David and Goliath

Bible Stories Anthology — 1 Samuel 17

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

The Battle Is the LORD's

It is the best-known story in the Old Testament, and it is almost always told wrong.

It is usually told as a story about believing in yourself: the little guy with big dreams who faces the giant problem in his life and wins because he refused to quit. Businesses use it. Sports teams use it. "David and Goliath" has become shorthand for any underdog who beats the odds.

But David did not believe in himself. He did not talk about his own courage or his own skill with a sling. He talked about a covenant, and about a God. "This uncircumcised Philistine." "The armies of the living God." "I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts." "The battle is the LORD's."

For forty days, a whole army of Israel — led by a king who stood head and shoulders above every man in the nation — stood on a hillside and let one man mock their God. Then a shepherd boy arrived with bread and cheese for his brothers, heard the mocking, and could not understand why no one would answer it. By sundown the champion was dead, the Philistine army was running, and Israel had met the man who would be its greatest king.

This is a story about faith in God's covenant and God's power, and about the anointed one who stands in the gap for his people and wins the victory they could not win for themselves.

The Setting

When. Around a thousand years before Christ, in the reign of Saul, Israel's first king. Saul had begun well, but he had disobeyed God, and God had rejected him as king (1 Samuel 15). In the chapter just

before this one, God sent the prophet Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint a new king in secret — the youngest son of a man named Jesse (1 Samuel 16).

Where. The valley of Elah, about fifteen miles west of Bethlehem, in the low hills where the land of Judah met the coastal plain of the Philistines. It is a broad valley with a stream bed running down its middle. The Philistines camped on the hills on one side; Israel on the hills on the other; "and there was a valley between them" (17:3). The towns named in the text — Shochoh and Azekah — are known sites, and the valley can still be visited today.

Who. Goliath, a champion of the Philistines from the city of Gath; Saul, king of Israel; Abner, the commander of his army; Jesse of Bethlehem and three of his older sons, Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah; the armies of Israel and the Philistines; David, Jesse's youngest son; and the LORD God.

The situation. The **Philistines** were Israel's great enemy in this period, a people of the coastal plain with five strong cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron. They were well armed, and they had worked hard to keep Israel from being so: "there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears" (1 Samuel 13:19). In an earlier battle, only Saul and his son Jonathan had owned a sword (13:22).

This is the **Mosaic Law administration**. An **administration** is a period in which God deals with mankind on a particular basis. Israel lived under the covenant of the Law, and that covenant included God's promise to fight for His people: "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee… For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deuteronomy 20:1, 4). David knew that promise. The army had forgotten it.

And there is one more thing the reader must know before the story begins. In the chapter before, Samuel had gone to Jesse's house and looked over his sons. When he saw the tall eldest son, Eliab, he thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him." God said:

> **1 Samuel 16:7** *But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*

God chose the youngest, the one left out in the field with the sheep:

> **1 Samuel 16:13** *Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward…*

David was already God's **anointed** — in Hebrew, *mashiach*, the word from which "Messiah" comes. He was king in God's eyes, though not yet on the throne. And "the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward." Everything he does in the valley of Elah, he does as the LORD's anointed, with God's spirit upon him.

The Story, Told Faithfully

A Valley Between Them

> **1 Samuel 17:1** *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 Ephes-dammim.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:2** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:3** *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.*

"Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah." The Philistines had pushed into Israel's own territory and camped on land God had given to the tribe of Judah. Two armies faced each other across the valley. Whoever went down first would have to fight uphill against the other. Neither side moved. It was a standoff.

The Man Between

> **1 Samuel 17:4** *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.*

"A champion." The Hebrew is unusual: *ish habbenayim*, literally *the man of the between* — the man who steps into the space between two armies. In the ancient world, a battle was sometimes decided by **representative combat**: each side sent out one warrior, and the result of that single fight settled the battle. The champion stood for his whole army.

"Of Gath." Gath was one of the five Philistine cities, and one of the three where the last of the Anakim — the tall clans who had terrified Israel's spies in Moses' day — still remained after Joshua's conquest (Joshua 11:22). Goliath came from a family of unusually large men; his brother and other relatives are named later as warriors of the same kind (2 Samuel 21:15-22).

"Six cubits and a span." A cubit was about eighteen inches, and a span, the width of an outstretched hand from thumb to little finger, about nine inches. That makes Goliath about nine feet nine inches tall. The reader deserves to know that the ancient copies of the Bible do not all agree here. The standard Hebrew text, followed by the King James Version, reads "six cubits and a span." But the oldest Hebrew copy of Samuel we have — a scroll found among the Dead Sea Scrolls — along with important copies of the ancient Greek translation and the Jewish historian Josephus, read "*four* cubits and a span," about six feet nine inches. Scholars disagree about which is original. Either way, in an age when the average man stood around five and a half feet, Goliath was a giant — and to a shepherd boy, he was enormous.

> **1 Samuel 17:5** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:6** *And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:7** *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.*

Scripture describes his equipment from head to foot, the way a camera might pan down a man's body. This is deliberate. The narrator wants us to feel what Israel felt looking at him.

- **A helmet of brass** — bronze, in modern terms.
- **A coat of mail** weighing five thousand shekels. A shekel was about two-fifths of an ounce, so the armour alone weighed around 125 pounds. The Hebrew for "coat of mail" is literally a *coat of scales* — the same word used of fish "scales" in Leviticus 11:9. It was made of overlapping bronze plates, like the scales on a fish — or a serpent.
- **Greaves of brass** — bronze shin guards.
- **A "target" of brass between his shoulders.** Probably a bronze javelin or short sword slung across his back.
- **A spear** with a shaft "like a weaver's beam" — as thick as the wooden beam of a loom — and an iron head weighing six hundred shekels, around fifteen pounds.
- **A shield-bearer** walking in front of him.

In a land where Israel's soldiers were forbidden blacksmiths and had almost no swords, Goliath was a walking armoury.

Choose You a Man

> **1 Samuel 17:8** *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 not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:9** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:10** *And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:11** *When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.*

"Choose you a man." The terms were simple: one man for all Israel. Win, and the Philistines serve you. Lose, and all of you serve us.

"I defy the armies of Israel." The word "defy" means to taunt, to reproach, to heap scorn on. He was not only challenging Israel. He was mocking them.

And "Saul and all Israel… were dismayed, and greatly afraid." Notice who is named first. Saul. Israel had asked for a king so that he would "go out before us, and fight our battles" (1 Samuel 8:20). Saul was the obvious man to answer. He was "higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward" (1 Samuel 10:23) — the tallest man in Israel. If anyone was going to face a giant, it should have been the king who stood a head taller than everyone else. Instead, the king was afraid with everyone else.

> **1 Samuel 17:16** *And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days.*

Forty days. Twice a day, morning and evening, Goliath came out and shouted the same challenge, and no one went down. In scripture, forty is often the number of a period of testing: forty days of the Flood's rain, forty years in the wilderness, forty days of Jesus' temptation. For forty days, Israel's faith was tested, and it failed every morning and every evening.

Bread and Cheese

> **1 Samuel 17:12** *Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Beth-lehem-judah, whose name was Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men for an old man in the days of Saul.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:13** *And the three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul to the battle…*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:14** *And David was the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:15** *But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Beth-lehem.*

The story shifts from the battlefield to a farm in Bethlehem. David was the youngest of eight. The chapter before told us he had already served at Saul's court as a musician, playing the harp to calm the king's troubled spirit (16:14-23). But he was not a soldier in the army. He went back and forth between the palace and the sheep.

> **1 Samuel 17:17** *And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren;*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:18** *And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge.*

Armies in those days did not always supply their soldiers with food; families sent it. So Jesse sent his youngest son with an ephah of roasted grain (perhaps thirty pounds), ten loaves, and ten cheeses as a gift for his sons' commander. "Take their pledge" means bring back some token that they are alive and well.

A father sent his son to his brothers, to see how they fared. As this series understands it, that is a picture worth holding on to. Joseph was sent the same way by his father Jacob to check on his brothers (Genesis 37:14) — and was hated by them for it. David is about to be treated much the same.

> **1 Samuel 17:20** *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.*

"Left the sheep with a keeper." Even in a hurry, David did not abandon his flock. He arrived just as the army was drawing up in battle lines, shouting their war cry — the same show they had put on every day for forty days, and then gone back to their tents.

> **1 Samuel 17:22** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:23** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:24** *And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid.*

"His carriage" is old English for what he carried — his baggage. He left the food with the man in charge of the supplies and ran to find his brothers. And while he was talking to them, Goliath came out again, and "David heard them."

The whole army ran. David did not.

Who Is This Uncircumcised Philistine?

> **1 Samuel 17:25** *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.*

The soldiers told David what the king had offered: great riches, the king's own daughter in marriage, and freedom for the man's whole family — most likely freedom from taxes and forced service to the crown. It was a huge reward. No one had claimed it.

> **1 Samuel 17:26** *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?*

These are the first words David speaks in the Bible, and they tell us everything about how he saw the situation.

"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?" This is **erotesis** — a figure of speech in which a question is asked, not to get information, but to make a point. A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used to add emphasis or feeling. David knew exactly who Goliath was. His question meant: *who does he think he is?*

And listen to the word he chose: "uncircumcised." Everyone else saw a giant. David saw a man outside the covenant. **Circumcision** was the sign God had given Abraham of His covenant with Abraham's descendants: "it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you" (Genesis 17:11). Israel was circumcised; the Philistines were not. To call Goliath "uncircumcised" was to say: this man has no covenant with God, and we do. His size did not matter. The covenant did.

"The armies of the living God." Everyone else called them "the armies of Israel" (17:10). David called them the armies of *the living God*. Goliath was not defying a nation. He was defying God. And a living God — unlike the dead idols of the Philistines — could answer.

Eliab

> **1 Samuel 17:28** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:29** *And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?*

Eliab — the tall eldest brother Samuel had first thought would be king, the one God had "refused" — was furious. Maybe he remembered the day Samuel poured oil on his youngest brother's head instead of his. He attacked David three ways: *Why are you here? Who's watching your few little sheep? I know your pride.* Notice the contempt in "those few sheep." And notice the irony: Eliab accused David of pride and "naughtiness of heart" — while it was Eliab who had stood on the hillside for forty days doing nothing.

"What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" The Hebrew of David's answer is short and hard to render. It may mean *Is there not a cause?* — isn't this worth speaking about? — or *Was it not only a*

word? — I only asked a question. Either way, David did not argue with his brother. "He turned from him toward another" (17:30) and kept asking.

Before Saul

> **1 Samuel 17:32** *And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:33** *And Saul said to 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.*

Word reached Saul, and he sent for David. "Let no man's heart fail" — the very thing Moses had commanded the priests to say before every battle: "let not your hearts faint, fear not" (Deuteronomy 20:3). No priest had said it for forty days. A shepherd said it.

Saul's answer was reasonable, by every human measure. *You are a youth — a young man, inexperienced. He has been a soldier since he was your age.* The word "youth" (*na'ar*) is the same word used of Joseph at seventeen. David was not a small child, but he was young, and he was no soldier.

> **1 Samuel 17:34** *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:*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:35** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:36** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:37** *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.*

Lions and bears really did live in the hills of Judah in those days. A shepherd was expected to defend the flock, but not every shepherd would go *after* a lion that had already taken a lamb. David did. He chased it, struck it, pulled the lamb out of its mouth, and when it turned on him, grabbed it "by his beard" — the mane under its jaw — and killed it.

But notice where David puts the credit. He does not say, "I killed a lion and a bear, so I can kill a giant." He says, "*The LORD* that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, *he* will deliver me." David's confidence did not rest on his record. It rested on God's record. What God had done before, God would do again.

"The paw of the lion… the paw of the bear… the hand of this Philistine." In Hebrew, "paw" and "hand" are the same word. David put Goliath in the same category as the wild animals that had tried to take his father's sheep.

"Go, and the LORD be with thee." Saul said the right words. He had no intention of going himself.

Saul's Armour

> **1 Samuel 17:38** *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.*

> **1 Samuel 17:39** *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.*

Saul dressed David in his own armour — his helmet, his coat of mail, his sword. In the ancient world, to give someone your own armour was an honour. It may also have been Saul's way of fighting by proxy: if David wore the king's armour, perhaps it would look as though the king had gone out.

David tried to walk in it. "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them." *Proved* means *tested* — tried out, used before. Many picture a small boy swimming in armour too big for him, but that is not what David said. He said he had never used it. He had never fought in armour. He would not face the giant with equipment he did not know, borrowed from a man who had no faith. He took it off.

Five Smooth Stones

> **1 Samuel 17:40** *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.*

"His staff" — his shepherd's walking stick. "Five smooth stones out of the brook" — the stream bed that ran down the middle of the valley between the two armies. Stones worn smooth by water fly straighter. "A shepherd's bag… even in a scrip" — a pouch a shepherd carried for food and supplies.

And "his sling." The sling was not a child's toy. It was a real weapon of war, used by armies throughout the ancient world. It was a pouch on two long cords; the slinger whirled it and released one cord, and the stone flew with tremendous speed and force. Scripture records seven hundred left-handed slingers in the tribe of Benjamin who "could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss" (Judges 20:16). Slingstones about the size of a tennis ball or larger have been found at ancient battle sites across the land. In skilled hands, a sling could kill at a distance long before a spearman could get close. David was not bringing a stick to a sword fight. He was bringing the weapon he knew, the one he had used for years in the fields.

Why five stones? Scripture does not say. Some have suggested David was ready in case Goliath's brothers came after him, since four other giants from Gath are named later (2 Samuel 21:15-22). Others think he was simply being practical: bring more than one. We do not know. What we do know is that he needed only one.

The Giant Speaks

> **1 Samuel 17:41** *And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him.*
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> **1 Samuel 17:42** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:43** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:44** *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.*

Goliath saw a young man with ruddy cheeks and a handsome face, carrying a shepherd's staff, and was insulted. "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?" — erotesis again. In the East, the dog was a

despised scavenger, and to be treated as a dog was the worst of insults. *You come at me with sticks, like I'm a stray dog?*

"The Philistine cursed David by his gods." Now the battle was named for what it was: the gods of the Philistines against the God of Israel.

In the Name of the LORD of Hosts

> **1 Samuel 17:45** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:46** *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 carcases 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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:47** *And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands.*

This is the heart of the story — the reason it was written.

"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." Three weapons against one name. "In the name of" is an **idiom** — an expression whose meaning comes from how a people used it rather than from its separate words. To come in someone's name is to come with his authority, as his representative, with his power behind you. David came as the representative of "the LORD of hosts."

"The LORD of hosts" — *Yahweh Tsebaoth* — is God's title as commander of armies: the armies of heaven, and the armies of Israel. Goliath had defied "the armies of Israel." David answered in the name of the One who commanded them.

"That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." David's goal was not fame. It was that the whole world would know who the true God was.

"And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD's." The lesson was for Israel too. They had been looking at Goliath's weapons for forty days, and counting their own. David told them: it was never about weapons. "The battle is the LORD's." A later king of Judah heard the same words from a prophet: "the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15). And the psalmist sang it: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).

One Stone

> **1 Samuel 17:48** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:49** *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.*

Goliath moved forward. David *ran* toward him. For forty days the whole army had run away from Goliath. David ran toward him.

Count the actions in verse 49: David put his hand in his bag, *and* took a stone, *and* slang it, *and* smote the Philistine, *and* the stone sank in, *and* he fell. This is **polysyndeton** — the figure of speech called "many ands," which slows the action down so that every movement is seen. It all happened in seconds, and scripture makes us watch every one.

The stone struck the one place Goliath's armour did not cover. He had a bronze helmet, but his forehead was exposed — perhaps he had raised his face to look down at David, or pushed his helmet back. The stone "sunk into his forehead," and the giant "fell upon his face to the earth."

There is a quiet echo here that many readers have noticed. Years before, when the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant and set it in the temple of their god Dagon, they came in the next morning and found "Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD" (1 Samuel 5:3). Now the champion of the Philistines lay the same way, face down in the dirt before the LORD's anointed.

> **1 Samuel 17:50** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:51** *Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took 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.*

"There was no sword in the hand of David." The narrator makes sure we notice. The victory was won without the weapon everyone thought mattered most. Then David ran, stood on the fallen giant, drew Goliath's own sword out of its sheath, and cut off his head with it. The enemy's own weapon finished him.

And "when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled." That is how representative combat worked. The champion stood for the whole army. When he fell, they all fell with him. The terms Goliath himself had set — "if he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants" (17:9) — had turned against him.

> **1 Samuel 17:52** *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.*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:53** *And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled their tents.*

The army that had not dared to go down into the valley for forty days now chased the Philistines all the way home to Gath and Ekron, and plundered their camp. One man had won the battle. The whole army shared the spoils.

Whose Son Is This?

> **1 Samuel 17:54** *And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent.*

Jerusalem was still a Jebusite city at this time; David would not capture it for years (2 Samuel 5). The verse may mean David later brought the head there when he made Jerusalem his capital, or that the narrator, writing afterward, names the place where it ended up. Goliath's sword was kept as a sacred trophy at the tabernacle at Nob, "wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod," and David would carry it again later (1 Samuel 21:9).

> **1 Samuel 17:55** *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.*
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> **1 Samuel 17:58** *And Saul said to him, Whose son art thou, thou young man? And David answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Beth-lehemite.*

These verses have puzzled many readers, because David had already served in Saul's court as his harpist (16:21-23). Why would Saul not know him? The answer is in the question. Saul did not ask, "Who is he?" He asked, "*Whose son* is he?" He had promised that the man who killed Goliath would have "his father's house" made free in Israel (17:25). Now he needed to know who the father was — and what family was about to marry into his own. A king pays little attention to the father of a young musician. He pays a great deal of attention to the father of the man who has just become the hero of the nation.

"I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Beth-lehemite." The last words of the chapter take us back to Bethlehem — the town of Ruth and Boaz, the town of Jesse's family, and, a thousand years later, the town where the Son of David would be born.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

The anointed one. David went into the valley already anointed with oil and with the spirit of the LORD upon him. "Anointed" is *mashiach* — Messiah. Hannah had prophesied, years before David was born, that God would "give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed" (1 Samuel 2:10). David was the first king to fulfil that picture, and he points to the greater Anointed One who would come from his own line: "Jesus Christ, the son of David" (Matthew 1:1).

The shepherd king from Bethlehem. David was a shepherd who risked his life for the sheep, going after the lion and the bear. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). God had promised, through Ezekiel, "I will set up one shepherd over them… even my servant David" (Ezekiel 34:23) — a promise fulfilled in David's greater Son.

Sent by his father, scorned by his brother. Jesse sent David to his brothers to see how they fared, and his eldest brother met him with anger and contempt. Jesus Christ "came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).

The champion who fights alone, for all. Israel could not fight Goliath. One man went down into the valley alone, as the representative of the whole nation, and won. When he won, they all won; they shared the spoil of a battle they had not fought. That is what Jesus Christ did for us. Mankind could not defeat the enemy who "had the power of death." So Christ, as our representative, took on flesh and blood "that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15). Israel had lived forty days in fear of one man. Mankind had lived "all their lifetime" in fear of death. The Champion won, and His people went free.

The head of the enemy. As this series understands it, there is a deeper echo here. In Eden, God promised that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). In the valley of Elah, a man in a coat of *scales*, who cursed God's people by his gods, was brought down by a stone to

the head, and his head was cut off with his own sword. Scripture does not draw that line itself, but it is hard to miss. The enemy was defeated with his own weapon — as Christ, through *death*, destroyed the one who had the power of death. And after His death came His resurrection and His ascension to the right hand of God, where He now reigns: "having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15).

To the Grace Administration

Not Saul's armour. David could not fight in Saul's armour; it was untested, and it belonged to a man without faith. The believer under grace is not told to fight in the world's armour either: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). God has given His own armour: "Put on the whole armour of God… For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers… Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness… taking the shield of faith… And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:11-17). David's real armour was his knowledge of who God was and what God had promised. The believer's is the same: truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, and the word of God.

The battle is still the LORD's. Believers today do not face Philistine champions. But they face an adversary, and fears, and situations that look as large as Goliath. The answer has not changed: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Ephesians 6:10). "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Sharing a victory we did not win. Israel pursued and plundered an army after one man had defeated its champion. Under grace, believers share in a victory they did not win: "thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). And the promise of Eden reaches us too: "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20).

God looks on the heart. Saul was the tallest man in Israel; Eliab was tall and impressive. God passed them both by for a young shepherd, because "man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). God still chooses that way.

To the Topic of Faith and Fear

Two responses to the same giant stand side by side in this chapter.

- **Fear looks at the giant.** "When they saw the man, fled from him." Israel measured Goliath's height and counted his weapons, twice a day, for forty days.
- **Faith looks at God.** David measured the giant against God: "who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"
- **Fear forgets what God has done.** Israel had God's promise in the Law to fight for them, and a history of deliverances. They forgot it all.
- **Faith remembers.** "The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion… he will deliver me."
- **Fear waits.** Forty days on a hillside.
- **Faith runs toward the battle.** "David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine."

The Main Takeaway

The battle is the LORD's — so face every giant in His name, not your own strength, remembering what He has already done.

- **See the giant through the covenant.** Goliath's size did not matter; his standing with God did.
- **Remember God's record.** The lion and the bear were the training ground. What God has done for you before, He can do again.
- **Don't fight in someone else's armour.** Use what God has given you and taught you to use.
- **Come in His name.** "I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts."
- **Run toward it.** Faith does not wait forty days.
- **Give Him the glory.** "That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."

For Our Learning — The People

- **David.** Jesse's youngest son, a shepherd from Bethlehem, already anointed by Samuel with the spirit of the LORD upon him, and a musician at Saul's court. He killed a lion and a bear defending the flock, answered Goliath's challenge "in the name of the LORD of hosts," and killed him with a sling and a stone. Later Israel's greatest king, "a man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22), and the ancestor of Jesus Christ.
- **Goliath.** A champion of Gath, from a clan of unusually large men, about nine feet nine inches tall (or six feet nine inches in some ancient copies), heavily armoured. He defied Israel's armies for forty days, cursed David by his gods, and fell to one stone.
- **Saul.** Israel's first king, the tallest man in the nation, already rejected by God for disobedience. He was "dismayed, and greatly afraid," offered a reward instead of going himself, and lent David armour he himself did not use.
- **Jesse.** An old man of Bethlehem, grandson of Ruth and Boaz, father of eight sons. He sent David to the camp with food for his brothers.
- **Eliab.** Jesse's eldest son, tall and impressive, whom God had passed over. He met David with anger and accused him of pride.
- **Abinadab and Shammah.** Jesse's second and third sons, soldiers in Saul's army.
- **Abner.** Commander of Saul's army, who brought David before the king with Goliath's head in his hand.
- **The men of Israel.** An army that stood in fear for forty days, fled from Goliath, and then pursued and plundered the Philistines once their champion fell.
- **The LORD of hosts.** The commander of the armies of heaven and of Israel, who looks on the heart, who delivered David from the lion and the bear, and who gave the victory, "that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Representative combat.** A battle decided by a single fight between one champion from each side, with the result binding on both armies.

- **"The man of the between."** The literal Hebrew for "champion" (*ish habbenayim*) — the one who steps into the space between the armies.
- **Philistine weapons.** The Philistines kept Israel from having blacksmiths so that they could not make swords or spears (1 Samuel 13:19).
- **Scale armour.** Goliath's "coat of mail" was a coat of overlapping bronze scales, about 125 pounds in weight.
- **The cubit and the span.** About eighteen and nine inches respectively.
- **Families supplying soldiers.** Families sent food to their men in the army; David brought grain, bread and cheese.
- **Taking a pledge.** Bringing back a token from the soldiers to show the family they were well.
- **A king's reward.** Riches, a royal marriage, and freedom from taxes and service for the hero's family.
- **Circumcision.** The sign of God's covenant with Abraham's descendants; "uncircumcised" meant outside the covenant.
- **The sling.** A real weapon of war: a pouch on two cords, whirled and released. Skilled slingers were prized in ancient armies (Judges 20:16).
- **The shepherd's staff and scrip.** A walking stick and a small bag for food and supplies.
- **The dog.** A despised scavenger in the East; to be treated as a dog was a deep insult.
- **Cursing by one's gods.** Calling down the power of one's gods against an enemy before battle.
- **Trophies of victory.** The enemy's head and weapons were kept as proof of victory; Goliath's sword was kept at the tabernacle at Nob (1 Samuel 21:9).

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Erotesis** — asking a question to make a point rather than to get information. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (17:26); "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?" (17:43); "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" (17:29).
- **Idiom** — an expression whose meaning comes from how a people used it. "In the name of the LORD of hosts" (17:45) — with His authority, as His representative; "uncircumcised" (17:26) — outside God's covenant; "make his father's house free" (17:25) — exempt from taxes and service.
- **Polysyndeton** — "many ands." "Put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine" (17:49): every movement slowed down so we watch it.
- **Simile** — a comparison using "like" or "as." "The staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam" (17:7); "this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them" (17:36).
- **Metonymy** — naming one thing in place of another closely connected with it. "The paw of the lion… the hand of this Philistine" (17:37) — the paw and the hand for the power to seize and kill.

What the Bible Actually Says

- **This is not a story about believing in yourself.** David never mentions his own courage. He says, "The LORD… will deliver me" and "the battle is the LORD's."
- **David was not a little boy.** He was "a youth" (*na'ar*), the word used of Joseph at seventeen — old enough to kill a lion and a bear.
- **David did not refuse Saul's armour because it was too big.** He said, "I have not proved them" — he had never tested or used them.
- **Goliath's height differs in the ancient copies.** The standard Hebrew text says "six cubits and a span" (about 9 ft 9 in); the Dead Sea Scroll of Samuel, the Greek translation and Josephus say "four cubits and a span" (about 6 ft 9 in). Either way, a giant.
- **David took five stones but used only one.** Scripture does not say why he took five.
- **David did not kill Goliath with a sword.** "There was no sword in the hand of David" (17:50). He cut off the head afterward with Goliath's own sword.
- **Goliath fell on his face, not his back** — "upon his face to the earth" (17:49).
- **A sling was not a toy.** It was a deadly weapon of war.
- **Elhanan did not kill Goliath.** 2 Samuel 21:19 says Elhanan slew "the brother of Goliath" (the words "the brother of" are in italics in the King James Version, added by the translators); the parallel verse in 1 Chronicles 20:5 names him: "Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite."

God's Will and Intent

- **God fights for His people.** "The LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you" (Deuteronomy 20:4).
- **God looks on the heart, not the outward appearance.** He chose the youngest shepherd over the tallest king.
- **God trains His people in small things for great ones.** The lion and the bear prepared David for Goliath.
- **God saves "not with sword and spear."** Victory does not depend on human weapons.
- **God wants His name known.** "That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."
- **God provides a champion.** When His people could not win, He raised up His anointed to win for them — a picture of Jesus Christ, the Son of David.