

Goliath Presents a Challenge to the Army of Israel

1 Samuel 17:1-30

1 Samuel 17:1-30 - *"Now the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and were gathered at Sochoh, which belongs to Judah; they encamped between Sochoh and Azekah, in Ephes Dammim. ² And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and they encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array against the Philistines. ³ The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. ⁴ And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. ⁵ He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. ⁶ And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. ⁷ Now the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels; and a shield-bearer went before him. ⁸ Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, "Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. ⁹ If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." ¹⁰ And the Philistine said, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together." ¹¹ When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.*

¹² Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse, and who had eight sons. And the man was old, advanced in years, in the days of Saul. ¹³ The three oldest sons of Jesse had gone to follow Saul to the battle. The names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. ¹⁴ David was the youngest. And the three oldest followed Saul. ¹⁵ But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. ¹⁶ And the Philistine drew near and presented himself forty days, morning and evening. ¹⁷ Then Jesse said to his son David, "Take now for your brothers an ephah of this dried grain and these ten loaves, and run to your brothers at the camp. ¹⁸ And carry these ten cheeses to the captain of their thousand, and see how your brothers fare, and bring back news of them." ¹⁹ Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

²⁰ So David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, and took the things and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the camp as the army was going out to the fight and shouting for the battle. ²¹ For Israel and the Philistines had drawn up in battle array, army against army. ²² And David left his supplies in the hand of the supply keeper, ran to the army, and came and greeted his brothers. ²³ Then as he talked with them, there was the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, coming up from the armies of the Philistines; and he spoke according to the same words. So David heard them. ²⁴ And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid. ²⁵ So the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel; and it shall be that the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, will give him his daughter, and give his father's house exemption from taxes in Israel."

²⁶ Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" ²⁷ And the people answered him in this manner, saying, "So shall it be done for the man who kills him." ²⁸ Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger was aroused against David, and he said, "Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." ²⁹ And David said, "What have I done now? Is there not a cause?" ³⁰ Then he turned from him toward another and said the same thing; and these people answered him as the first ones did."

Background Notes

The beautiful Valley of Elah is located about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. The Philistines were located on one side of the valley and the Israelis on the other side. The Philistines had a champion warrior named Goliath. Goliath was nine feet nine inches tall, and I'm sure if he were living today, he would be approached by one of the NBA teams, and offered a lucrative contract to play professional basketball! His armor weighed about 125 pounds, and just the head of his spear weighed about 16 pounds!

Every day Goliath came forward from the army of the Philistines and challenged the army of Israel to send out a warrior for a contest. This "battle by champion" was common in the ancient world, and the outcome of the battle would be decided by the contest between the individual warriors. But for obvious reasons, no one from Israel accepted the challenge! Would you?

Young David "just happened" to be visiting his three older brothers who were in the Israeli army at this time, and he saw and Goliath and heard the challenge. David heard that King Saul had promised his daughter as wife to the man who killed Goliath, and thus that man would become the son-in-law of the king. Furthermore, he would be made wealthy, and his family would become tax-free in Israel. What a deal!

So, David asked how this pagan Philistine could be allowed to taunt the armies of the living God, and be such a reproach to Israel? Why had no one taken up the challenge? When David's older brother, Eliab, heard David asking these questions and showing a willingness to take up the challenge, Eliab became angry. He accused David of having wrong motives, and he told David to go back home and care for the sheep! Eliab obviously felt guilty, as did many other Hebrew soldiers, for not having the courage to fight Goliath."

Doctrinal Points

1. The enemy will always have his "Goliaths."

We certainly don't want to miss the spiritual picture that God has given us here in this chapter. The Old Testament battles between God's people, Israel, and their enemies generally illustrate some aspect of our spiritual warfare today.

As Christians, we are involved in spiritual warfare, whether we're fully aware of it or not. Ephesians 6:12 says, *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."* Our enemy is Satan and his evil demonic forces. Satan uses the attractions of this world system, and our flesh (our sinful nature), and his demonic forces to attack individual believers, Christian ministries, churches and fellowships.

In 1 Samuel 17, the Philistines, enemies of God's people, sent out their champion warrior, Goliath. What an impressive opponent – unbeatable, overwhelming, confident, proud, instilling fear in God's people, and even defying God Himself!

Satan has his giants today. For example, think of the Goliath of secular science that will not recognize God. Secular science today presents us with its impressive accomplishments. His giant seems so overwhelming in its proud and confident statements that there is no God! It seems unstoppable in its relentless attempts to remove any idea of a Creator. Even God's own people run and hide before such an impressive Goliath. Secular science taunts and challenges believers, calling us ignorant and unscientific! And we run and hide or try to make concessions to this giant, rather than challenge its so-called scientific tenets. Even when it openly defies God, most of the time Christians stand in fear on the sidelines, just as God's people did in 1 Samuel 17.

Secular science is just one of many the enemy's "Goliaths." The enemy will always have its Goliaths. Where are the "Davids"?

2. The Lord will always have His "Davids."

Verse 15: *"But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem."* In 1 Samuel 16 we learned that David was Saul's personal musician and armor-bearer. David's visits to play music for King Saul, of course, would not have been to the front lines of the Israeli armed forces. But David's father, Jesse, sent David to the front line with some provisions for his three oldest brothers, who were in the military.

On this mission to his brothers, David saw Goliath and heard his taunts and threats firsthand. Verse 16 says that Goliath had been doing this for forty days! In Scripture, forty is a number that is associated with "testing," and Israel was certainly being tested here -- as to their courage and as to their faith in the Lord. Would anyone step forward and defeat this impressive-looking enemy of God's people, who was openly defying the God of Israel? But no one came forward. Verse 24 says, *"And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid."*

But the Lord always has His "Davids." We mentioned the "Goliath" of secular science that defies and denies the God of the Bible as the Creator of all things. Praise the Lord for the "Davids" whom God has raised up in the area of science. These Davids are people of faith and courage, who have been willing to step forward and take on the challenges of secular science that denies God and defies God's people. The smooth stone of Intelligent Design, for example, has certainly hit the giant of secular science in a vulnerable area.

There are other Goliaths of the enemy forces. For example, in the social and political arena some of these giants are being challenged and stopped in their tracks by courageous and faithful Christians who hold to the moral values presented in Scripture. The Lord will always have His Davids.

Practical Application

Let's fight the Goliaths, not our brothers!

When David's older brothers questioned his motivation for being willing to fight Goliath, look at his response: *"And David said, 'What have I done now? Is there not a cause?' Then he turned from him toward another and said the same thing; and these people answered him as the first ones did."* Certainly David could have wasted a lot of time here arguing with his brothers. His desire to fight Goliath might even have caused a family split. But David took the high road, and he fought Goliath, not his brothers.

This is a good lesson for us today. Sometimes even fellow believers will misread our motives for how we live and the stands we take. As a result, many Christians are not fighting the Goliaths -- they're fighting their brother instead! Churches split. Christian ministries fold. The work of the Lord is hindered. And finally, the Lord's people are hurt.

Meanwhile, while believers are fighting each other over minor disagreements, the Goliaths keep on marching forward with their taunts and threats, tearing down the truth and openly defying God and His Word. Let's be very careful in the battles we choose to fight! Let's fight the Goliaths, and not our brothers!