

David and Goliath

Introduction of 1 Samuel 17

The Philistine challenge 17:1-11

The scene switches from the peaceful royal court to a new battlefield, near Socoh in Judah - in other words there was a fresh invasion by Philistine troops, which Saul had to counter. Perhaps because of earlier losses, the Philistines used a different type of warfare this time. They put forward a champion and demanded that an Israelite champion should come forward and fight him in single combat. The theory behind such individual combat was the belief that either the gods or the stranger god would grant victory to whichever man they chose. A victory could thus be won without much loss of life. In view of Goliath's height, powerful weapons and strong armour, the Philistines clearly had no doubts who would win. It is noteworthy that not even Saul, whose height has been emphasised earlier in the story (9:2, 10:23), had the courage to accept the challenge; he too was dismayed and terrified. Saul thus displayed his lack of leadership: Israel needed a new soldier to lead them into battle.

David comes to the battlefield 17:12-30

David now comes back into the story. Vs 12-19 explain how it happened that he was not with the Israelite army when Goliath first uttered his challenge, and why he came on the scene some forty days later. The author means us to understand that God overruled these events. David did not come as a warrior, it is evident. (Probably the events of ch. 17 took place before those of 16:21.) V 25 is not unimportant, since it explains why David would become prominent in Israel, and lays a foundation for 18:17. However, this verse makes an interesting contrast with v.26. In his decision to take up Goliath challenge, David's motives were not his own wealth and honour, but the wish to honour God and to remove disgrace from Israel. David showed himself a suitable leader for Israel, in contrast to the frightened Saul and his own quarrelsome brothers.

Saul interviews David 17:31-40

This conversation between Saul and David highlights David's courage and his faith in the living God, and so again testifies to his suitable qualities for leadership. Saul could have displayed the same faith and courage, but he did not. Saul is shown to put his faith in military experience and in strong armour, so that his attitude was not really very different from that of Goliath. The storyteller would not have denied, of course, that experience and armour are usually important in battle; but the truth was that only God could give David the victory in this unique situation.

David's victory 17:41-58

So the duel took place. It seemed a very unequal contest to Goliath, who felt insulted when he saw an apparently unarmed youth approaching. The reader, however knows in advance that it really was an unequal contest, since David's God was in control. Both combatants made their speeches, as was appropriate in a battle between champions, and both named their gods. Goliath could only utter curses by his gods, but David's God was no tribal deity but the God who would become known in the whole world. The Lord saves is the motto of the whole Bible; in context, David does not mean his own salvation from death but the deliverance of Israel from Philistine domination.

David's exploit resulted in a wide-ranging victory, and the Philistines were driven back to their own cities of Gath and Ekron. David had driven them away from Israelite territory. The battle trophies included the head of Goliath; the skull was later taken to Jerusalem, after David had captured that city (2 Sa.5).

The final paragraph, vs 55-58, has caused much discussion. Scholars have often interpreted it as meaning that Saul did not recognise David or know anything about him. If so, it contradicts 16:14-23. It may be agreed that ch.17 is drawn from a different source document than ch.16, but it is not necessary to conclude that ch. 17 reflects a tradition that Saul and David had never previously met. On the evidence of ch. 17 alone, we know that the two men were in conversation before David's encounter with Goliath, so Saul must have known David's name at the very least. The questions Saul put to Abner were not so much about David, in fact, as about his family, presumably because Saul was now under obligation to give David his daughter in

marriage, in fulfilment of his vow (17:25). It was, therefore, important for him to find out all he could about the background of the man who would now be a court figure.

Goliath

Goliath (exile) a gigantic warrior of the Philistine army, probably on of the Anakim (Num 13:33) (Josh 11:22)

Goliath size was extraordinary. He was 6 cubits and a span. If a cubit is 21 inches, he was over 9 feet in height. Some suggest he was 9 feet 9 inches, some suggest he was over 11 feet.

Note: In 2 Samuel 21:15-22 there are four more giants killed by the Israelis in battle, they were all from the tribe of giants in Gath. Some people believe, the five stones David picked up to kill Goliath, was a forcast of the five giants that were eventually killed by David and his men.

Goliath's armour and weapons

His bronze coat of mail (body armour- was made of leather or metal; but in this case the suggestion is that it was leather), bronze greaves, bronze spear with an iron spearhead, and huge sword, must have made him appear invincible. The weight of Goliath's coat of mail was five thousand shekels of bronze, about one hundred and twenty pounds.

Helmet

The helmet was a type of hat worn by warriors to protect their heads from physical blows in a military battle (1 Sa 17:5, Jer 46:4). Helmets came in all sizes and were made from many different materials, although metal was the most effective. Since the head is the most vulnerable part of the body; it was the first area covered by armour. It was made out of bronze.

Javelin and spear

In various translations of the Bible, these two terms are used interchangeably to refer to the same basic weapon - a long slender shaft with a metal point. The only difference between them is that a spear was heavier and larger than

a javelin. Therefore a spear was used as a thrusting weapon as well as a throwing weapon.

Other spears and javelins are mentioned often in the O.T. At God's command, Joshua stretched out his spear toward Ai to show that the city would fall to the Israelites (Josh 8:18-19). In a fit of jealousy Saul tried to kill David with a spear (1Sam 18:10-11).

Other words for spear or javelin used in various translations of the Bible are dart (2Sam 18:14, KJV, RSV) handpike (Ezek 39:9 RSV), handstaff (Ezek 39:9 KJV), lance or lancet (Judg 5:8 NEB; 1 King 18:28, NKJV), and throwing stick (Ezek 39:9 NEB).

The staff (the part that supported the spear head) of Goliath's spear was like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels. This is between 15 and 16 pounds.

Daggers/sword

Different translations of the Bible speak of the dagger and the sword as if these two weapons were basically the same.

A sword was a piece of cutting weapon, with which a warrior might stab or slash an enemy. Some swords were designed to pierce, others to slash. All swords consisted of two parts; a handle, or hilt and a blade. The blade was usually straight; but one unusual variation was the sickle sword. This weapon featured curved blade with the sharp edge on the outside. Swords were the basic weapons of a Hebrew soldier. The Biblical phrase that identified a man as a soldier was that he "drew the sword" (2Kings 3:26).

Daggers were similar to swords in that they were composed of a hilt and a blade and were used to stab. Their advantage over swords was their ability to be hidden. Ehud, the judge, exploited this advantage by hiding a dagger and stabbing the oppressor Eglon (Judg 3:16-22).

Shin guard

This was used to protect Goliath's legs. It was made out of bronze.

David

David means beloved.

He was the youngest of eight brothers (1 Sam 16:10). He was the son of Jesse, a respectable citizen of the city. His mother was tenderly remembered for her Godliness (Ps 116:16; Ps 86:16). As the youngest son, David was the keeper of his father's sheep. In his job he showed courage and faithfulness by killing both a lion and a bear; which attacked his father's flock.

David as Warrior. Goliath's challenge for a Hebrew to do battle with him stirred David's spirit. Weighted with heavy armour, Goliath was equipped to engage in close-range combat. David's strategy was to fight him at a distance. Taking five smooth stones for a brook, David faced Goliath with only a sling and his unflinching faith in God. Goliath fell, struck by a stone from David's sling. For this feat, he became a hero in the eyes of the nation. But it aroused jealousy and animosity in the heart of Saul. Saul's son, Jonathan, however, admired David because of his bravery, and they soon became good friends. This friendship lasted until Jonathan's death, in spite of Saul's hostility toward David.

Sling

Slings were first developed and used by shepherds for protecting their livestock against wild animals.

This was a simple weapon, composed generally of a small piece of leather or animal hide. Small stones or pebbles were generally used as ammunition in a sling. While the sling is a simple weapon in terms of construction, it is difficult to fire with accuracy. Only trained and experienced soldiers were equipped with slings.

Next to archers, the sling men were the most effective long-range warriors in OT times. The advantage of such a long-range weapon is illustrated by the most famous sling story of all David's victory over Goliath. The young, inexperienced David killed the giant because of his trust in God. David also had a decided advantage in the contest because Goliath was armed with a spear and a sword, both of which were short-range weapons.

Slingers were important elements in the Israelite army. The Benjamites also had a unit of 700 left-handed slingers who could “sling a stone at a hairs breadth and not miss” (Judges 20:16).

Staff

A short pole or stick used for many different purposes in Bible times. A staff was used much like a walking cane by travellers (Gen 32:10) the elderly (Heb 11:21), and the lame (2 Sam 3:29) but it could also serve as a simple weapon, especially in the hands of a “shepherd” (1 Sam 17:40), as well as God’s protection of the believer (Pa 33:4). Instrument of punishment (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Cor 4:21), a shepherd’s crook (Ezek 20:37), a mark of authority, a sceptre such as Moses’ rod (Ex 4:20) and Aaron’s rod (Num 17: 2-10) a measuring stick (Ezek 40:3; Rev 11:1), and a tool used to thresh grain (Is 23:27).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jack W. Hayford, Litt.D., **Spirit Filled Life Bible NKJV**, OT Editor: Sam Middlebrook, D.Min. NT Editor: Jerry Horner, Th.D. Assistant Editor Gary Matsdorf, M.A.

Consulting Editors: D A Carson R T France. J A Motyer, G J Wenham, New Bible Commentary 21st Century Edition, First published December 1953 **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Herbert Lockyer, SR., Editor with F.F. Bruce and R.K. Harrison, Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible, Copyright 1986 by Thomas Nelson Publishers, Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson, Inc.