

BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

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1 SAMUEL 17-18 DAVID & GOLIATH; SAUL'S JEALOUSY



We now examine the fascinating rise of the man who would become Israel's greatest king—David. Almost half of the biblical narrative on the monarchs of Israel deals with David. He was, after all, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22).

He was certainly a multifaceted person—a shepherd, musician, composer, singer, warrior, administrator, king, and prophet—and left a notable mark in literature and art. Of course, God added and magnified his natural abilities, and David never forgot to thank Him for it, as his Psalms clearly show.

What time period are we talking about? A round number for David is the year 1000 B.C. This is convenient since for Abraham it is 2000 B.C. "Accepting that Saul was king for about forty years," *Archaeology and the Old Testament* says, "David was born in the tenth year of his reign. When David was anointed, he was old enough to tend the family flocks by himself and to hold off wild animals, but underage for military service. Fifteen would be an intelligent guess of David's age at his anointing... a time span of about twenty-five years for Saul's successful rule and approximately fifteen years for his decline" (p. 253).

He played the lute to assuage Saul's bouts of what today would probably be called acute manic depression (accompanied by spirit problems). A successful medical treatment against this illness is music therapy. Gleason Archer adds, "Saul's evil bent was by the permission and plan of God. We must realize in the last analysis all penal consequences come from God, as the Author of the moral law and the one who always does what is right."

David then returned home for an undetermined amount of time and went back to his beloved shepherding. We shouldn't forget he already had been anointed and empowered by God to be the next king of Israel. So when the Philistines went on the attack again, God was there to help and back up David.

The Bible says, "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. 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" (1 Sam.

17:1-2). Notice how precise the information is about the *multiple* forces the Philistines had to *gather* since they were a Pentapolis--living in *five* main cities--and about the exact battlefield location, the strategic valley of Elah, guarding two approaches into the central part of the southern hill country.

It is here where the famous account of David and Goliath takes place. By the way, David's name has been confirmed by archaeology and recently, a Philistine inscription with a name very similar to Goliath's was found right in his home town of Gath!

The Bible says, "And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was 5,000 shekels of bronze. And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. Now the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead weighed 600 shekels and a shield-bearer went before him" (17:4-7).

"This," says *Expositor's*, "may be the most detailed physical description of any found in Scripture." He was around nine feet tall, a bit taller than Robert Pershing Wadlow, who was eight feet eleven inches tall at the time of his death in 1940, at the age of twenty-two. "A coat of mail such as Goliath's," adds *Expositor's*, "was fashioned from several hundred small bronze plates that resembled fish scales and had to meet the needs of protection, lightness, and freedom of movement...Greaves protected the legs below the knee...Goliath's most formidable offensive weapon was his spear, whose heavy 'point' was made of iron (a metal monopolized by the Philistines and denied to the Israelite troops)."

For forty days, Goliath stood in the middle of the valley, defying anyone to fight him and they would represent their gods. *Expositor's* mentions, "This is an excellent example of an attempt at representative warfare by means of a contest of champions. The purpose was to avoid a general engagement of troops which would spill more blood than necessary...and it was not uncommon in ancient times and literature (see Homer's account of the combat between Menelaus and Paris in the *Iliad*)."

Embarrassingly, no Israelite was willing to fight him—not even Saul, the tallest man in Israel. This is when David appears on the scene. "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...and see how your brothers fare, and bring back news of them...And he came to the camp as the army was going out to the fight and shouting for the battle...And David left his supplies...ran to the army, and came and greeted his brothers. 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. And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were *dreadfully afraid*. 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'" (17:17-26).

When David's eldest brother, Eliab, saw David was not afraid of Goliath, he reprimanded him, thinking this was an empty boast and accusing him of pride and insolence. Why this reaction? "At the battle scene," says *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, "David's eldest brother was less than cordial. Such friction between the brothers may have been occurring ever since David was anointed instead of one of his elder brothers." It reminds us of the jealousy of Joseph's brothers towards Joseph.

As a good leader, David didn't reply in the same manner as his brother. Instead, he didn't pay attention, applying Proverbs 12:16, "Losing your temper is foolish; ignoring an insult is smart" and focusing on the important task at hand.

The Bible continues, "Now when the words which David spoke were heard, they reported them to Saul; and he sent for him. Then David said to Saul, 'Let no man's heart fail because of him, your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' And Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.' But David said to Saul, 'Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living

God.' Moreover David said, 'The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.' And Saul said to David, 'Go, and the Lord be with you!'" (17:31-37).

It is important to note God's powerful spirit of courage had entered David some time back, and now, although still a youth, he had that miraculous power available that had turned Moses, Joshua, Samson, and others into such powerful leaders. We should never underestimate that power, nor think it is ours, as God told Zerubbabel, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" (Zec. 4:6). Paul later said to young Timothy, "For God did not give a spirit of cowardice to us, but of power and of love and of self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Armed with such faith, nothing could stop David! Saul's armor was too big for him, and he decided to only use his shepherd's sling--but it was a deadly weapon. "In Old Testament times," says *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, "slingers were regular components of an army and were often used together with archers; during siege warfare their role was to pick off the enemy from the besieged city's ramparts. Such slingers were capable of hurling (underhanded) a projectile (3 to 4 inches in diameter) at over 100 mph and their effective range was well in excess of a 100 yards. The Bible speaks of the amazing accuracy of the slinger (Judges 20:16), and ancient depictions never show them wearing body armor. A slinger's mobility was his best defense" (p. 257).

As Goliath lumbered toward David, expecting to crush him like a bug, David told him, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day, I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands" (17:45-47).

So David ran toward him, swung his sling, and "struck the Philistine on his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and

killed him. But there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and...killed him, and cut off his head with it. And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled” (17:49-51). *Archaeology & the Old Testament* adds, “Then, in keeping with the rules of picked combat, the Philistines fled the battle scene, chased by the army of Israel” (p. 257).

David, full of God’s spirit, was able to accomplish this feat—and many more in his faith-filled life. This was a great defeat for the Philistines, and in an instant, David had become the national hero. Of course, Saul was first elated, but hadn’t recognized it was the same lad who had played to sooth his troubled mind. This is not so surprising for an occupied king that has now become mentally ill and corrupt in power. Saul’s mind could have deteriorated to the point where he couldn’t concentrate or remember things very long. It could also be because some time had elapsed and David now looked older, as *The JFB Commentary* explains, “The growth of the beard, and other changes on a now full-grown youth, prevented the king from recognizing his former favorite minstrel.”

When Jonathan met David, he instantly recognized all his goodwill and abilities, and “the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father’s house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul” (18:1-3). So began a legendary friendship.

When the troops returned triumphantly, it was David, and not Saul, who received the greatest praise from the women, who made up a refrain, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” The evil spirit in Saul revived and he was filled with pathological anger and jealousy, so he began to plot David’s death. The Bible says, “So Saul eyed David from that day on. And it happened on the next day that the distressing spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied inside the house. So David played music with his hand, as at other times, but there was a spear in Saul’s hand. And Saul cast the spear for he said, ‘I will pin David to the wall! But David escaped his presence twice. Now Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him, but had departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from his presence, and made him the captain over a thousand,

and he went out and came in before the people. And David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him. Therefore, when Saul saw that he behaved very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them” (18:10-16).

The term, “went out and came in” as *Expositor’s* explains, means: “led the troops in their campaigns” “To go forth and come back” is frequently used with military connotations (Num 27:16-17; 1 Sam 29:6).”

Since Saul was unsuccessfully trying to directly kill David, he schemed a plot, showing his fickle and demonic nature. “Then Saul said to David, ‘Here is my daughter Merab. I will give her to you as a wife. Only be valiant for me, and fight the Lord’s battles.’ For Saul thought, ‘Let my hand not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.’ So David said to Saul, ‘Who am I, and what is my life or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?’ But it happened at the time when Merab, Saul’s daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife. Now Michal, Saul’s daughter, loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. So Saul said, ‘I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.’ Therefore Saul said to David a second time, ‘You shall be my son-in-law today...and David said, ‘Does it seem to you a light thing to be a king’s son-in-law, seeing I am a poor and lightly esteemed man?’” (18:17-23). One of the most endearing characteristics of David was his modesty—and this self-effacement lasted his entire life.

Saul asked David to slay 100 Philistines as a dowry for his daughter--hoping he would be killed. Instead, David went out and killed 200 Philistines! Saul was now even more afraid of David, seeing the supernatural powers he possessed from God. It was virtually like having another Samson in their midst. The people were ecstatic over him. “And David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name became highly esteemed” (18:30). This is taking about his strategic and military successes.