us through and give us the victory.

Verses 1-3

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.

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.

3.

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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”.

This is the setting for one of the most amazing and famous scenes in scripture. The Philistines, long-standing enemies of the Hebrews, but allowed to exist by God to test His chosen people, marched to a place between Shochoh ('bushy') and Azekah ('dug over'), which was in Ephesdammim ('edge of blood').

Ephesdammim was 16 miles south-west of Jerusalem, probably consisting of plains. The two towns were in these lowlands of Judah... a vast army needs a large valley. Saul and his army pitched their tents in Elah, which was at the other end of the same plain. Interestingly, Saul's army pitched closer to Philistine territory, whilst the Philistines pitched closer to Judah. Both armies then set themselves in battle array, though not in battle lines. Between the two was a 'no-man's land' and both armies could see each other, waiting.

The kings of each side sat on top of respective mountains, and their armies stood on the sides of the mountains. The valley from Elah to Ephesdammim ran between the two. Each waited to see who would make the first move. On this occasion it was the Philistines – and we quickly see the cause for their confidence!

Verses 4-7

1.

“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.

2.

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.

3.

And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders.

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4.

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 Hebrews saw a lone figure stride out from the enemy camp. They probably could not believe their eyes, for they saw a giant of a man, literally. It could mean only one thing – this was their enemy's champion! How their hearts sank. They obviously thought that a one-to-one fight between a giant and a normal-size warrior would have only one result... the death of the Hebrew and the subsequent subjugation of the whole nation of Israel. It is how modern Christians are paralyzed by fear of a seemingly bigger foe. They fail to remember – God is bigger than all!

The giant was Goliath ('splendour') whose very name described his stature. (Note: this was one of two Goliaths, both giants, killed by men of Judah, at different times). He came from Gath ('winepress') one of the five royal Philistine cities and home of many more giants. At that time there was a race of giants, in their various families. (See relevant article, and the book of Joshua).

Cynics, even amongst Christians, try to dismiss this fact, but giants existed for centuries. Even today there are giants, over seven feet tall, and some close to eight feet. Look no further than the massive athletes who are on the American fake-wrestling scene! Even if none existed today, Christians are duty-bound to just accept the scriptural statements. If scripture says so, then it can be taken as fact... giants existed!

There were many measures of cubits (some longer and some shorter), but on average the Biblical cubit was about 18 inches or 450 millimetres (the length of the forearm). A 'span' measured roughly half a cubit, or the distance between the thumb and little finger of an outstretched hand, about 9 inches or 200 millimetres. Goliath was six and a half cubits, so that made him roughly ten feet tall or about 3 metres. Impressive!

Not only was he tall, but he was very strong and muscular, judging by what he wore. He had an helmet of brass and his coat of mail alone weighed 5000 shekels of 'brass'. There were different

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shekel weights for different metals, such as gold and silver, etc. A shekel of gold was one ten-thousandth of a talent, or 220 grains; a shekel of silver weighed one three-thousandth of a talent or 132 grains; a shekel of copper was one fifteen-hundredth of a talent, or 528 grains. In Western weight a talent was 125 lbs and 60 shekels was about 2 lbs. The 'brass' referred to in the text was copper or bronze. So, Goliath was wearing a mail armour coat of copper whose weight was staggering...166 pounds, the same as a very heavy man! Bear in mind that he had the height and stature to carry it – but even then he must have had the strength of an ox.

But that was not all! He wore brass/copper leg armour and a brass 'target' (short sword or javelin) between his shoulders. These would have added tremendous weight. The staff of his spear, that is the shaft, was as big as a weaver's beam, and the iron spear-tip alone weighed 600 shekels or 20 lbs. No wonder he had an armour bearer carrying his shield! Can you imagine the size of the shield? Without doubt, he was a formidable enemy.

Verses 8-11

1.

"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 I not a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul ? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.

2.

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.

3.

And the Philistines said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.

4.

When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid."

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This massive specimen of man simply stood in the plain, reducing his enemies to a quivering mess. You might think this was reasonable, but, as you will see, it gives us a valuable lesson in trust and in how not to be a coward.

Goliath boomed out a taunt to the Hebrews. "Why have you come here to fight? Where is your champion? If he can kill me we shall be your slaves... but if I kill him, you will be our slaves! We defy you!"

Saul heard this challenge and so did his army. Everyone was *"dismayed, and greatly afraid"*. That is, they were 'scared and shattered' and had immense fear and awe. One of the most basic truths for Believers is that if God is for us who can be against us? At this early stage in Saul's demise we can see that he had already lost the trust he once had in God. He showed fear in the face of God's enemies, instead of an unshakable trust.

Verses 12-16

1.

"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.

2.

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 the next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.

3.

And David was the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul.

4.

But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

5.

And the Philistines drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days."

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We now have a sub-plot in the account, where we are given details of where David was at this time. You will remember David was at the king's court, and he used to play harp and sing soothingly to him when he became depressed by a demon.

Because of his youth and having had no experience at war, David was sent back to his aged father, Jesse, to assist in running the farm, for three brothers of seven were at the battle front. The three sons who followed Saul were the eldest, Eliab ('my God is father'), the second eldest, Abinadab ('my father is noble') and Shammah ('astonishment') the third eldest. David, as we know, was the youngest.

So, David was at Bethlehem, shepherding his father's flocks, whilst Goliath taunted the Hebrews, every morning and evening for forty days. On the very first day, his challenge drew great fear from the Israelites, so with each day that passed Saul and his army became more and more demoralised. During those forty days the king and his advisers would have debated their coming defeat and imminent enslavement, with a crushing gloom. Why did the enemy issue their challenge for forty days? Simply, to terrify the Hebrews and reduce any strength they might have had. Each day brought terror and a fear of fighting.

Verses 17&18

1.

"And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren and Ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp of thy brethren:

2.

And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge.

3.

Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines."

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At about the end of the forty days Jesse told David to take food to his brothers at the front. He was to take an ephah of parched corn, which was about 3 pecks or 70 lbs. The parched corn was roasted, rather like modern popcorn and eaten without further cooking. There were also ten large loaves. For the captain of the brothers' company of 1000 men, Jesse sent ten complete cheeses, out of deference and probably out of a hope that he would take care of his sons. David was to check on his brothers' welfare and obtain news from them as to their condition. All of Israel was waiting to see what their fate as a nation would be.

Verses 20-24

1.

“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.

2.

For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army.

3.

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.

4.

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.

5.

And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid.”

David got up early the next day and went about his task, after handing over the sheep to

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another shepherd. He reached the battle-field, which had a trench and earth barrier dug between the Hebrews and the Philistines, just as Goliath was about to come forward to shout his challenge, yet again. Thus far, he had single-handedly demoralised the entire Hebrew army, so all his own king had to do was wait until the enemy caved in from terror and inward defeat. The Philistine army went forward to back up the giant and the Hebrews walked forward.

David left his yoke of oxen that pulled the cart, with the man responsible for guarding the other carts and animals, and ran toward the line where his brothers were, greeting them cheerily. As he chatted to them and asked how they were, Goliath swaggered out from the rest of his army and shouted his usual challenge. Everyone, including David, listened to his taunts and jeers. But, the Hebrew soldiers just ran back to their own lines in fear.

Verses 25-30

1.

“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.

2.

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?

3.

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

4.

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.

5.

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And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?"

6.

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

As they quaked in fear the soldiers spoke amongst themselves, saying that Saul was offering a huge sum of riches to the man who would kill Goliath. Saul would also give his daughter's hand in marriage and make the champion's family freemen of the nation. However, the sight of Goliath was too much, and no-one took up the challenge!

David could not believe what he was hearing and asked the men who were talking to repeat their words. David was incensed that a heathen enemy was allowed to defy the living God of Israel! Now *that* is the true response of a man of God! That is how we should all face our enemies, for our God is the living God, the only real and true God.

The fearful men repeated the offers made by Saul, to David, but when David's eldest brother heard about it he was very angry with him. He demanded to know why David had come, and where the sheep were. Eliab was convinced David had left the sheep to watch the battle. Yet, all he had done was to obey his father. Once at the battle-field he heard the taunts of Goliath and his heart was stirred with holy anger against him, though he was very young. David did not think of the danger – he just felt anger that anyone should dare to defy his God.

David respectfully replied that his query was justified, for there was just cause to be angry with Goliath. David turned to the men and again asked what the circumstances were, and what Saul had offered.

Verses 31-37

1.

"And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul: and he sent for him.

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2.

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

3.

And Saul said unto 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.

4.

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:

5.

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.

6.

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.

7.

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."

Someone went to Saul and repeated what the young man had said. Saul was intrigued and sent for David. With the wisdom and courage of a fearless champion, David told the king not to be ruled by anxiety – he would go and fight the giant!

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Saul wanted a champion, but he did not wish to send a non-combatant against a seasoned warrior. Saul thought it would mean instant death for the plucky young man. So he said that a young man could not be a match for a man of war. Saul's mistake was in not recognising the source of David's anger and courage – God.

With frank factuality David stood his ground and related his past successes in the face of danger - like the time he fought off a bear and a lion that attacked his flock. David related how he fought them both, single-handedly. This, plus the later notes of how David wore Saul's armour, tells us that David, though young, was big and powerful in stature (remember – Saul was also very tall).

The angry but faithful follower of God told Saul that Goliath would end up just as dead as the lion and the bear, because he had defied Almighty God! God, he added, saved him from the animals, and he would save him from death at the hand of Goliath. Saul must have been impressed, for he sent David to fight with his blessing. After forty days of fear, this young man gave a glimmer of hope - and even if he failed, at least they would have tried before they ended up as slaves.

Verses 38-40

1.

“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.

2.

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.

3.

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.”

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Saul went into Saul's armoury tent and was given Saul's own armour. David put the helmet on, then the coat of mail. The sword was strapped to his side. Then, David refused to go to battle wearing the armour and the sword: 'I have not even tried them out yet', he said to Saul. So, he removed the armour and stood in his own clothes. He took his own walking stick with him and then went to the small river to pick out five smooth stones. He placed them into his shepherd's bag and then he walked confidently toward the defiant Goliath.

Saul and his men must have watched in amazement as they wondered what on earth the youngster hoped to achieve without armour and with only five stones. But, David was a shepherd, well-versed in the use of a slingshot. For him, his sling was as potent as the bow of an expert bowman.

Verses 41-47

1.

"And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him.

2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

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.

5.

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.

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6.

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.

7.

And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with a sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hands."

Goliath strode out with confidence; his armour-bearer carried his shield before him. When Goliath saw who had come from the Hebrew line, he laughed in derisive anger. All he saw was a young man without a scratch on his body and with fair skin, not even weathered by the sun and wind.

Goliath called and asked if he thought he was a dog to be beaten with a stick! Goliath swore at David, using the names of his local gods. He then shouted to David to approach him, so that he could tear his body apart and feed his flesh to the birds and desert animals.

But, David was unperturbed by this huge mountain of vicious manhood. He shouted back with his own taunt: 'You have come against a mere youngster with a sword, spear and shield... but, all I have is faith in my God! He is the God of our army, the very God who you have defied! In just a few moments you will die at my hand and I will cut off your head. The army of the Philistines will be cut down and fed to the birds, so that all the world might know the God of Israel is with us and is Almighty!' What a speech! But could he deliver the promise?

David was to show that God wins with His own strength and that He could defeat the Philistines with His word alone. What a lesson in trust to us all. Do YOU believe God can deliver you from danger, enemies and circumstances? If you do not, then you do not know Him at all. I say this after having had many deliverances and victories in Christ, where my own strength was nil.

Verses 48-51

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1.

“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.

2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took of 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.”

The enraged Goliath strode toward David, and David ran to meet him. How the adrenaline must have surged through his body! Have you ever experienced a similar circumstance? I have! The sheer joy of God is with you as you go forth in complete confidence! Behind Goliath, David could see the whole army of the Philistines. The Hebrew soldiers had heard David's reply to Goliath. Now they must have willed him onward in a mixture of disbelief and faint hope. As David ran to meet the giant they must have waited with halted breath!

David stopped and took a stone from his bag, loading his sling with it. With expertise he swung the sling around his head and let go the end. The stone hit the giant with the force of a bullet, under the brow of his helmet and above his nose, driving into the flesh, stunning him unconscious. The mighty warrior crashed to the ground, face first. David ran up to the fallen champion, took his own huge sword, and cut off his head. In disbelief the shocked Philistines ran away!

Verses 52&53

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1.

“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.

2.

And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled their tents.”

The men of Israel rose up with a shout – they now knew they would now beat the enemy! They ran after the fleeing Philistines, right back to their own borders at Ekron (‘torn up by the roots’), the most northerly Philistine town on the lowlands of Judah. As they followed, Philistines fell dead on every side even in their own towns and villages... Shaaraim (‘double gate’), Gath (‘winepress’) and Ekron. None were spared and the Hebrew soldiers took what was in their tents as spoil.

Verses 54-58

1.

“And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent.

2.

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.

3.

And the king said, Inquire thou whose son the stripling is.

4.

And David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before

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Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.

5.

And Saul said unto him, Whose son art thou, thou young man? And David answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.”

David did not follow, but took Goliath’s head to Jerusalem as a trophy and sign of God’s victory. When Saul saw David kill the giant, he asked his general, Abner, who the young man was. Abner said he had no idea, so Saul asked him to find out who the ‘stripling’ was. The word means ‘young man’ and that is how we know David was not a child as so many pictures of him make us think. He was a big lad, for Saul was very tall and yet David could wear his armour.

When David walked back to the Hebrew lines with Goliath’s head, Abner met him and took him to Saul, where the king asked him who his father was. I am the son of Jesse, your servant, came the reply. It is curious that Saul should not recognise David, when he had been singing and playing for him at court. It is possible that Saul had other singers, or that he did not recognise him out of his usual occupation – see how we can not ‘see’ someone like a nurse if she is not in uniform. Or, it could be that he did not ‘see’ David when he was in the depths of his depressions.

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